

Prepared by:

PC Guy Lambert *Police Begging Co-ordinator*

Inspector Mike Cox *Cabot Sector Inspector*

PC Phil Bennett *Sector researcher*

PS Matt Parfitt *Cabot Sector Assistant*

Contents:

Summary.....	1
Objectives.....	4
Defining the Problem.....	10
Dealing With the Problem.....	14
Results.....	22

Pictures by M. Parfitt and publicity used in the street wise campaign

StreetWise

Introduction

Bristol is a thriving leisure and commercial centre. Located at the junction of two major motorways it attracts thousands of people daily. It also had an increasing population of beggars.

It had become difficult to walk in the Central area of Bristol without being approached by individuals begging for money and whilst in many cases whilst not 'homeless', many slept 'rough' and with them came the litter of used syringes, drugs paraphernalia and unkempt appearance

Of particular concern were the 'aggressive' beggars, obtaining money by the use of threatening language or intimidating behaviour. More alarmingly was the trend towards Robbery offences using hypodermic needles and knives to demand money to fund Drugs habits.

Police operations were devised to tackle the rise in begging related crime but repeatedly failed to deal with the problem. Criminal issues aside there were quality of life, health and social issues not only for the local communities but importantly for the beggars themselves.

Based on empirical research, it was clear the Police alone would never be able to deal effectively with the Criminal aspects of this situation whilst there were deep rooted underlying social problems.



StreetWise

At about this time the Bristol City Council were looking into the issue of 'rough sleepers' and there was a clear link between begging and rough sleeping.

Council and Police managers, realising the links, met to discuss sustainable solutions and from those early discussions a partnership developed bringing together various interested professional and charitable organisations.

Resourced by the City Council under pilot grants from the Office of the Deputy Prime ministers a strategy was developed to tackle the wider issues of begging centred around three main areas,

- 1) *To educate the public to donate sensibly and not directly to beggars*
- 2) *Offer effective support and encouragement to break from that life style*
- 3) *Provide enforcement and sanction.*

Currently operated over 10 months the initiative has achieved notable mile stones into the initial aims of tackling the- persistent begging population. The main shopping area and other hotspots were targeted with dramatic reductions at all times of the day The target groups had been identified and targeted sanctions aligned with support from agencies in the partnership and through Innovative work of the partnership being proactively actioned.



Streetwise

There is still much work to do but already the initiative has intervened into the life cycle of the 'homeless' community and continues to build upon its successes.

Streetwise

OBJECTIVES

The aim of the project was to develop a strategy to reduce the number of persistent beggars on the streets of Bristol. To achieve this it was necessary to develop a strategy that would break the life styles of those caught in a life of begging and offending and so result in a sustained reduction.

The goal was to produce a short-term impact and a long-term solution. The short term aim was to reduce and deter persistent beggars from their activities within the City of Bristol to meet one of the major complaints from the public and businesses in the area. This would rely primarily on Enforcement.

Experience had shown that Enforcement alone would not have solved the problem hence the long term strategy would have to be one of intervention. The aim was to identify those who were persistent beggars and provide support to help them break away from the cycle of offending, arrest, court and re-offending.

Much of our understanding of the problems was founded in the long experience beat officers had gained in dealing with the consequences of the beggars lifestyle that of petty theft, shop lifting food, spirits or clothing, their intimidating and threatening behaviour and the persistent annoyance of the public.

'The beggars in Bristol are getting more and more physical and in your face. I've seen a beggar pull a bag off an old lady. People should stop giving them money.'

'I don't think it is a huge problem in Bristol. I have not been approached by a beggar and I don't believe they are harming anyone.'

'I have to face aggressive beggars every day and feel very unsafe. I had a beggar pull a knife on me once. I felt it wasn't treated as a serious problem by the Police.'

StreetWise

Beggars were seemingly on every street, outside every cash point.

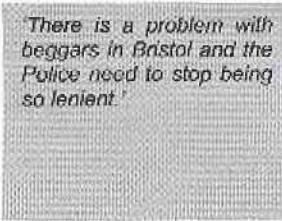
There was an increase in the number of complaints related to beggars who would sleep rough in car parks and in and behind shop doorways. It was in this latter context that the foundation of the initiative was laid.

On a national level the Government was looking at the numbers of homeless people on the streets of British cities and Bristol featured amongst them. The City Council was linked to the Government initiative to identify and reduce the number of homeless living on Bristol's Streets.

From initial Government studies and policing experience it was clear

that many factors contributed to the begging lifestyle. In most circumstances it was discovered that there was a link to the deprived life style of beggars and their addiction to class A drugs. Such addiction gripped and held them in a life of dependency, which compelled them to beg and commit other offences to fund their addiction.

Government reports published via the internet of extensive research commissioned by the 'Rough Sleepers Unit' provided quantitative corroboration of the less tangible' experience of Bristol Police officers and offered a basis on which to establish initial aims and goals of a strategy.



There is a problem with beggars in Bristol and the Police need to stop being so lenient.

StreetWise

The establishment of a partnership between the City Council Rough Sleepers initiative and the Police was the cornerstone of this strategy.

The partnership was quickly extended to incorporate those involved in working with or having an interest in the homeless who could contribute to the overall aims. This involved charities such as outreach and 'The Big Issue'¹. The NHS, Citizens Panel, and Business representatives.

Despite the knowledge brought to the table by each group and the statistics produced by Government research, a public survey was commissioned to identify problems specific to Bristol and it became

evidently clear that begging, particularly on the scale seen, was a major issue to a lot of the public, even those who were giving to beggars, and not just businesses who were losing trade as a consequence of begging activities.

Public Perceptions

The survey commissioned as part of the initiative highlighted some significant results.

Of the 1411 people questioned; 66% said they saw a beggar at least once a week with 27% seeing one every day.

Over half were totally unable to assess if the beggar was in genuine need and less than a quarter felt any

'.....to beg and commit other offences to fund their addiction.'

'...It was discovered there was a link to deprived life style beggars and addiction to class drugs.'

StreetWise

confidence in making that judgement.

People were generally more likely to give if they saw a woman or child and 17% give if they see a person regularly.

25% were reluctant To visit the city because of begging and of those 42% had been directly or felt threatened by aggressive beggars.

Overall there was a swell of feeling, a compulsion, to give.

Other information showed us that in all cases beggars had a history of multiple offending, not only begging but other types of offences. Most had at least two previous convictions for other offences but a significant minority had convictions

for all the major acquisitive crime groups. Theft, Robbery Burglary Vehicle Crime and others. It was clear that begging for most was just one in a line of options of obtaining money, one which carried far less sanction than some other forms; of offending. Changing the life styles of Beggars would, it appeared, have an impact upon other forms of acquisitive crime not historically linked to begging.

The scale of the problem had vastly increased in recent years with far more problems reported daily by members of the public being robbed! by 'beggars', and of security staff, shop owners, council workers all being threatened by them.



StreetWise

The streets and subways were being littered with blankets and cardboard boxes used by beggars on which (to sleep or sit whilst begging, that made the city look run down and neglected deterring increasing numbers from using its facilities.

Helping the hard to reach

The problem of begging had become a major factor influencing the quality of the lives of those who worked, lived and visited Bristol. As a Quality of Life issue for these people, begging and, indirectly, rough sleeping was an overwhelming priority.

Following the analysis of the problem and based on the survey and research a basic strategy was defined by the partnership

to deal with both the long term and short term aims. This strategy had three main objectives:

- *To positively deal with persistent begging.*
- *To Educate the public into alternative forms of help*
- *To provide support for those in need.*

Co-ordinator appointed

Both the short term goals and long term solutions would rely on using Enforcement to break into the cycle.

To provide the full range of support and to head up and control the strategy two co-ordinators were appointed- One was a Police Officer and the other a Council officer. Their role was to implement, assess, review and co-ordinate the tactical priorities

Streetwise

Establish a community base

To facilitate this, a database was commissioned to collect and analyse data on all beggars and their activity within Bristol. This facility was to lay central to monitoring and evaluating the progress and success of the strategy providing ongoing information on which to dynamically meet changing demands and specifically to identify and target persistent beggars for sanction (those who habitually re-offend and identified as having been arrested 5 or more times for begging) and less prolific offenders for whom support would stand a chance of working. This would allow effective resource

allocation and provide evidence to support the initiative.

Monitoring Numbers

The effectiveness of the strategy was measured by identifying persistent beggars and noting the changes in numbers, the number of complaints received from the public and businesses, the number of those sleeping rough and the numbers taking up support. Comparisons between the start of the project and as the project progressed gave, and continues to give an indication of its effectiveness.



StreetWise

Defining the Problem

In addition to our own experience and knowledge of the issues concerning begging we drew upon independent information gathered from a host of sources in order to improve our understanding. The information highlighted the underlying factors influencing those who beg and the conditions that existed which perpetuated the problem in many ways the data reinforced much of what was commonly believed to be true. The research undertaken by the Rough Sleepers Unit and the field survey conducted by the Citizens Panel were of particular interest as they focussed on the beggars themselves and concentrated on the root causes.

Bristol City Council supplied us with facts and figures with regard to rough sleepers in the city and charitable organisations such as the Big Issue and Outreach provided a valuable input in relation to their attitudes and individual circumstances.

This fresh approach in gathering independent information and adding the findings to our Knowledge enabled us, in partnership with the relevant agencies, to quantify the problem and provided a basis on which to formulate our responses.

Database Established

It was important to manage and take control of the data and one of our first steps was to create



StreetWise

and establish a database to do this. The database assisted in the development of our solutions and provided an ideal tool for evaluation, it was crucial that the evaluation was ongoing ensuring that we maintained a flexible approach to the problem solving throughout.

The exchange of information was a crucial aspect of the projects success and is ongoing. We established regular meetings with stakeholders in order to discuss difficulties and ensure that information necessary for our evaluation is updated regularly, e.g. the rough sleepers count and NHS drug support take up.

Once gathered and collated the Beggars world became clearer to us with a number of key factors evident. The inherit lifestyle of those beggars together with a strong link to substance abuse ensured that the need to beg was always with them.

The research revealed that the overwhelming majority of beggars that, although weren't homeless, had no permanent home base with most identifying at least one significant background problem as a factor in them living this way. Coupled with this it was established that 86% confirmed that they using drugs regularly. It was later determined that 100% of the beggars

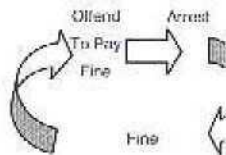
StreetWise

dealt with in this initiative had a Class A drug addiction. The spending priorities of those begging endorsed their plight as it was confirmed that drug and food purchases accounted for the majority of their spending. There was also a close link between the commission of crime and beggars. 100% of the beggars dealt with in this initiative had a criminal record.

It was clear the combination of an unstructured lifestyle together with a drug addiction made it an extremely difficult situation to escape and it certainly highlighted the inherent problems with previous attempts to tackle the issues.

Beyond the specific problems faced by the beggars our analysis was able to determine what impact they had on the sector and district. There was no doubt that the general public were affected as reflected in the continued number of complaints received. In addition local businesses also suffered by the beggars who deterred visitors from coming into the city. Many of the beggars developed a threatening and aggressive approach giving rise to further concerns from the public.

Our research revealed that there were in excess of 200 beggars operating on the sector and taking a staggering amount of money. Conservative



Streetwise

estimates suggest a collective figure of £800,000 per year with a realistic potential at £2 million or more.*

When considering these amounts of money it is clear that their impact on the open drugs market is significant and reflects the true extent of the problem.

* Based on money taken from and information given by beggars themselves



Streetwise

Dealing With The Problem



Experience with the initial operation 'Avid Coin 1' set up as a Police response to the begging issue, highlighted some substantial difficulties in dealing with the problem.

Previous Failings

A basic flaw was that Avid Coin was a 'Police only' operation formulated, driven and resourced by the Police. The belief was that bringing offenders before a court would over time encourage them by order or choice to either leave the area or modify their life style.

'Special' courts were ultimately arranged to hear begging cases so that a consistency of approach could be applied and in consultation with the

Crown Prosecution Service a co-ordinated system of prosecution could be adopted which would ensure a common goal.

The operation culminated in the acquisition of an Anti Social Behaviour Order (ASBO) against a prolific beggar. However the offender went on to breach this E times with no sanction before the intervention by the streetwise initiative and agreeing to take up an offer of support

This approach repeatedly failed, primarily due to its failure to deal effectively with the causal circumstances of the beggar's life styles, specifically the drug issues. The justice system was an easier

.....Case Number
.52SU/497053/02 "..... The
defendant was charged
with Begging at Baldwin
Street (22/11/2002 and
deal with as follows:
Convicted – fined £5.00"



Streetwise

option for them than dealing with their own life problems.

The Changing Strategy

It was clear when revisiting the problem that Enforcement alone did not provide a sustainable solution. It was neither practical, economic or effective as it failed to meet and attack the root cause. To provide an enduring solution the cause needed to be tackled as well as the symptom and it was clear that the Police did not have the facility to deal with the situation long term.

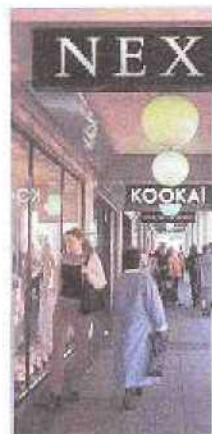
Consequently as the political climate turned Us focus on the 'rough sleepers' on the streets of British cities City Councils were being tasked to

monitor and reduce the numbers of those steeping rough.

This provided a unique opportunity to work with the City Council to pool resources and tackle the problem on many levels.

Drug supply had been a growing problem over the last 10 years and was finally being tackled with an extensive, robust and co-ordinated strategy, which would in time disrupt the supply of drugs on the streets. This left the other main cause of begging, their life style, to be tackled.

Dealing with such social issues lay beyond the loan influence of the Police service but tackling this area was vital to resolving the perpetual problem of begging.



Streetwise

However enforcement was inextricably linked to the solution and was the key to identifying and "capturing" those caught in this life style in order to offer and provide the support intervention which was at the heart of any sustainable solution.

Resourcing of the strategy had been a long term issue with Police operations but for the first time money was being made available to the City Council via the Government which could be utilised to finance various options. Meetings with Police and council began to build a partnership which would grow to include all the stake holders involved in the begging issues. The plan required the

establishing of two co-ordinator posts from the main partners. One, Police the other Council. They would link the resources available to each organisation to the other and provide the control focus of the main strategy.

That focus was to be in three key areas

- *To positively deal with persistent beggars*
- *Educate the public to help in ways other than giving directly to beggars on the street*
- *Provide support and back up*

The co-ordinators would work together operationally and each draw on their resources designing tasks and operations to focus on the three main strategy aims.

Streetwise

The thrust of the initiative begins with Enforcement. As part of the agreed strategy and to support monitoring and assessment of the project, a database was established. Operations were mounted on a regular basis with both co-ordinators taking a very active role. Their overall purpose was to identify individuals and gather intelligence, offer available support and back up, establish a consistent contact to build trust, maintain an intelligence capability and to ultimately pursue sanctions.

Individuals seen begging were initially approached and given a warning. Their details taken and

the interventionist options available offered to them.

In some cases offers of help and support were taken up early on. However many failed to take any offer of help and subsequently were arrested and put before a court.

As the database grew those repeatedly arrested and tailing to take the options of support were highlighted. For persistent offenders injunctions were sought at Crown Court. This operation led to the first Crown Court injunction in Britain being taken out against a Beggar meeting the first aim of the strategy, Enforcement.

The second goal, that of Education, was and



StreetWise

continues to be the most difficult.

Press Strategy

A poster campaign was launched with the initiative and press coverage was crucial in promoting it. A great deal of publicity in the press and on local radio followed the first few months of the operation and raised the issues not only in the minds of the public locally but also wider afield in the national press sending a message to those begging in Bristol and those who may have thought to come to Bristol to beg.

Reports were obtained of beggars who thought it too difficult to beg and who were preparing to leave the area. This all provided very positive

messages both to those members of the public who saw beggars as a threat and to those who gave. It showed that the authorities were interested in trying to make a difference and provide help not just a notion.

Building Trust

The third key strategic aim was to offer support and counselling to all of those identified as beggars or rough sleepers.

However this met with some difficulties as the partnership works on many levels and consequently produces some conflict of interest between its members. Concerns were raised that the work of some charities might be



Streetwise

jeopardised if they were seen to be working with the Police, effectively undermining the trust of their clients. Indeed there was some scepticism as to the motive of the Police and Council as some felt the council were doing this because (hey *had* to rather than because there was any genuine concern.

Working with those involved and ensuring that every one had a voice, allowed compromises and for each to take a role relative to their purpose. Enforcement did not sit well with some charitable organisations who felt that enforcement was not the ideal way to approach the issues. Indeed some views have been expressed that the money

financing the Police response would be better spent offering more support to, for instance, health agencies.

Such an example of an ethical stance is that of the The Big Issue South West (TBISW) who have suffered increasing problems with unlicensed vendors selling 'recycled' magazines. recovered from bins etc. or from copies sold to them at reduced rates by 'friends'. This has led to difficulties for the TBISW and yet there is a reluctance to support any enforcement action by the Police or provide details of those vendors breaching agreements to sell.

The conflict of views lay more in areas of perceived ethics than any

Streetwise

tangible problem. Indeed the combination of enforcement and support has offered a level of short term success not enjoyed by other processes which in its self may contribute to some insecurity within those organisations.

Changes in Police Practices

The Police remain the main drive behind the initiative and specifically in the appointment, by the sector Inspector, of a highly motivated officer to act as the Police co-ordinator. Fundamental to the strategy the role requires the organisation and administration of operations. the establishment of a database, implementation of legislative procedures and monitoring and

assessment of the financial resources.

This officer established systems to ease the processing of prisoners by producing pro-forma files requiring the minimum of time to complete. He has co-ordinated the 'drugs worker' and custody staff, arranged a monitoring system and developed a Access database to record the intelligence. In addition he costs Police operations and provides budgetary control in company with the Council Co-ordinator.

Targeted activity

Weekly covert patrols are organised utilising Rest Day working to minimise and sustain standard policing commitments.

StreetWise

Coupled with the standardised proforma procedures and a dedicated custody officer, staff are briefed with current intelligence and perform foot patrols in targeted areas at key times. Generally those are early and late evenings and can be run any day of the week.

Coupled to this and an intrinsic part of the overall plan the council co-ordinator is on hand during all operations to pick up and identify those who want or who would be best suited to support intervention. They are then provided with support and advice which is then followed up in the coming days and weeks.

The incentive for the beggars is an easy route to

changing their lives and breaking the ever repeating cycle or to take the option of building a history of offending which [leads to ever greater sanction and perpetuation of a self-destructive life style.

Streetwise

E v a l u a t i o n

The response to the launch of this unique campaign was overwhelming with intense media coverage from local and national press and Local radio. Soon after the launch all the major banks expressed interest and became a part of the partnership. Posters were placed in all local shops, pubs and clubs with displays on local busses raising public awareness encouraging them not to give money directly to beggars but to contribute to charities providing help.

As a result of this campaign we have eradicated begging from the central shopping areas during the day and greatly reduced the number of beggars on the streets at other times.

The database was the main tool for evaluation providing information from data collected during pint Police and Council operations. Using this facility we have been able to establish a firm link between street, retail and commercial crime and our begging community. We were also able to identify that 100% of those in our target group are supporting a drugs habit and every all of them had previous convictions for other Crimes.

StreetWise

To evaluate the strategy it was necessary to define what was to be accepted as a persistent beggar. It was decided that a beggar would be considered persistent if they had been arrested for begging more than 5 times. A function of the database readily provides this information on a daily basis and currently 28 have been identified. The strategy is targeting each of the persistent beggars and work is being done with them through drugs agencies and housing. Targeting was necessary in order to maximise the effectiveness of the resources available to focus where there was a chance of succeeding in breaking into the more entrenched cycle.

The Police and City Council are the primary leads and carry out the on going evaluation. Statistics are produced weekly and monthly and provide the basis of planning our ongoing strategy. They are also submitted to the office of the deputy prime minister and used by the Government to update the rough sleeping initiative website set up in 2000.

Outreach assist in the analysis of the data collected during the operations and use it in their work supporting beggars. They form the main link between the various other charitable organisations that provide help in relation to drugs rehabilitation programs and housing.

Streetwise

So far we have identified 289 Beggars within the city centre of Bristol. 540 Arrests have been made in ten months with the more persistent of the beggars being arrested more than 10 times. We have taken out 11 County court injunctions banning beggars from the streets of Bristol and successfully prosecuted 7 beggars for breach of injunction in the county court. One has since been sentenced and served a term of imprisonment at a category A prison and another received a 14 day suspended sentence.

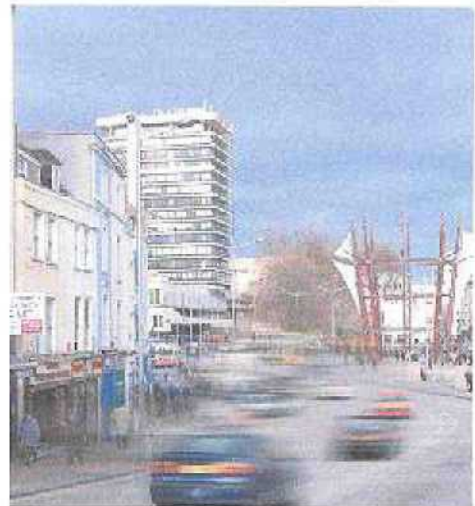
We currently have 28 persistent beggars on the database all of whom have been proactively targeted.

14 have been placed into drug treatment programs and 4 into permanent housing, 2 persistent beggars have been identified as having mental health issues and we are awaiting a new social workers post to be filled to deal with them.

Currently every single person we have identified has a class A drugs addiction and a criminal record. Intelligence is now indicating a clear move away, by some of the more hardened beggars, from begging to retail crime. These individuals are being successfully detected by the Broadmead shop squad and the retail outlets themselves who also provide feedback and intelligence involving offenders.

StreetWise

The initiative has begun to gain momentum and the effects build week upon week. The initiative is spreading and store detectives and other security services in private organisations are keen to join us to maintain the pressure for change. It is no longer 'somebody else's problem' it is every ones solution.



StreetWise

Results So Far.

- Over 300 Beggars identified
- Established 100% link with Class A drug addiction
- 240 Arrests in 26 weeks
- 9 County Court Injunctions
- 14 on fast track drugs program
- No re-offending of those on program
- Over 50 referred to Housing Organisations
- Operation used as foundation of Government White Paper
- Operation established as 'Best Practice'
- 'Big Issue' fraud detected
- Identification of offenders for other offences
- Arrests of offenders for other forces
- 310 intelligence reports in 26 weeks
- A unique database of Beggars

StreetWise

- Reduction in vehicle crime
- Reduction in public nuisance
- Begging in Broadmead Eliminated