



Gloucester Street Aware

Street Aware is the operational name for our Safe & Attractive Streets Policy work, which has been ongoing since July 2016.

Background

The Policy was open to widespread consultation before it was implemented, and was widely endorsed by the support, voluntary and community sectors, businesses and enforcement teams.

Street Aware brings together multiple partner agencies to co-ordinate a consistent approach across the City centre in particular; to deal with street based nuisance and anti-social behaviour.

Since its implementation, Street Aware has focussed on street begging with associated crime and ASB. However, the approach we use is designed to be universal and can be applied to any issue e.g. street drinking, psychoactive substances, or any other issue that becomes prevalent.

The approach we take is “Engage, Support, Enforce”. The aim is that successful engagement and support of individuals will help to address the root causes of anti-social behaviour and resolve issues in a co-ordinated way. Where engagement and support are refused, and anti-social behaviour persists, enforcement will be taken.

Implementation

Implementation of the approach was reasonably swift, as the first step was information gathering. A few patrols of the City gave us an understanding of the hotspot areas and those involved in begging.

We gathered information on as many individuals as possible ahead of the first multi-agency meeting. At this meeting, a list of names was compiled and we sought to confirm as much as possible about each person including:

- Name and age
- Housed or not
- If rough sleeping, whereabouts and how long have they been doing so
- In receipt of benefits or other financial support
- Associated with anyone else on the list, or anyone else that ought to be added to the list
- Any support needs they have, and hurdles to getting them support
- Whether they have a dog (this can be a barrier to housing)
- Drug, alcohol or mental health issues
- Which agencies are aware of the individual and who is working with them



It essential to have the right agencies around the table to inform and advise on actions to take, so that we can take a holistic view of the issue and try to tackle the root causes

Some of the agencies who attend the Street Aware operational meetings include the homelessness Outreach service (was St Mungo's but recently moved to P3), CGL (was Turning Point), supported housing providers, Gloucester City Mission, Police, GCC homelessness teams.

Separately, we also work with our streetcare partners Amey to get discarded and unattended items removed from the streets. We have co-ordinated with community members who wish to volunteer to help those on the streets and maintain open dialogue with the faith forum. We also work with the Big Issue, and with Chris Keppie who is the County homelessness lead. We ensure that Street Aware feeds in to the wider homelessness remit so that we are all supporting the same aims for the City.

How it works

A successful Street Aware model for Gloucester has included the following:

- Daily outreach patrols
- Daily Police/Solace patrols
- Thursday night outreach shifts
- Fortnightly multi-agency meetings
- Liaison with support agencies
- Raising public awareness
- Media campaigns
- Creative consideration of tools & powers to prevent further ASB
- Influencing partner agencies to achieve a co-ordinated approach
- Working with the voluntary sector e.g. faith forum

We engage with every person we see on the streets, because we want to make sure those who genuinely need help get it, even where they aren't engaging in ASB. We try to have meaningful conversations with those we see, and use every opportunity to talk to people.

Each agency involved in the process shares information from other partner agencies where possible, so that we are providing a joined up approach. We used to have fortnightly multi-agency meetings but these have recently moved to monthly ones, with an ongoing "plan" in place for each person we know about.

Through our multi-agency approach, we know the names and circumstances of everyone we see on the City centre streets. The vast majority of people we have dealt with have been housed and in receipt of financial support. Every person in the City centre has been offered accommodation. We continue to try and engage with people even when they refuse this.



In Gloucester we have found that begging occurs to feed drug addictions. Investigations have found several of our street people also involved in the suspected supply of drugs, along with other criminality.

Street Aware is the operational work taking place to tackle nuisance and anti-social behaviour. The homelessness team still lead on rough sleeping provision; Street Aware is a conduit to report to them.

An associated Communications Plan is in progress to get clear and informative messages to the public. It is important to note that rough sleeping and street based ASB are two separate issues that aren't necessarily connected.

Under the Street Aware Comms Plan, we focus on putting out information relating to street ASB. We support partner agencies such as StreetLink with their campaigns and are exploring alternative giving. We will shortly be launching a Street Aware campaign to encourage local businesses and residents to be part of the solution.

How much does it cost?

The cost to Gloucester City Council is mostly staff time only. Where necessary we have met the cost of court applications for civil injunctions and we have a small budget for media.

In terms of staff time, a commitment has to be made to cover:

- Writing, consultation and implementation of policy
- Liaison and/or relationship building with the appropriate partner agencies to ensure a successful joined up approach.
- A dedicated lead officer to co-ordinate the Street Aware approach and take responsibility for feeding in to other teams/agendas to share findings and create change.

We considered the Making Every Adult Matter initiative as part of the approach to address these issues but found that we are implementing a broadly similar process minus the £5k cost.

Benefits of Street Aware

- A joined up approach helps to create real change in our communities
- The holistic approach is supported by all and ensures the fairest measures are taken
- Feeding in to the bigger homelessness picture helps to ensure that service users' voices are heard
- Working together with a variety of partner agencies ensures a consistent approach in both identifying those who are in genuine need and taking proactive action against those who are not



- The Street Aware approach helps to get people the most appropriate help for their situation

A recognised multi-agency group and lead officers ensures consistency and that results are continually seen

Challenges

Operationally, big challenges can occur with the individuals we try to work with. Drugs use and dealing, sex working, modern slavery, PTSD, learning difficulties, mental health and safeguarding have all been explored further in order to offer the most suitable support to people. The biggest issue, however, remains non engagement.

High visibility issues include unattended items, “seeing people in doorways”, and general complaints about the “state of the City” from both members of the public and businesses.

After engaging with over 40 individuals, we are now left with around 8 who are entrenched, refusing to engage and are rough sleepers. We have around 5 who are still involved in ASB or crime. Challenges occur evidentially when people change their behaviour, e.g. from overtly begging to passive begging.

Gloucester is a very generous City and there is provision for food, clothing and bedding every single day for those who need it; we have also found this to be one of our challenges. A further challenge is trying to influence well-meaning volunteers to be part of a co-ordinated citywide approach.

Media and communications have also been a challenge and it is important to keep messaging clear. Even so, divide of public opinion in dealing with people who are on the streets can create negative publicity. We proactively send out information to keep local press informed. In terms of taking enforcement action against people who are also rough sleeping, we treat this as we would any other potentially vulnerable perpetrator – if there is sufficient evidence of their negative behaviour and impact on the wider community then there are reasonable grounds to attempt to curb their behaviour. Enforcement action is used as a last resort and after engagement has taken place and support repeatedly offered, but where impact on the community is ongoing.

The overwhelming message we receive from members of the public is that they want services to help those genuinely in need and we are committed to ensuring that this happens, whilst taking proactive action against those who are not