

MAKE-IT-COUNT SCHEME

PARTNERSHIP RESPONSE TO BEGGING IN STOKE-ON-TRENT CITY CENTRE

STAFFORDSHIRE POLICE, CITY CENTRE LPU POLICE STATION, ENGLAND, 2000

SUMMARY:

During early 1999 begging significantly increased in the City Centre area resulting in complaints and pressure from local businesses and the public for Police action. Evidence used to identify the problem came from Police Command & Control data, evidence from local businesses, public and police, on street body counts at various locations/times, and evidence from outreach workers engaging beggars. In March '99 a Problem-Solving session involving Police, City Centre Management & Homeless Project Coordinator was held, that identified the initial key elements of problem. A larger Action group was formed, consisting of people that could address issues around these key elements. The problem was then analysed and defined in detail and responses developed addressing each element present.

Focusing on the offender we adopted a 'Person centred' approach - targeting individuals for support / enforcement (part of care package); used disruption tactics; gave referrals to outreach workers diverting people away from begging (For example, one beggar was given access to a clarinet and training and now earns money as a licensed street entertainer); conducted regular information exchange between Police and outreach workers so a coordinated approach could be maintained; and initiated a fast-tracking scheme for drug rehab that was to be paid for from donations to scheme. Focusing on the victim we informed/educated the public through large awareness campaign, with regular publicity weeks since initial launch; established collection boxes to divert public giving from beggars towards homeless charities; and established a professional witness Pro-forma developed for businesses to use to record any anti-social behaviour that could be dealt with promptly. For the location we identified preferred begging 'pitches' and architectural crime & safety surveys were conducted; provided alternative legitimate uses into those areas (i.e. street entertainment/barrow sellers'); and established 'zero tolerance' zones around cash-point machines. Total funding of the scheme reached £2600 bringing it to point of launch in November 1999.

By various measures the scheme was a success. There was a reduction in daily street beggars from an average of 6 on street beggars daily to less than 1 per day over 12 month period. There was £3 - £5K projected annual income from donations and a reduction in funding to beggars of over 66%. Police records indicated over 66% reduction in begging related incidents. 92% of public knew of scheme, 94% felt some or vast improvement (sample size 50). Other UK towns/cities seeking to adopt scheme following recommendation as National exemplar by Jack Straw.

SCANNING

During the early part of 1999 there was a notable increase in the numbers of street beggars operating in the Stoke-on-Trent City Centre area.

Staffordshire Police was at that time undergoing major re-structuring and re-organisation in order to change their policing style to a more locally based, problemsolving approach. A Local Policing Unit was created that solely covered the City Centre area that was responsible for delivering policing services throughout the 24hr period. This project submission relating to the 'Make-it-Count' scheme was the first significant problem that this unit tackled using a problem solving approach. This issue was highlighted as a problem requiring attention before the unit was actually up and running, back in mid-March '99. (The LPU commenced operation on the 12th of April).

The problems being caused by the increase in beggars was identified through:

- An increase in complaints being made regarding the behaviour of beggars in the City Centre area to the Police - resulting in Command ,& Control incidents being created and officers being deployed to deal with them (despite having inadequate legislation to support any meaningful action).
- Complaints from members of the public (being customers) to City Centre businesses, and to the police.
- Numerous complaints were received from banks about lone women being put off using their cash point machines during the day, but particularly during the evenings, because of the presence of beggars and they were reporting reductions in use of the machines most targeted by beggars.
- Letters of complaint written by members of the public appearing in the local evening

paper, which at one stage caused a high level of media and public interest in the issue which fuelled itself for several weeks.

- Concerns expressed by potential investors in the area regarding the impressions that large numbers of beggars gave to the City Centre's image, to City Centre Management and other key strategic figures.
- Pressure being brought to bear by the City Centre Management Partnership Group to for the issue to be addressed.

This problem was seen as being a priority, despite rises in vehicle crime and violence in the area, because it contributed to an impression that the area was uncared for and that there was a lack of guardianship present. During this period it was also noted that other criminals were being attracted into the City Centre and that retail crime became significantly worse than it had been over previous years.

The Local Policing Unit agreed that it should help develop a solution to the problem, but strongly resisted the suggestion that this was a 'policing' or single agency issue.

Some of the drivers for a response to this problem were as follows:

- There was a risk of impact on potential new investment being worked upon at that time (£170 million investment has since been secured for the redevelopment of one of our shopping areas this occurring some months after the commencement of the project).
- It was seen as being a growing problem and the increase in incidents and complaints that beggars were using more intimidating begging methods within the area was of great concern.
- There was a credibility issue in that the newly formed Local Policing Unit had been introduced and simultaneously a range of worsening crime & safety problems was

striking the City Centre. (Thankfully, and through some hard and smarter working the situation is now significantly improved).

- Structured Problem-Solving was being held up as a model that could work for us (even under difficult circumstances) and our problem with beggars seemed an ideal way of showing that we were serious about this approach.

Once a decision had been made that we needed to address the problem a small 'scoping' meeting was called between the LPU Commander, the City Centre Manager and the Co-ordinator of a homeless outreach team that covered the area.

From this meeting some key elements of the problem and our likely responses were identified and the participants of a possible Action group were identified as being able to bring insight or resources to address the problem.

The following people / representatives were identified as being valuable to form our Action group and were invited to a meeting to discuss and define the problem and identify a way forward:

- City Centre LPU Commander
- City Centre businesses representative - Marks & Spencer Manager
- Radio Stoke - Action Line coordinator
- City Centre Manager
- Rough-sleepers project coordinator
- Nurse practitioner who works with homeless people.
- Local Authority Community Safety Coordinator

- Partnerships Inspector - Local Authority liaison officer

Scanning at this meeting identified the factors recorded overleaf as being relevant to the problem. The Problem Analysis Triangle was used as the framework to list issues beneath the headings of Offender, Victim and Location.

ANALYSIS

A range of 'soft' and 'hard' data was used to define and help us understand the problem.

From the initial work undertaken at the workshop defining our understanding of the problem several hypotheses were generated. A number of additional actions were generated in order to test this thinking and shape our response.

Specifically we conducted the following:

- Initial analysis of Police Command & Control data to identify 'hot spot' areas - this was found to be time consuming and of limited value so provided little benefit. Under-reporting was the major factor in coming to this conclusion, though the unwieldy nature of the then Command & Control computer system was also a consideration. This was upgraded in Sept. '99.
- A street survey identifying locations & times of day that beggars were operating in the City Centre. This was conducted over a week by Pc's from the Local Policing Unit in conjunction with the Local Authority CCTV. The findings were mapped and shared with the steering group who confirmed and validated the report. As part of this exercise they also identified the individuals who were begging and passed those details on to the rough-sleepers team to carry out further research into their background. This gave us accurate hot-spot 'information linking locations and offenders' in away that had not previously occurred. It

also provided a basis upon which other work could be conducted and developed.

- Face to face interviews with local businesses, both retail, leisure and banks affected by the problem. This gave us confirmation that we had accurately identified the views of local businesses during our 'scanning' stage, but importantly bought us time, goodwill, and helped involve our biggest critics at an early stage in shaping our understanding and our response.
 - Interviews with members of the public who were seen to give money to beggars, as well generating discussions through local BBC radio and monitoring the flow of letters on the subject in the local newspaper. This partly confirmed our previous understanding, but additionally highlighted the public's goodwill and willingness to help people in trouble. It also showed their confusion and frustration over the issue as many wanted to do something to help, but did not know what the best thing' to do was. Over half the people spoken to did not make any link between giving money to beggars and the beggars using the money to buy drugs.
 - Interviews and survey work by the rough-sleepers team to establish the true nature of the people begging in the City Centre and of homeless people more generally in our area.
 - This confirmed our belief that all the identified beggars at that time were drug addicts with high heroin habits and some with crack addiction problems. Ten regular beggars were identified initially as a result of our survey.
 - Two of the women who were begging were also identified as working as prostitutes in the area, depending on how they had done during the day begging.
- Over 60% of the beggars were 'failed' shoplifters who were well known by many of the stores in the City Centre and were banned from most of the larger ones.
 - Begging provided the main source of finance for this group of people with which to purchase drugs. It was not uncommon for them to earn £50 during a good day.
 - Homelessness was an issue for around 30% of the beggars within the City Centre who were active, actually sleeping rough in the Bus Station or Car Parks. Most of the remainder were technically NFA though, living in squats on the outskirts of the City Centre or temporarily with 'friends', but likely to spend sometime sleeping rough occasionally. One was living in a hostel and one had a permanent address.
 - Habitual beggars had identified pitches' which they protected.
 - Taxing did occur between beggars and they occasionally used violence towards each other and the street drinkers with whom they sometimes associated.
 - Low self-esteem was identified as being a significant issue and many of the beggars did not access support offered by the rough-sleepers team because they had sustainable income for drugs through begging.
 - Just under 80% of the homeless people in the area and a// of the beggars in the City Centre originated from the region. This varied greatly with the situation. Nationally where a much lower proportion of people were actually from the areas they found themselves homeless in.
 - 2 Additional 'fact sheets' developed through the analysis are provided on the following pages for further information.

- Architectural Site Surveys of the identified 'pitches' being used by the beggars in order to recognise common factors and develop location based responses with more certainty. The survey confirmed our understanding of location based issues that impacted on the problem. It highlighted the positive aspects of the locations that the beggars had selected that also made them attractive for other legitimate uses

Our analysis indicated that begging was a growing problem. We identified that unless there were some intervention that the situation would worsen, not only in relation to begging, but also in other areas due to the 'broken windows' aspects associated with this problem.

Gaps in our analysis included impact on stores and banks footfall and ultimately profits, but this was not able to be obtained due to its' sensitive nature. Quietly on an individual basis managers were able to share broad indicators - up or down - with us, but as this could not be obtained in any objective and reliable way it was felt to be a little too 'dirty' to rely on.

Following the analysis it was decided that we could set the following objectives for our project.

We would:

- Significantly reduce the number of on-street beggars operating within the City Centre area from first 3 months recorded figures following launch of our project. (We did not make this specific in terms of a number, due to the fact that we felt that we should ultimately have no beggars operating in the City Centre - but that we weren't confident that this was an achievable target).
- Divert those people habitually begging towards more healthy lifestyles through them accessing support at the drop-in centre.

- Raise public awareness of the issues of homelessness and begging.
- Raise funds to provide further support to homeless charities and projects and reduce the public funding of beggars drug habits.

RESPONSE

It was decided that a broad based, holistic strategy would be most effective given the complex nature of the problem we were intending to address. We did not wish to merely displace the problem or change the behaviour towards another unlawful one. Whilst the main priority was reducing the problem we also wanted to provide an exit strategy for people involved in begging, should they choose to take it.

As a starting point we decided to trawl National good practice to see how other Towns and Cities had addressed what we knew to be a growing National problem. Unfortunately and perhaps surprisingly we did not find an 'off the peg' solution or strategy that we could readily implement to address our problem. Through the Association of Town Centre Management however, we did find a scheme identified as being 'good practice' called the 'Make-it-Count' scheme which had operated in Winchester for a couple of years and which sought to divert public donations from street beggars towards charity. We examined their scheme and thought it ideal to fulfill possibly two of the elements of our strategy.

It did not however address the issues of targeting support and enforcement for those individuals involved in habitual begging, nor the issues of addressing some of the location issues we had identified through our analysis.

As part of our response to target support & enforcement for habitual beggars we used part of our original research and created 'files' for each of the beggars identified. We established an information exchange protocol between ourselves and the Potteries Housing Association who managed the outreach workers

including the rough-sleepers team and drop-in centre. We began to share information about the behaviour of the beggars and challenge them in a co-ordinated way. (Due to the loss of the co-ordinator as a result of funding cuts the further development of the approach towards introducing shared multi-agency negotiated care plans with the individual concerned, was not realised. These plans remain on hold at the present time, but will be commenced prior to the end of the year, if we have a significant return of beggars back into the area).

We targeted businesses that had experienced most of the problems associated with the beggars and provided them with increased awareness of the law and developed a 'professional witness' pro-forma statement, in order that they could record any problems of anti-social behaviour themselves prior to contacting the police.

We targeted certain beggars who had consistently refused support from the outreach team for enforcement, whilst referring them towards the drop-in centre in an attempt to reduce their income and push them towards seeking help away from begging in the City Centre.

We highlighted some of the locations used as begging pitches to the Local Authority Markets Inspector (who is responsible for street trading in the City Centre) and we began to identify and mark them as either busking / street entertainment pitches, or street trading pitches.

We identified all Cash Point areas as zero tolerances zones for begging and policed this firmly and consistently. We communicated this to all of the beggars via the outreach team and our personal contact with them.

Following a fairly lengthy period we spent looking for appropriate collection boxes our City Centre Manager organised and developed the more public elements of the scheme towards an official launch in November'99. A first class coordinated marketing and information campaign was commenced complete with radio, TV and newspaper

coverage during a week of action. Large posters highlighting the presence of collecting boxes and telling the public that 'begging is not the answer' were placed around the City Centre in advertising panels and on litterbins.

As we got to know some of the beggars more other individual strategies were developed. An example of this was that one of the young female beggars was given access to a clarinet and received some musical tuition in order that she could play. Once she had reached an acceptable standard she auditioned and was given a permit to work in the City Centre as a street entertainer, busking, rather than begging for income.

Once their income had started to significantly reduce due to members of the public donating money through the charity boxes some of the beggars began to access support seeking 'scripts' for their addictions and accessing the drop-in centre more regularly.

The next stage in this process, the development of a fast tracking drugs rehabilitation arrangement, is currently on-going.

We favoured this kind of holistic strategy for several reasons:

- We felt that it would deliver 'best value' in the long term.
- We felt that a single agency response was not appropriate, and would be very limited in its success.
- We felt it was a more socially and morally acceptable course of action than enforcement campaigns that would tend to split public support either for or against beggars and mask some of the real issues.
- We felt that specific targeted and tailored support was essential due to the diverse range of problems and needs of the 'offending' group. The ownership and involvement of the people at the centre of the project - the beggars themselves was

seen as being critical if longer term resolution was to be achieved.

We sought to gain ownership of the response both within and outside the force:

- By involving people on the front line in shaping the project
- By showing that an improvement in the problem on-street could be achieved
- By creating opportunities for positive press and media coverage
- By displaying strong leadership and giving a commitment to addressing the problem at a senior local level
- By celebrating and promoting success, but being honest and objective enough to admit when we got things wrong and improve them.

We encountered the following difficulties during the development and introduction of the strategy.

- We lost momentum after about 3 months of really good progress and seemed to stagnate for a couple of months waiting for other people to get back to us with updates. We eventually took the initiative and kick started things again by making our own arrangements.
- In an effort to displace begging, we introduced some street entertainment into one of the best begging pitches without having launched the public element of the scheme or really taken the initiative and established control over the beggars on street. This resulted in a young female mime artist being 'taxed' by a particular beggar because she was working on what he saw as being his pitch. This was only a one off, but highlighted the importance of integrating strategies to us.
- Loss of a key person - Gary Thomas the rough-sleepers project coordinator who's funding ran out unexpectedly - this caused

some of the ongoing work and development to be halted.

ASSESSMENT

As part of our on going monitoring of the impact of the project on the numbers of beggars on street (which was the primary objective of the scheme) it was decided to carry out the following to support meaningful evaluation of the project.

- The fortnightly 'on street' spot checks by our City Centre Manager continued after the launch of the scheme.
- The steering committee was arranged to meet periodically to monitor progress and amend the plans or strategy as the need arose
- A formal review date was identified.
- A survey of businesses and the public was organised. (It was decided not to hold the survey close to one of the planned publicity weeks when the large display posters were promoting the scheme throughout the City Centre area in order that a more accurate view could be obtained).

The following success criteria were identified to aid our evaluation and the following performance achieved.

- Reduction in habitual on-street beggars operating in City Centre. A reduction from on average of 6 on street beggars to an average of less than 1 over the 6 months since the introduction of the project.
- Increase in take-up of support from target group through drop-in-centre. There has been an increase in usage of the drop in centre from the target homeless group in the area of over 30% since November '99, however 60% of our core of habitual beggars have actually moved on and now beg and base themselves in other towns. There were numerous improvements and additional measures introduced during this period by the management of the drop-in centre, and so this increase in usage should be

discounted from the evaluation as it is unreliable and cannot be directly linked to the scheme as an outcome at this time.

We have identified some additional work to test our hypothesis that beggars have displaced because they wanted to continue with their current lifestyle in a different location, rather than access available support and make changes to how they lived. This additional work will also involve 'tracking' our identified on-street beggars since the start of the work last year to see where and how they have moved on, in order that we can identify why this occurred and refine our strategy accordingly.

- Raise awareness amongst general public of the issues involved in begging, the specific link between begging and drug misuse, and the basis of the scheme.
 - Two surveys were actually run involving both City Centre businesses and visitors to the City Centre. Several significant trends were identified through this survey.
 - Members of the public shopping in the City Centre were far more aware of the existence of the scheme than managers and workers employed in the shops and businesses in the City Centre and were more certain of an improvement.
 - 92% of the public surveyed had heard of the scheme.
 - 64% of businesses had heard of the scheme.
 - 94% of the public had noted some or vast improvement
 - 48% of the business had noted some or vast improvement
 - Amongst those businesses surveyed, those who were directly affected (located) in the area of on-street begging previously were significantly more aware of the scheme and saw in the main a vast improvement and felt the scheme to be successful. Those

businesses who had not were less certain of the schemes success and felt that the situation was mostly the same, and a few worse.

- Raise finance for homeless charities and project work including drug referral work. We are projecting an annual income of between £3-5K from the collecting boxes, though this is dependent on how effectively we promote the scheme during peak periods - Winter / Christmas etc. This is lower than the income from Winchesters scheme (£14K p.a.), due we believe to the high volume of tourist visiting their City. We will be carrying out additional work during the year to establish this with more certainty in order that we can amend our strategy accordingly.
- Favourable locations for begging to be utilised for other purposes - We have achieved this in the principle sites within the City Centre, but there remain a couple of locations still to be included. These areas have now in effect become 'self-policing' and there has been no drift of begging back into them.

The members of the steering group were involved in the evaluation, and examined the range of data, both soft and hard together in order that some validation could occur through cross comparison. (We decided that independent evaluation by an external body was too expensive and would provide us with limited value). We will be continuing with the monitoring of the project through fortnightly head counts and will be carrying out further survey work involving members of the public towards November / December time.

This project has been promoted Nationally by the Home Secretary, Jack Straw as being good practice and has won the first ever Staffordshire Police Problem-Solving award (also being promoted throughout the County as good practice both in terms of tactics and approach).

Future developments / spin-offs from this project will include support for some much longer-term

work on preventative strategies based upon research currently being undertaken by the drop-in centre team.

We accept that we will probably always be playing 'catch-up' in relation to how we deal with our end of this problem and are unlikely to ever resolve the social situations that cause people to feel the need to beg completely.

We are 'up beat' about our project though and will continue to modify, improve and learn from it as circumstances change on the ground.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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