

Committee: Police	Date: 2 nd November 2012
Subject: Update on the Force response to begging in the City of London	Public
Report of: Commissioner of Police POL 71/12	For Information
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Summary</u></p> <p>At your September Committee, the Commissioner undertook to bring a specific report to a future Committee on the Force's response to begging.</p> <p>The statistics provided within the main report represent data collated between 1st January 2012 and 10th October 2012 inclusive. In the reporting period 73 arrests have been made under the Vagrancy Act 1824 for the offence of Begging, 83 Anti-Social behaviour (ASB) reports regarding begging have been created.</p> <p>There are a number of proactive Policing operations and initiatives which deal with begging; Operation Baskin focuses on identifying persons begging and arresting them under the Vagrancy Act, Operation Poncho is a joint operation between Police, CoL Housing Needs Department and Outreach services. Wards Policing run awareness campaign for the Public around known begging hotspots giving leaflets to members of the public to raise awareness of cause and effect.</p> <p>The response to dealing with begging is discussed at Strategic level meetings including the Metropolitan Police Strategic Rough Sleepers (Op Reach) meeting; the City of London Corporation Rough Sleepers Strategy meeting and the Licensing Tactical Group.</p> <p>This report evidences a number of positive approaches to dealing with begging, working with partner agencies to tackle the underlying problems including drug and alcohol dependency, homelessness and Mental Ill Health which can contribute to persons feeling the need to beg.</p> <p>Recommendations</p> <p>It is recommended that this report be received and its contents noted.</p>	

Main Report

Background

1. At your September Committee, the Commissioner undertook to bring a specific report to a future Committee regarding begging in the City of London and the Force's response to this issue. Begging has continuously been raised as a community priority at the Community Partnership meetings.

Current Position

2. The City of London appears to be an attractive area for begging with activity focused around transport hubs, tourist attractions and more recently licensed premises during evening hours. Activity is seasonal with higher numbers of reports during the summer months.
3. All reports of Begging are treated as Anti-Social behaviour by the Police, recorded within the control room and forwarded to the ASB Coordinator within Wards Policing.
4. Between 1st January and 10th October 2012 (inclusive) the City of London Police has made 73 arrests for Begging under the Vagrancy Act 1824. There were 83 reports of persons begging during the same period. One third of all begging reports and subsequent arrests are within Bishopsgate Ward, specifically Bishopsgate and Liverpool Street, a further 23% are within Tower Ward. As data has only been being collected and collated on this issue since January 2012 it is not possible to identify any year on year trends at this stage. However, the Force will be able to report on yearly trends in a future report to your Committee.
5. Begging has been highlighted as an issue by survey respondents, at wards meetings and by residents complaining directly to elected Members. The Force is currently in the process of developing the force priorities for the Policing Plan for 2013-14 and will be looking to include begging within the wider priority of tackling Anti- Social Behaviour (ASB). Community Safety measures will be developed and reflected within the ASB priority.
6. A coordinated approach between Police and partner agencies has led to three Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) under the Vagrancy Act being granted within the reporting period, with a further one due

to be granted imminently. Four further applications are being compiled in respect of persistent beggars.

7. Police work with a number of partner agencies in order to tackle the underlying causes of begging, often due to drug or alcohol abuse, homelessness and Mental Ill health. Action is focussed upon identifying persistent beggars, engaging with outreach services to provide assistance on an individual needs basis, and to prosecute offenders and to collate evidence to support applications for ASBOs where individuals fail to engage.

Operations and campaigns

8. There are a number of proactive policing operations and initiatives which deal with Begging:
 - **Operation Baskin** is a Police led operation with a zero tolerance approach to begging. Officers arrest those found begging. Once detained, offenders are drug tested and where tests are positive, individuals are referred to the Drug Action Team (DAT). Those who test positive for Class A drugs are entered into a treatment programme with the intention of removing the cause of the need to beg.
 - **Operation Poncho** is a partnership operation with the City of London Housing needs department, local outreach teams, re-homing charities and mental health workers. The team patrol every night and interact with homeless people to encourage them to engage with support services available and find them accommodation. This operation has contributed to the reduction in numbers of rough sleepers within the City of London from 39 at the beginning of the reporting period to 14 at the last count. A number of persons have been found accommodation including one male who had been sleeping rough for 11 years.
9. Police also work with UK Borders Agency (UKBA) to tackle those rough sleepers who are foreign nationals and there has been some success in repatriating individuals.
10. Wards Policing also work with local outreach services to run awareness campaigns educating members of the public in relation to the issues caused by begging and actively encouraging them to give money to homeless charities rather than individuals begging. The leaflets entitled 'Your kindness can kill' identify that some beggars

use the money given to them to purchase alcohol and or drugs and this can actually prevent them from getting off the streets. A forthcoming campaign will focus on Liverpool Street station in November.

11. Ward officers working with the Corporation have persuaded the owners of the buildings in Rose Alley to erect new fencing. This has closed off a problematic area in regards to rough sleeping. Ward officer for Mansell Street Estate has also held meetings with estate management to respond to complaints of rough sleepers appearing on the estate since the closure of a local hostel.

Enforcement

12. In the case of persistent beggars who refuse to engage with outreach services, Police actively seek Anti Social Behaviour orders (ASBOs) through the courts. The ASB Coordinator compiles a compendium of evidence to prove to the court that the behaviour is persistent, and that the conduct is anti-social. The Court will decide as fact whether the behaviour complained of caused harassment alarm or distress to relevant persons, they must also be satisfied that an order is necessary to protect relevant persons from further anti-social acts by the defendant.
13. The collation of evidence to support an application for an ASBO takes some time, however when granted ASBOs prohibit the individual from certain activities and or bans them from certain locations and have been granted in some cases for a period of 3 years.

Meetings

14. The Community Engagement Superintendent is responsible for dealing with Anti-Social Behaviour, including begging. There are a number of strategic meetings at which begging is a main focus:
 - **The Metropolitan Police Rough Sleepers Strategy meeting** (Op Reach) ensures that efforts to reduce rough sleeping in one Borough do not cause displacement to another area. This meeting also ensures cross border ASBOs can be granted to prevent similar displacement.
 - **The City of London Rough Sleepers Strategy meeting** is chaired by the Director of Children and Community Services together with Partners from Cleansing, Mental Health Service provision, Police and Broadway outreach Services. A Rough Sleepers action plan is in

existence and covers actions from ensuring that suitable accommodation is available, to utilising the City of London Technical Department to 'design out' hotspot areas.

- The recently formed **Tactical Licensing Group** chaired by the Superintendent Community Engagement meets fortnightly together with senior staff from the Environmental Health and Public Protection Department. This meeting enables the sharing of information in relation to Anti-Social behaviour including begging and feeds into the Police Intelligence led tasking meeting to ensure Police resources are effectively deployed to deal with ASB.

Conclusion

15. This report informs Committee members of the coordinated partnership approaches in existence, which are actively working to reduce Anti-Social behaviour around begging in the City of London.

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