

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD**

**8 NOVEMBER 2016**

**REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY SAFETY & LEISURE  
SCRUTINY PANEL**

**STREET BEGGARS**

**Please note the changes to the previous scrutiny final report format. Findings are not detailed in the content of the report. Minutes of the relevant scrutiny panel meetings are referenced and attached as appendices to provide an evidence base for conclusions and recommendations.**

**PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1. To present the draft final report of the Community Safety & Leisure Scrutiny Panel's following its short-topic investigation of street beggars.

**THE AIM OF THE INVESTIGATION**

2. This topic was included in the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel's 2016-17 work programme. The panel sought to examine whether the Council's current approach to changing the behaviour of street beggars is proving successful.

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

3. The panel focused on the following issues:-
  - To examine how big an issue the presence of street beggars are in Middlesbrough?
  - To consider whether street begging is linked to drug and alcohol misuse or homelessness?
  - To examine what approaches have been taken to date on this issue and whether these approaches are proving effective?
  - To explore what other options are available to the Council / Police to ensure local residents / businesses are not adversely affected by the behaviour of street beggars?

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

4. The Vagrancy Act 1824 makes it an offence to sleep rough or beg and anyone in England and Wales found to be begging can be arrested. Until recently it was believed that the Vagrancy Act 1824 had largely withered away in England through

lack of use. However, in recent years the number of homeless people sleeping out has risen, and the use of the Act has increased dramatically, especially in London. In 2013-14, 2771 cases were brought before the courts, a 70 per cent increase on the previous year.

5. Despite the notable increase in arrests for begging research indicates that people who beg on the streets of England do so in order to buy hard drugs, particularly crack cocaine and heroin and super-strength alcoholic beers and ciders. In a police crackdown on begging in Birmingham in autumn 2013, every one of the 40 people arrested failed a drug test. Street beggars are often caught up in a desperate cycle of begging from the public, 'scoring' drugs from a dealer and then taking these drugs. Most are not individuals in temporary difficulties, but people who are dependent on a begging income to fund a serious drug habit.<sup>1</sup>
6. The majority of people who beg have accommodation and the most recent evidence shows that fewer than one in five people arrested for begging in England and Wales in 2014 were homeless. Freedom of information figures from 34 of 43 police forces show that out of 1,002 people arrested for begging in 2014 only 199 were legally defined as homeless.<sup>2</sup> In light of the above factors the panel was keen to undertake a review on this topic to establish whether the current approach in response to street beggars in Middlesbrough is proving effective.
7. The Anti-social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014 parts 2 – 6 introduced new powers and tools to ensure agencies put the needs of victims first. These tools include Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPO's) and allow local authorities to make it an offence to engage in any activities deemed to have a "detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality". Local authorities have used PSPOs to ban activities including begging, swearing and the supply, possession and taking of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) in a public place.

## CONCLUSIONS

8. Having considered the evidence provided to the panel, the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel has reached the following conclusions:-

Further information to support these conclusions is attached at Appendix 1

- a) Nine prolific street beggars have been identified in Middlesbrough and the majority have a heroin addiction, with alcohol addiction as a secondary issue. A few have Anti-Social Behaviour (ASBOs) Orders, including some for begging and others have ASBOs for causing ASB in other areas of the UK. The majority have poor mental health and refuse to work with services. Over the last 18 months the number of street beggars in Middlesbrough has ranged from eight to 11 and the figures tend to decrease during the winter period. The majority of street beggars are passive and their behaviour is not aggressive. Unlike certain towns and cities in the UK where homelessness is a very visible issue this is not the case in Middlesbrough.
- b) Despite the public's misconception that the street beggars are homeless eight out the nine have accommodation. All are entitled to receive benefits including Housing Benefit and many have been assessed by the Department of Working Pensions (DWP). Their individual circumstances often mean they are receiving

---

<sup>1</sup> Why giving to those who beg does more harm than good – Thames Reach

<sup>2</sup> Most arrested beggars not homeless, police figures suggest - BBC Breakfast 31 July 2015

upwards of £2000 a month in benefits but are still choosing to generate additional income by begging. Many continue to suffer from poor mental health and have often experienced abuse in childhood. The panel recognises that it is important to balance support and enforcement and where support has proved ineffective enforcement action is taken. Three Criminal Behaviour Orders are currently in place, which enable the multi-agency group to specify that they do not want a particular individual in a certain exclusion area.

- c) The panel was impressed by the level of support available and the multi-agency working arrangements in place. A multi-agency group meet on a six weekly cycle to address the issue of street beggars in Middlesbrough. The group comprises of representation from Middlesbrough Council, Thirteen Housing, Middlesbrough Recovering Together, Tees Valley Community Rehabilitation Company (TVCRC) and DePaul UK (Homeless Charity). On 27 July 2016 a multi-agency operation was undertaken in the town centre, which involved speaking directly to the street beggars in a co-ordinated effort to engage them in accessing support. The multi-agency group is also undertaking other generic actions to reduce street begging in Middlesbrough. This includes improved lighting, CCTV and liaising closely with the needle exchange to encourage the street beggars to access support services
- d) It is evident that the personalised approach adopted is sensitive to the individual needs of the street beggars. Whilst acknowledging the negative impact that the presence of street beggars can have on businesses and residents in the town. The panel shares the view expressed by Thirteen Housing, Cleveland Police and the department of Supporting Communities that it is not necessary to introduce a Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) for begging in Middlesbrough at this time.
- e) The use of Dispersal Orders has proved effective and provided the multi-agency group with the opportunity to move the street beggars out of the town centre and into supported accommodation for a period of 48 hours (over a weekend). Dispersal Orders have been used in Middlesbrough town centre in June and July 2016. In addition each time the street beggars are approached by the Police, the Street Wardens or Neighbourhood Safety Officers they are provided with a list of all relevant support services they can access. It is clear that a very pro-active approach to the issue of Street Beggars is being taken.
- f) The panel is supportive of the 'Think before you Give' campaign and is not in favour of launching a hard hitting poster campaign in Middlesbrough. A drop in income is known to stimulate people to address their real needs instead of avoiding facing them. The 'Think before you Give' campaign materials features local contact information for homelessness charities and if members of the public wish to make a donation the information is easily accessible.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9. Following the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel's recommendations for consideration by the Overview and scrutiny Board are as follows:
  - 1. That the multi-agency approach adopted in addressing the issue of street beggars be endorsed and supported.
  - 2. That the public information campaign to encourage people to 'Think before you Give' be widely advertised and promoted across Middlesbrough.

3. That a charity donation box be installed in the town centre to allow members of the public to make an immediate donation to a homelessness charity.
4. That approved street performers be required to display their Busking Permits for easy identification by members of the public.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

10. The Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel would like to thank Rachel Beard, Community Safety Partnership & Neighbourhood Safety Team Manager (Middlesbrough Council), John Garner, Homelessness Manager (Thirteen) and Rob Jones, Inspector (Cleveland Police) for their assistance with its work.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

11. The following sources were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

- Report to, and minutes of, the Community Safety and Leisure Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 12 September 2016.
- Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour - Cabinet Report, Newcastle City Council, March 2016
- Why giving to those who beg does more harm than good - Thames Reach

## **COUNCILLOR ALMA HELLAOUI**

### **CHAIR OF COMMUNITY SAFETY & LEISURE SCRUTINY PANEL**

The membership of the scrutiny panel was as follows:

Councillors A Hellaoui (Chair), Z Uddin (Vice-Chair), D Branson, J Blyth, D Davidson, S Dean, J Goodchild, L Lewis and F McIntyre.

#### **Contact Officer:**

Caroline Breheny

Democratic Services

Telephone: 01642 729752 (direct line)

Email: [caroline\\_breheny@middlesbrough.gov.uk](mailto:caroline_breheny@middlesbrough.gov.uk)