

Preventing Begging in Darlington

A Multi-agency Strategic Approach

Empathy

Engagement

Education

Enforcement



Foreword

As the country emerges from the shadow of Covid-19 and the footfall in public spaces returns to previous levels, the number of people seen begging in town centres across the country has significantly increased. Begging evokes diverse responses from the general public's perspective; a beggar can be the object of compassion, of fear, of societal failure or of latent exploitation. Many people offer support to beggars who appear cold, hungry and in need. Many are begging for financial gain to support addictions and offering money maintains their addiction, undermines their health significantly and undermines the work of health drug treatment professionals who are working with these individuals.

From a policing perspective begging is taken very seriously both from the welfare needs of the beggar, the impact on addiction cessation and the fear and intimidation they can cause. From a social care perspective, a beggar is the harbinger of deeper vulnerability (homelessness, addiction, etc).

The Darlington Multi-Agency Begging Strategy seeks to provide a proportionate response to this complex and emotive issue. It will seek to balance the needs of those who are begging, the health professionals, the views of the public and the policing demands in a consistent and complimentary way. The strategy acknowledges that addressing the problem of begging requires collective action around empathy, engagement, education, and enforcement, and affirms a partnership approach that brings Police, care agencies, Local Authority, the justice system and the individuals concerned to ensure needs have been addressed, discourage begging, inform the public and take enforcement action when necessary

I am delighted to support this strategy which I believe will strike the right balance between the upholding of the law and the genuine concern for the wellbeing of the individual who begging and the local community.

Detective Chief Superintendent *Adrian Green*
Darlington Police Commander
Community Safety Partnership Board (Chair)

Have A Heart
GIVE SMART

If you really want to make a difference, please don't give your change.
Why not donate to a charity instead?

ATM

700 Club

The 700Club is a Darlington based charity working with people who are begging in partnership with the council, police and other agencies.

You can text **BEGGING** to **70085** and a donation of **£5** will be made, or give online to Begging Appeal - find out more at www.700club.org.uk
All money given will go towards outreach work to help those who are begging

Context

A proactive response to begging in Darlington has led to a dramatic fall in the number of people begging in Darlington. The strategic objective has therefore shifted from response to prevention.

Begging is a form of anti-social behaviour that is unacceptable in Darlington. The term “begging” refers to people who ask for money from members of the public in a unilateral exchange. It can be lucrative as it exploits public sympathy. Begging sites are often “stage dressed” to suggest homelessness.

For most individuals, the reasons that initially motivate them to beg are the same factors that maintain their begging behaviour (i.e., commonly addiction). This can become a vicious cycle as they find themselves trapped by their circumstances. This strategy is written from the perspective that timely prevention of begging is in the best interest of the person begging. Not only does begging compound the problems that prompt the activity, but it also heightens the vulnerability of the individual. There are clear health impacts to begging (both direct because of the effects of cold, etc., and contingent impacts arising from what the money is used for), but there is also an increased risk of being coerced into even more harmful activities (e.g., dealing, sexual exploitation, serious crime).

Preventing begging also benefits the community. The presence of beggars impacts negatively on the Town’s reputation, on retailers, on community cohesion and on the perception of personal safety. Fear of intimidation, particularly among those who are vulnerable (e.g. elderly, disabled, and children) causes people to stay away. There are also cost benefits to health, social-care and criminal justice budgets if begging is prevented.

No single agency can prevent begging activity.

By placing the best interest of the beggar at the centre of this strategy, cognisance is taken of more wide-ranging strategic objectives narrated elsewhere. i.e. -

- Darlington’s Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy
- Environmental Strategy (Local Business - Involvement, Security, Street Design, Street Furniture - Safe & Secure Design, Street Cleanliness)
- Financial & Digital Inclusion Strategy (incl., Employment, Housing, Skills, Meaningful Activity)
- Police and Crime Plan (Police and Crime Commissioner)
- Darlington Community Safety Partnership Plan 2021-2026

A Strategic Approach.

The strategic objective of this strategy is, in the best interest of the individual, to prevent begging activity within Darlington.

To achieve this strategic objective, four action pathways, **empathy, engagement, education, and enforcement** have been developed.

Empathy

To prevent begging, the motivating factors must be understood.

People beg for a variety of reasons. In Darlington, homelessness is rarely a factor. Begging to feed an addiction is commonplace, whether to drugs, alcohol, and gambling. Some beg to meet everyday needs such as paying rent or paying an outstanding bill.

People who engage in begging generally have multiple and complex needs, with unresolved issues including mental, physical, and sexual health, drug and alcohol dependency, criminality, behavioural problems, inadequate daily living skills, and social isolation/exclusion.

This strategy is founded upon the understanding that as a community we have the resources to meet any need that a person begging presents and will not withhold them.

Key Actions

1. *All partners to positively promote understanding of the precursors of begging to avoid any interventions being perceived as victimisation. (The myth that beggars are casualties or victims of an uncaring community must be actively debunked).*
2. *Listen to the 'life experience' of former beggars and use the knowledge gained to inform strategy.*



Engagement

Prevention of begging demands proactive and early engagement with those identified as begging with the aim of supporting them into services, assisting them to address their issues, and so removing the motivation to beg.

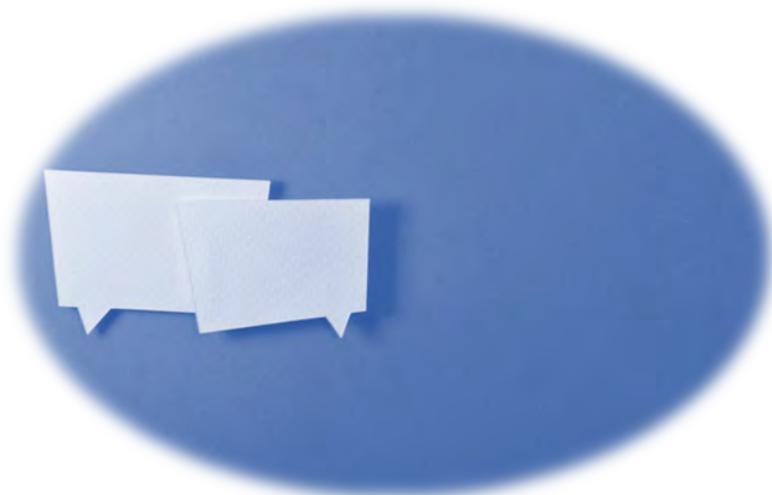
Identification of individuals begging will be based on intelligence from all partner agencies.

Street level response will be led by the 700 Club, who employ a dedicated worker to provide support at street level, seeing and speaking to the individuals that beg approximately 3 times a week, and where appropriate, providing access to wider support options (including 24/7 accessible emergency accommodation). Street level support will be wide ranging and personalised: it will include Tier 1 and 2 substance intervention, help with setting up benefits and maximising income, budgeting advice and help regarding mental and physical health. The aim is to do all possible to move individuals away from the need to beg.

Wider support options include referral into addiction services, the homelessness pathway, healthcare services, etc.

Key Actions

- 1. All partners to share intelligence around begging activity.*
- 2. Regular street monitoring walkabouts to continue.*
- 3. Street level engagement to be systematic rather than ad hoc, with each individual identified having a support plan in which all engagement and goals are documented. (700 Club, Police, Housing Option Team)*
- 4. All agencies equipped with information to give to those begging about what is available to them. Information would include how to access accommodation, food, or agencies to support them. This to be delivered in an appropriate form, i.e. leaflet, card.*
- 5. Coordinate with the Streetlink initiative.*
- 6. Regular multi-agency meetings to be convened to share intelligence and to ensure that appropriate services are in place (lead agency, Darlington Borough Council Community Safety).*



Education

Begging attracts because it is lucrative. Much of the good work achieved through engagement is easily undermined by the spontaneous generosity of members of the public. Such kindness can compound the issues that drive begging and have a detrimental effect on the individual's well-being. Education of the public to refrain from giving to beggars must go hand in hand with the one-to-one engagement with beggars.

Interrupting the cash flow, making life harder for individuals who beg, will of itself motivate some to engage with agencies that can help them overcome the issues that lead them to beg. We acknowledge, however, that some individuals will simply seek an alternative revenue stream, and that acquisitive crime figures may be impacted. Police partners regard this as an acceptable risk.

Key Actions

- 1. Posters, flyers, magazine and newspaper articles, media opportunities etc., to promote the message that to not give money to beggars is the best and most constructive way to help them. It is crucial to make the public feel part of the solution.*
- 2. To provide alternative ways in which the public can financially support those begging. This to include promoting the "Have a Heart Give Smart" initiative as a way of supporting agencies that support beggars. Being generous is a good thing, and it is important not to alienate the public by criticising acts of compassion.*
- 3. Publicise all the work undertaken by partners to improve the situation of those who beg.*
- 4. Engage retailers, both in the daytime and nighttime economies to identify those begging and to disincentivise customers from handing money to beggars.*
- 5. All partners to provide "talking heads" to underline the fact that this strategy is motivated predominantly by concern for the individuals begging.*



Enforcement

Enforcement is an integral part of this strategy and is understood as a tool that is supported by all partners to incentivise individuals to address the factors that lead them to beg. Partners include the judiciary because, self-evidently, a fine is an incentive to beg more, not less. The support of all partners re-enforces the notion that enforcement action too is in the best interest of the individual, and it also prevents reputational damage falling to the Police and Local Authority who may, if seen to be acting unilaterally, be perceived negatively by the public.

Enforcement is the response of last resort. There is no evidence in Darlington of begging being linked to organised crime.

The available enforcement tools are:

- Public Space Protection Orders. The aim is to remove those begging from public places where high footfall makes begging financially viable.
- Community Protection Warnings (CPW) and
- Community Protection Notices (CPN)
- Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBO) are an attempt to support positive behaviours.

Other options such as reporting for Public Disorder, Obstruction of the Highway and the Vagrancy Act can also be used by the Police. Where begging is aggressive, arrest is possible.

All enforcement activity to be shared with partners and integrated into the strategic support plan for the individual.

Key Actions

1. *Judiciary to be educated regarding this strategy, and to be kept informed through Chair of Magistrates - police liaison. Inform and educate magistrates so that they share in the determination to help individuals begging confront their issues as well as form legal judgements.*
2. *All partners to contribute to the evidence base for enforcement, so that at the point of Orders being made, significant effort has been made to encourage behavioural change outside of the judicial system. Intelligence to be shared amongst partners to identify key offenders, locations, and times.*
3. *To monitor the use of Fixed Penalty notices and to direct individuals who are issued with more than **three** over a short period of time to the courts.*
4. *Police (Sgt/Insp) to integrate this strategy within Operation Policing in Darlington.*