



Street Homeless

A guide for city-centre organisations

How to work with your colleagues and with people who may be homeless near your premises to provide safety and support for everyone.

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Introduction

Homelessness is complex, the dynamics and challenges are always changing. Unfortunately, there isn't a straightforward answer for what is the 'right' thing to do when working with people who appear to be street homeless near your organisations. What we feel is more important, are the values behind your chosen approach. We hope that the information provided in this guide will help your organisation to;

- Develop your own positive approach to working with people who are homeless.
- Improve your response to situations which involve people who are homeless.
- Increase your understanding of homelessness.
- Inform your staff about what provisions are available for people who are homeless.

We believe that all citizens of Manchester have the right to feel safe, respected, and supported – this includes you, your colleagues, your customers, and people who are experiencing homelessness.

This guide has been co-produced through the Manchester Homelessness Partnership (MHP) with businesses, the City Council, the police, and with people who have experienced homelessness. When creating the guide, we found that there are five important elements to think about when working with people who appear to be homeless near your organisation:

1. **Values**
2. **Consistency**
3. **Informed signposting**
4. **Building relationships**
5. **Understanding homelessness and avoiding blame**

This guide explores these ideas in the '*Our suggested approach*' section and gives some examples of what to think about in specific situations. It also introduces the bigger picture of homelessness and details the existing processes from Greater Manchester Police, Manchester City Council and other charitable agencies.

We understand that people who are begging or may appear to be street homeless near your premises can affect your organisation in a negative way. For example, we have frequent reports of theft, damage to property, and aggressive behaviour towards staff and customers. We also know that the underlying causes of homelessness are ongoing, so we believe that as a city we all have to start to approach things differently to move towards our shared goal of ending homelessness and stopping the need for begging.

Use of the guide

The guide is an introduction only and does not cover all scenarios. Homelessness is also constantly evolving, so some of the information provided may become out-of-date. It should be used in conjunction with a briefing or training from CityCo or the Manchester Homelessness Partnership.

Main messages

There is a lot of information in this guide, but please read it thoroughly and talk to your colleagues about it. If anything isn't clear, or if you would like to arrange a more detailed briefing or training, please get in touch at Operations@cityco.com for CityCo members. If you are short on time, here is a quick summary of our main messages:

1. Nobody chooses to become homeless. Homelessness is complex and street-homelessness represents the smallest proportion of the homeless population in Greater Manchester.
2. Begging and homelessness are not the same thing, and both need approaching from a place of support.
3. There is a lot being done to end homelessness in Manchester and we are all working together with people who have personal insight into homelessness. See: [Manchester Homelessness Partnership](#).
4. When working with people who appear to be homeless near your organisation we find that values, consistency, signposting, and relationship building are important.
5. If someone is behaving in a way which is consistently detrimental to your business, enforcement action can be taken and you can submit evidence to the BCRP¹ or to the ASBAT² team.
6. There are indoor food provisions for people who are homeless every meal of every day in Manchester. This is provided by charitable organisations that offer professional advice and services too.
7. [Street Support Network](#) provides a central place to go for information on what is being done to end homelessness in Manchester (and other cities), including where to find help and how you can give help.

¹ Business Crime Reduction Partnership

² Anti-Social Behaviour Action Team

Guidance for working with people who are homeless

Our suggested approach

Until we end the need for street-homelessness and begging, any organisation who have premises in Manchester city centre will need to understand that homelessness is a very real part of our city, and that people who are rough sleeping have the same rights as any other citizens. We promote an approach which is based on sharing spaces in a way that means everyone can feel safe.

From conversations with our partners (charities, businesses, the council, and people who have been homeless), we found that these five criteria are important to consider when responding to anything relating to homelessness as an organisation:

1. Stay true to your values

- The Manchester Homelessness [Charter](#) sets out the values for how we'd like to work. This includes co-production, respect, equality and coordination.
- You may have 'organisational behaviours' already, or your own personal values. We would ask that your approach to people who are homeless is guided by these. The intention behind your actions is just as important as what you do.
- It can be useful to ask yourself what outcome you would really like and why. For example, for the person to be moved-on or for the person to get the support they need.

2. Understand homelessness and avoid blame

- Homelessness is complex and nobody chooses to become homeless. We believe that if everyone better understood the bigger picture of homelessness, this would help us to end it.
- We cannot blame individual people who are homeless for their situation or anyone else. Let's just forget about blame.

3. Be consistent

- It is frustrating for people who are homeless if an organisation near where they are based changes their approach regularly. For example, if one member of staff asks them to move-on, but another colleague says hello and gives them a cup of tea.
- Whatever approach you decide to take, make sure it is known and followed by all staff and if possible, have one contact point for anything relating to homelessness.

4. Give informed signposting

- If you are going to speak with someone who is homeless (and if it is safe to do so) get yourself quickly informed on what support is available in the city.
- You can ask someone what help they need and use the [Street Support Network](#) website to direct them to their nearest charity, and to find out where they can get the specific advice and services.
- You are encouraged to contact [StreetLink](#) if you have seen someone sleeping rough and want to connect them to services. This will go directly to the City Council Rough Sleeping Support Service.

5. Build mutual relationships

- It may take time for the situation to improve for people who are rough sleeping near your organisation. During this time, it can help to build a relationship with them based on mutual trust and respect. Try to keep conversations to 'neutral' topics which don't ask for personal and potentially traumatic information to be shared.
- Getting to know your nearest homelessness charity or service can help too – we can introduce you or just drop in and say hello!

What is already being done in Manchester?

There are already a lot of people working to support businesses in Manchester to respond to incidents which relate to homelessness near their organisation, and to support the people who are currently rough-sleeping or begging in the city centre. A summary of the main mechanisms is given below:

Manchester City Council

All local councils in the UK have a legal duty to provide advice and assistance to people who are legally defined as homeless or threatened with homelessness. However, not everyone who falls within the legal definition necessarily qualifies for temporary accommodation.

Alongside a range of homelessness services, Manchester Council also has a team specifically working to reduce rough sleeping in the city centre. This team exists to build relationships with people who are street homeless and offer them support - they are not an enforcement unit. This team are in the city doing out-reach work and work with other agencies 6am to 8.30pm Monday to Friday. (During periods of Severe Weather, the team complete weekend and night-time outreach). Every month they are successful in supporting people to move from rough sleeping to suitable indoor accommodation. The team follow up referrals from all sources and are pro-active in seeking out people in need of support.

Manchester Council also funds a range of housing providers, charities and organisations supporting people to live safely and independently off the streets.

CityCo.

CityCo is the city centre management company for Manchester. They are an independent membership organisation and they also manage Manchester's Business Improvement District (BID), and ABID partners.

The Business Crime Reduction Partnership (BCRP) is a subscription service for businesses to help manage threats and minimize risks using civil exclusion. In short, if a person's behaviour is damaging a business, steps can be taken without the police or the council. Businesses who subscribe can submit evidence of behaviours on their premises that can be used to start offender management. It is important that evidence is accurate and relevant. The BCRP works in partnership with MCC and GMP where civil exclusions are not sufficient and more robust action is needed. For more information please contact Operations@cityco.com

Greater Manchester Police (GMP)

In relation to negative incidents relating to people who are homeless or begging, the GMP can respond to '*persistent or continuing conduct which is having a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality*'. They do this through a three staged approach;

1. Approach, engage, advise; offer support where possible
2. Approach, engage, warn; report to the anti-social behavior action team
3. Approach, engage, serve; offer support and serve the CPN

Street Engagement Hub

The Street Engagement Hub is a Community Safety Partnership formed due to the high demand for services to engage with ASB and the street-homeless community. Operating every Tuesday and Thursday at the Mustard Tree charity in Ancoats, the Hub involves multiple organisations such as; Manchester City Council, GMP, Riverside, Change Grow Live, St John's Ambulance, Probation and many others. The Hub provides support to vulnerable and complex individuals from the street community with issues such as housing, drug or alcohol addiction, medical care and benefits advice from DWP. More information on this service can be found on [Manchester City Councils website](#) or on the [CityCo website](#).

Out-reach groups and evening services

As well as the Manchester City Council outreach team, there are a number of professional homelessness charities which undertake regular street-outreach to understand people's situations, what they need, and try to encourage people to engage with services. They may already visit areas around your organisation or may be able to start covering the new location if you feel you have seen an increase in people who are homeless nearby.

You can view all homeless charities in Greater Manchester on the [Street Support Network](#) website and can find your nearest support service. The Manchester Homelessness Partnership have also worked with different charities to provide more 'out-of-hours' support and provisions on evenings and weekends – when other services are closed. You can view a full list of organisations providing advice, food provision and support [here](#).

Charities

There are over 100 homeless charities that operate in our city and that have the right knowledge and support services to help people who are rough sleeping in Manchester move towards independence. This ranges from large national charities like Shelter, Centrepont and Justlife, to local organisations like the Booth Centre, Barnabus, Mustard Tree, Caritas Cornerstone, Lifeshare and Reach out to the Community.

The Manchester Homelessness Partnership

The [Manchester Homelessness Partnership](#) (MHP) is a network of over 200 organisations who are working together towards the same goal - to end homelessness in all its forms in the city. This network includes charities (large and small), businesses, statutory organisations (Police, City Council, NHS etc.), and people who have experienced homelessness. Read more in the 'understanding homelessness' section.

Ideas to consider in certain situations

This section intends to provide some guidance about what to do in some scenarios which are often linked to homelessness. Individual situations are often more complex than they may first seem, so unfortunately there isn't a straightforward answer. This is also not a comprehensive list. We would ask people to remain true to their values and use their best judgement in each separate situation they may be faced with.

Risk and when not to engage

Your personal safety is important. As you would with any member of the public, do not approach someone who you feel may pose a threat. Specifically, we would advise not to wake someone who is sleeping and not to move any refuse which may include drug paraphernalia (e.g. needles) or human waste without appropriate training and equipment.

Signposting

For anyone who you think is homeless and in need of support, please use the Street Support Network [website](#) (or download and use the Street Support Network App). On the Street Support '[Find Help](#)' portal you can see where the nearest charity is and you can tell people where they can receive the specific services which they may need (such as food, showers or housing).

Connecting people sleeping rough to local services

Most people who are street homeless or begging will be known to the City Council Rough Sleeping Support Service and to charities, but it is important that we monitor this. You are encouraged to contact [StreetLink](#) if you have seen someone sleeping rough who you have not seen before and want to connect them to services.

Aggressive or damaging behavior

If someone who is begging or appears to be homeless near your organisation is behaving in a persistent way that impacts your business negatively (e.g. aggression or theft) you can report anti-social behaviour to [ASBAT](#) (Anti-Social Behaviour Action Team) or to the [BCRP](#) if you are a member (Business Crime Reduction Partnership).

Emergencies

For anyone who you feel is in a life-threatening situation please do as you would for any member of the general public and ring 999.

Young people, pregnancy, and domestic abuse

For anyone who reports domestic violence please use this [national helpline](#). For anyone who appears to be under the age of 18 please ring the [Centrepoint](#) emergency helpline on 0808 800 0661. For anyone who is pregnant contact the Maternity Action advice line on 0808 802 0029.

Big Issue Sellers

All authorised Big Issue sellers should have an identity card displayed when selling the magazine. Each Big Issue seller is trained, registered and they buy the magazines at a reduced rate. We have also been told from the Big Issue to ask people to please take the magazine that they buy.

City centre and suburbs

The majority of people who are experiencing street homelessness are in the city centre but we are seeing more people moving to the suburbs. Unfortunately there is less support available here, but we are working to provide more. City Council outreach is coordinated using StreetLink referrals - the more accurate the reporting, the more informed outreach is. The City Council has significantly increased the size of our Outreach team to cover all areas of the city, including the suburbs. You can still find your nearest charity on the Street Support Network [website](#).

Winter and summer

More extreme weather conditions put people's health and lives at risk. In summer we would suggest you offer people water and encourage people to move into the shade. In winter, additional emergency accommodation is provided – please find out how to direct people to their nearest shelter by using information which will be shared each year through Street Support.

Giving money and food

Giving food or money directly to people on the streets is a personal choice but indoor food provisions are on offer for people who are homeless in Manchester - every meal of every day. You can see a full list of [services available](#) on the Street Support Network and on the CityCo [website](#). This doesn't always mean that everyone can access these provisions, but there is a consensus from people who work in the homelessness sector that giving money, food, or other items directly to people doesn't actually help them. This is because it is hard to know someone's full situation and needs, and sometimes it can actually enable people to stay on the streets and delay or stop some people from visiting services where they can get the professional support they need to get off the streets permanently – including referrals into accommodation.

If you would like to give to someone who is homeless you can see what items are needed on Street Support Network: [Give Help](#). If you would like to support individual people financially, you can donate to [Real Change MCR](#) which pays for items that individual people need - such as housing deposits, furniture or transportation. You can also donate items or fundraise for a homeless charity. If your organisation has food which would normally be thrown away, we would suggest giving this to [FareShare](#) who can get it to charities where it will be used.

Understanding homelessness

Different forms of homelessness

Everybody has the right to a decent, safe, secure, and permanent home³ - we would consider anyone who does not have this to be experiencing a form of homelessness. Often people think about street homelessness first, as this is the most visible, but this represents the smallest segment of the homeless population (2 to 5 per cent in Manchester). We don't like to categorise people, but it can help to explain what we mean by different types of homelessness:

- **Legal definition:** Someone who does not have a legal right to occupy accommodation, or does not have accommodation which is *reasonable*, accommodation which is available to occupy, or cannot access their home.
- **Street homeless / rough sleeping:** Someone who is street homeless and has no other place to sleep. This may include people who are in tents, doorways, parks, bus shelters, or in buildings – e.g. stairwells, car parks and train stations.
- **Unsecure temporary accommodation (UTA):** People who do not have a permanent home and who are not receiving support. This could mean they are sleeping in their cars, in squats, at their friends' house, 'sofa-surfing', or using hostels, B&Bs and budget hotels.
- **Supported temporary accommodation (STA):** People who do not have a permanent home but are receiving support and assistance from their local authorities and/or charities. This includes young people and care-leavers. STA is paid for by housing- benefits.
- **Unsuitable and unsafe accommodation:** People who may or may not have a permanent home, but the place where they are currently sleeping is not 'reasonable' to live in. This could mean they are experiencing domestic abuse, the housing is poor quality and is affecting their health, or they do not have enough space (e.g. families living in one room).
- **At risk of homelessness:** People who do have secure permanent or temporary accommodation but feel that they may become homeless in the next two months. This could include single people and families who are struggling to pay their rent or bills and may be accessing food banks or feeling reliant on charitable support.

Homelessness and begging

Not everyone who begs is homeless, and not everyone who is street-homeless would beg. There are also organised and criminal begging groups which operate in cities. Begging is as complex as homelessness, and more work is being done to understand this in Manchester. We would consider anyone who is homeless and/or begging as being vulnerable and in need of support (such as accessing substance recovery services).

³http://england.shelter.org.uk/campaigns/_why_we_campaign/tackling_homelessness/what_is_homelessness

Why people become homeless

Anyone can become homeless. Research says the most frequent reasons why people become homeless in the UK are related to relationship breakdown or loss of private tenancy (which sometimes means people who have been unfairly evicted). Often, people who are made homeless have had to rely solely on the state systems as they don't have their own social-support network.

There are other factors in the UK which are making it more likely for someone to become homeless and making it harder for people who are homeless to see their situation improve. These include:

- Not enough social housing
- Social housing stock being privately owned and let on a market rent
- Not enough affordable housing
- Building houses but not building neighbourhoods and social infrastructure
- People not being part of a community or other social support networks
- Move on from asylum support housing
- Family reunions resulting in homeless presentations, due to lack of/or unsuitable accommodation options
- Cuts to local government budgets
- Reforms to the welfare system
- Wealth distribution
- Cyclical poverty and associated patterns of behaviours

We also see a higher proportion of care leavers (~30 per cent), prison leavers (~20 per cent), and ex- military (~20 per cent) within the homeless population. And much higher rates of mental health conditions (~70 per cent), substance misuse, and experiences of ACTs (acute-childhood trauma). Homelessness impacts people's physical health too - the average life expectancy for someone who is street homeless in the UK is 43 for women and 47 for men. *(Please note that these figures are national estimations.)*

Street Homelessness in Manchester

Rough sleeping numbers peaked in England in 2017 and 2018: 4751 and 4677 respectively. Manchester's peak numbers were also in those years: 94 and 123 respectively.

Rough Sleeping Initiative funding started in 2018, and Manchester has achieved a 61 per cent reduction in count numbers: 123 to 48 between 2018 and 2023. The reduction in England between 2018 and 2023 was 17 per cent: 4677 to 3898. There is still much to do, but the reduction in Manchester in numbers has been higher than in England as a whole.

The dynamics in Manchester city centre are also complex and constantly changing so we work in a way which is flexible and responsive to new situations. These are a few ideas for why homelessness seems to increase more in Manchester than in other parts of the UK:

- Manchester is surrounded by the ten boroughs of Greater Manchester. Often people who have been made homeless in Salford or Trafford, for example, would come into the city centre which makes it appear more concentrated
- Manchester city centre has a 24 hour economy so it is street-lit, busier and therefore safer

- An increase in people who are begging (but who are not homeless) makes visible forms of homelessness appear worse than they really are
- There is currently an extremely high demand for social housing in Manchester with over 15,000 live applications on the Manchester Housing Register.¹

The Manchester Homelessness Partnership

The Manchester Homelessness Partnership (MHP) is a network of over 200 organisations who are working together towards the same goal - to end homelessness in all its forms in the city. This network includes charities (large and small), businesses, statutory organisations (Police, City Council, NHS etc.), and people who have experienced homelessness.

Everyone involved signs up to the [2016 Charter](#) which sets out our shared goal and the values for *how* we do what we do. This places a focus on systems change (tackling root causes) and co-production (including the voice of people who have experienced homelessness in everything we do). Most work is done through our action groups which mobilise resources around specific issues relating to homelessness; for example employment, mental health and physical health.

The Manchester Homelessness Partnership has a full-time Network and Communication Worker who can work with your organisation in the following ways;

1. Help you and your colleagues understand the bigger picture of homelessness
2. Connect you to charities that need your support and that match your organisations interests and skills (e.g. a digital agency to design a website)
3. Ensure that any social value strategies and offers of support will be meaningful, sustainable, and channeled to where there is a need
4. Review your internal structures for supporting your staff who may be at risk of homelessness

For any more information, please contact: info@mhp.org.uk

¹ Manchester Move, [Demand and Prospects information](#)

Other Frequently Asked Questions

What is being done to end homelessness in the UK?

No country in the world has ended homelessness but some great progress has been made, such as the [Housing First approach of Finland](#). There is a growing movement behind homelessness in the UK too, and we'd like to say that Manchester is leading the way.

The UK Homelessness Reduction Act came into force in April 2018 which marks the most drastic change in homelessness legislation in forty years. It places more emphasis on prevention as well as relief and has introduced a public duty to refer.

What is being done in Manchester?

We have been improving and recommissioning homelessness services and have a new city strategy which was written with people who have experienced homelessness. We have introduced a 'Social Impact Bond' scheme to house and support people who are rough- sleeping and will be piloting Housing First in Manchester from January 2019. Read more [here](#).

The Manchester Homelessness Partnership, (with Manchester City Council and Real Change MCR) has brought together everyone who is trying to end homelessness. This means we are now able to better share knowledge and resources. We are working more in Greater Manchester now too, and our model is now being replicated in other UK cities.

What is being done about begging in Manchester?

People who are begging (and may not be homeless) are still in vulnerable situations and in need of respect and support. A new approach is being piloted in Manchester city centre which can move people towards safety and better situations. For more information please contact asb.action.team@manchester.gov.uk

What does someone do when they become homeless?

If someone is at risk of becoming homeless, or has recently been made homeless, it is important for them to tell their local council as soon as possible. People can also register with their local authority to be assessed for longer term social housing options.

To be accepted as 'officially' homeless by a local authority, you must have not *intentionally* made yourself homeless. In addition, the support someone can get will depend on if they are in 'priority need' and if they have a 'local connection' to the area. For independent advice, we suggest that people visit a local homeless charity or contact Shelter.

How do I speak to someone who is homeless?

As you would to anyone else - with respect, dignity, eye-contact, and a smile! As with all people, someone's mood may change throughout the week or month – someone who usually responds to you positively may react negatively at other times. This is likely to be about their situation and not you. It might help to talk about 'neutral' topics which don't ask for personal and potentially traumatic information to be shared. Also remember to never give out your personal information, such as mobile numbers, home address or social media details.

How can I tell if someone is *genuinely* homeless?

Put simply, you can't. There are lots of forms of homelessness, some are visible and some are hidden, and lots of people who aren't homeless are still vulnerable and in need of help. If you get to know your nearby homeless charity or signpost people to the right organisations, they are likely to know the individuals background and current situation and can support them accordingly.

Should I give money or food to someone who is on the streets?

Giving directly to people on the streets is a personal choice. Indoor food provision is on offer for every meal of every day in the city. You can see a full list of [services available](#) on Street Support. This doesn't always mean that everyone can access provision, but the general consensus from people who work in the homelessness sector is not to give money, food, or other items directly to people who are rough sleeping. This is because it is hard to know someone's full situation and needs, and sometimes it can actually enable people to stay on the streets and stop some people from visiting services where they can get the professional support they need.

If you would like to give to someone who is homeless you can see what items are needed on Street Support: [Give Help](#). If you would like to support individual people financially, you can donate to [Real Change MCR](#) which pays for items such as housing deposits, furniture or transportation. You can also donate items or fundraise for a homeless charity. If your organisation has food which would normally be thrown away, we would suggest giving this to [FareShare](#) who can get it to charities where it will be used.

Should I give people tents and sleeping bags?

No. Giving people tents and sleeping bags can enable people to stay living on the streets longer term and discourage people from working with the services they need. They can also put people in danger, as unfortunately we have responded to many incidents where tents have been set on fire or trampled on etc.

What if people don't engage with services?

There are lots of reasons why people may not be able to access the support services which are available. There are a number of formal out-reach groups from the City Council, charity, and substance recovery organisations who speak with these people and try to make sure they get the support they need (without having to visit services).

How do I know if someone is receiving support? How long will it take?

As for any member of the general public, we cannot give out personal information relating to individual situations. We can give you the reassurance that they are known, and the right people are working with them.

Other ways to get involved with the Manchester Homelessness Partnership

As a quick summary, here are some immediate things you could do:

1. CityCo members arrange a 'lunch and learn' session with CityCo.
2. Look for what items or voluntary time is [needed](#) on the Street Support Network website
3. Donate to a [charity](#), or through [Real Change MCR](#)
4. Think about your internal processes for protecting staff who could be at risk of homelessness
5. Find people in your organisation who feel the same as you and have a conversation about what you'd like to do
6. Decide what your approach will be and ensure it is known and followed by everyone

Updated February 2025