

## Appendix 2

## **Begging / Alternative Giving Scheme**

### **Current Situation**

Since late July officers have noted an increase in the numbers of comments received from the public in relation to begging. These comments have been recorded in Councils confirm and jira databases. Year on year a significant increase in begging reports have been received e.g. in September 2011 there were 10 reports in September 2012 there were 19.

Officers, Councillors and community support groups have also reported an increase in the visibility of beggars, in particular in Cuba Street and Lambton Quay. This increase has been reported on in the media and concerns about the behaviour of some beggars have been raised by local businesses.

As a result of the increase in begging activity and associated behaviour in the CBD a meeting has been arranged with local residents and businesses. At the meeting Council, Police and community support agencies will outline what actions are being taken. The meeting will also be an opportunity for people to express their concerns.

This document outlines the current response to begging in Wellington and makes the following recommendations:

- To adopt an Alternative Giving Scheme
- Review Council's current responses to begging (internal and external)

### **Begging background information**

Many people instinctively want to give money to people engaged in a street-based lifestyle. But at best this only helps in the short term. At worst the money gets spent on gambling, drink or drugs and so the problem goes on.

There is a misconception that all beggars are homeless, a recent survey in Wellington found that 50% were housed in City Housing properties and the vast majority are in receipt of benefits. Information from Wellington Police indicates that some beggars are collecting up to \$150 per day.

In Wellington support services have advised that while some beggars use this money to support addictions many use it as a way to supplement their limited income. These income problems are often the result of previous debt issues, fines, high rental prices, inability to access cheap grocery shopping, transport costs, health costs etc. A recent example of a single woman receiving a benefit and living at the Women's Boarding House saw her with a disposable income of \$35 per week after her rent and other deductions had been made (to cover food, travel, health etc).

While each individual's reasons for adopting this method of raising money is different, all agree that the provision of appropriate support is a better option than begging.

## **Best practice**

International responses to begging fall into one or a combination of the following responses

- enforcement (to remove people begging from the streets)
- assistance (to enable people begging to change their lifestyles)
- communication (to deter the public from giving directly to people begging).

## **Enforcement / legal options in Wellington**

The majority of complaints received about begging are low level nuisance complaints. There are limited options available to prosecute beggars unless they are acting in a threatening manner, there is a breach of the peace or the activity is blocking a public right of way or entrance to a building. Where enforcement is an option, and the offence is low level, the Police often ask people to move on rather than bringing charges against the individual.

Trespass orders may be an option for building owners if begging is taking place on private property.

If the person is begging and drinking the Council's 24/7 Liquor Control Bylaw could be used to remove them from the area.

### *Begging bylaw*

A Council bylaw to prevent begging could be considered but would need to be supported by evidence that showed that the current responses were ineffective. As previously mentioned in this report the only current information collected is via public reports of begging direct to Council. At this time Council does not have sufficient evidence to support the introduction of a begging bylaw.

In addition if a CBD begging bylaw is introduced this may have the affect of displacing the begging into the suburbs. As such a bylaw would need to be supported by other responses to educate the public on their responses to begging.

Other cities have introduced a bylaw prohibiting begging e.g. The Nelson City Council specifically prohibited begging under the Trading in Public Places Bylaw 213, other bylaws exist or have been considered in Auckland, Porirua and Palmerston North.

It is recommended that a begging bylaw is not considered until Council has accurate data on the level of the problem and the impact of the initiatives outlined in this report.

## **WCC assistance / current response**

### High Level

When Council receives a call about begging and there is concern for the safety of the public or the beggar the matter is referred to the Police for action. Previously Walkwise may also have been dispatched but the new Local Host team may not have the capacity to immediately respond to calls due to reduced staffing and operating hours.

## Low Level

When Council receives a call about low level begging the details are referred via confirm to City Communities and / or City Safety for appropriate action to be taken.

### *City Safety*

Local Host team can be asked to respond depending on staffing capacity and hours of operation. If the team are unable to respond at the time of the request they can be tasked to keep an eye on hot spots / make connections with complainants.

### *City Communities*

Reports of begging are referred to Downtown Community Ministry (DCM) who are contracted by Council to: "respond within 48 hours to all Council notifications regarding people who may be homeless". The expectation is that DCM staff will respond by visiting the site where the begging has taken place to offer assistance and support and gather information. There is not an expectation that DCM will encourage the person to move on.

## **Support organisation assistance / current response**

There are limited external outreach responses available to Council when it receives information about begging. The main point of contact is currently DCM as outlined in the previous section. Due to current staffing and resourcing capacity DCM generally only provides a reactive response following a request from Council or direct contact from a member of the public.

A number of other organisations operate some level of outreach service, these include The Soup Kitchen, Te Aro Health, TRAW, Salvation Army etc. Currently there is little coordination of these responses and information sharing on emerging issues or new faces on the street is limited.

Council is currently undertaking a review of the existing grant funded organisations working this area. The aim is to establish the current level of service provided, gaps in provision, and future priorities for Council taking into consideration the initiatives outlined in Te Mahana (draft homeless strategy). Te Mahana also highlights that any new service developments must ensure that a coordinated and collaborative approach is taken by all new projects.

## **Public Opinion**

Conversations with members of the public and business owners usually fall into one of two responses:

### Removal of beggars

- Due to the negative impact on business e.g. customers not wanting to enter a business if they have to walk past beggars.
- Due to the intimidation tactics used to get money from the public
- The poor image begging is seen to give Wellington
- Fear for personal safety
- Annoyance factor of being repeatedly asked for money
- Because any money given will only be used for drink and drugs
- Because beggars are bludgers and should get a job

## Support of beggars

- Expressed appreciation of, and sympathy regarding, the vulnerabilities of street users
- An impulse to give but not knowing the best giving options (should they give money, food, donate to a charity)
- Concern about the beggars personal safety and health
- Lack of knowledge of support services provided in Wellington
- A wish to donate items or volunteer but not knowing how to do this

## Survey

DCM recently completed a week's survey of begging covering Cuba Street, Willis Street, Lambton Quay and the Railway Station. The survey found the following:

- 15 different people were sighted.
- 7 were homeless
- 7 were housed (all in WCH tenancies)
- 1 was Unknown
- DCM Staff attempted to have a conversation with each person, give a map, pamphlet and invitation to visit DCM and collect basic info re the persons housing status.
- Highest numbers were spotted over lunchtimes.
- In addition there were people drinking in either Glover Park or the corner of Dixon and Cuba on 3 occasions. All involved were known to DCM. Approx. half are known to be rough sleeping.

## Sector Opinion

### Support organisations

The key organisations are supportive of an alternative giving scheme that will redirect vulnerable people to their services so that appropriate support can be provided to address the underlying causes of the begging. This support could include debt advice, food banks, accommodation, health, addictions etc.

A view was expressed that while supportive of an alternative giving scheme organisations did not want to create a barrier / conflict with their clients. The introduction of the scheme would reduce the income that people obtained from begging. It was suggested that the scheme should be fronted by WCC and the Police so that there was a degree of separation between the initiative and support providers.

### Police

Are supportive of the idea but would need to consult internally for approval before their name can be used on a joint initiative.

## Hot Spots

The predominant areas of complaint / visibility are:

- Cuba Street
- Courtenay Place
- Willis Street
- Lambton Quay
- The Railway Station

Complaints have also been received from Karori, Kilbirnie and Newtown

## Local hosts

Local Hosts are Wellington's new city ambassador service whose role is to:

- assist the public and visitors to the city
- support the Police presence on the street, particularly at night
- liaise with bar and restaurant staff, and retailers
- keep an eye out for what's going on
- report safety hazards, graffiti or issues with city infrastructure

In relation to begging the expected role of Local Hosts is to:

- Develop an understanding of services available to vulnerable residents.
- Interact with vulnerable residents and support agencies.
- Direct people to appropriate services.
- Report changes in behaviour and emerging trends.
- Provide a safe friendly point of contact for information and advice.
- Proactively approach people when it is safe to do so.

It is expected that the Local Hosts will regularly interact with beggars to establish a rapport and signpost support services that are available. When concerns are raised Local Hosts may be tasked to provide an initial response or monitor a particular area.

At present the Local Host team only works within the CBD during the hours outlined in the table below:

<b>Mon</b>	<b>Tues</b>	<b>Wed</b>	<b>Thurs</b>	<b>Fri</b>	<b>Sat</b>	<b>Sun</b>
08.30 am 16.30 pm	08.30 am 16.30 pm	08.30 am 03.30 am	08.30 am 03.30 am	08.30 am 06.00 am	7.00 am 06.00 am	7.00 am 17.30 pm

The Local Hosts have access to Council vehicles and maybe able to respond to concerns outside of the CBD dependant on the availability of staff.

At present there is no ability to respond to concerns that are raised outside of the Local Hosts operating hours.

## Alternative Giving

Alternative giving is a scheme that has been adopted by a number of cities internationally which aims to persuade residents and visitors to give money to charities rather than to people begging in the street.

The aims of alternative giving schemes are to:

- fund raise for support agencies that actually work on the streets and support people into accommodation and access services
- educate the general public on the harm they do by handing over cash to beggars which is then spent on gambling, drugs or alcohol
- offer the general public alternative ways of helping to improve the lives of people who beg and the genuinely homeless

UK examples of successful schemes are:

<http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/ccm/content/housing/homeless-people/alternative-giving-campaign.en>

[http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/community\\_life\\_leisure/crime\\_prevention/safer\\_aberdeen/toc\\_begging\\_boxes.asp](http://www.aberdeencity.gov.uk/community_life_leisure/crime_prevention/safer_aberdeen/toc_begging_boxes.asp)


**Your money could  
change his  
day ...**

**... or  
change  
his life**

**The money you give to people on the street only helps to keep them there. Give your donation to a charity that can help to change lives.**

**Make your kindness count**

Visit [www.cambridge.gov.uk/alternative-giving](http://www.cambridge.gov.uk/alternative-giving)



## Other Options

In addition to the development of an alternative giving scheme other initiatives could be considered to redirect money that is currently being given directly to beggars.

### Donation boxes



Placed in key areas around high begging areas to allow residents / visitors to make an immediate donation

### Busking workshops

The development of busking workshops to enable people to have a legitimate way to make an additional income.

WCC currently allows busking as long as a free permit is applied for and busking rules are followed.

## Recommendation

1)

That WCC implements an Alternative Giving Scheme that includes:

- A poster campaign in key areas
- Leaflet drop in key areas
- Update of the homeless webpage to include information on the Alternative Giving campaign and organisations that donations can be made to e.g. <http://www.soupkitchen.org.nz/get-involved/donate/buy-a-gift/> <http://dcm.org.nz/Donate/Donate%20to%20DCM.html>
- Article in Our Wellington page
- Possible launch of the scheme by Mayor / Police
- Promotion at local residents / business groups

2)

That the current review of the 2004 homeless strategy, emerging Te Mahana strategy and Council funded services (internal and external) includes consideration of the future response to begging.