

Begging resources guidance – Surrey Police

Begging guide supports officers to understand, respond and record incidents of begging.

First published

19 January 2024

Key details

Does it work?	Smarter practice
Topic	Neighbourhood crime
Organisation	Surrey Police
Target group	General public

Smarter practice

Problem

Anecdotal evidence suggested that begging was an issue in Surrey. However, as there was no specific begging occurrence on [Niche](#), officers were recording begging incidents under other anti-social behaviour crime codes (for example, ‘nuisance’). This meant that data specifically around begging was not being captured. As a result, there was no accurate measure of the scale of the issue and no ability to identify hot spots or individuals involved. This was hindering the police’s ability to understand and tackle the problem.

Surrey Police identified that there are two types of people who beg in Surrey. It is likely that different approaches would need to be taken for these two groups, as they have different motivations and needs.

- Local begging involves individuals who are local to Surrey. These individuals were likely to be engaging with other local agencies to support their needs, such as alcohol and substance abuse, housing and employment.

- Organised begging involves individuals who make a ‘career’ from begging. These individuals were thought to be linked to – and most likely exploited by – organised criminal groups. These individuals were not known to have any links to Surrey. The limited intelligence available suggested that they were predominantly of Romanian nationality.

Due to there being no formal processes within Surrey Police, officers were unclear how to engage with people begging, what information to obtain and where to record this information.

Response

Begging occurrence

Surrey Police recognised this gap in recording and created an anti-social behaviour (ASB) begging occurrence non-notifiable crime on Niche in April 2021. This enabled officers to record begging accurately, allowing Surrey Police to better understand the scale of the problem and to build up intelligence on those involved.

Begging guide

The prevention and problem-solving team created a begging guide to help officers with:

- understanding the issue of begging
- how to approach someone who is begging
- what to do when engaging with someone who is begging
- how to ensure a clear and consistent approach
- how to offer support

The guide is an interactive PDF and has been added digitally to Crew Mate (an app linking to information and resources, which is easily accessible on officers’ phones and devices). The begging guide outlines the steps that an officer should take when responding to begging. The guide also has links to websites and documents that may help support the officers – for example, relevant legislation and how to find an interpreter.

Aims

The aims of the recording and begging guide are to:

- improve accurate recording of begging
- have better quality data about those involved in begging

- be able to identify hot spot locations and to conduct temporal analysis to identify peak times of day, month or year for begging
- have a standardised and consistent approach to tackling begging across the force (regardless of team, role or length of service)

Begging guide resources

Once the begging guide is accessed in the Crew Mate app, there are three main links on the first page.

- 'Learning about begging' covers definitions of begging and organised begging, why people beg, police powers around begging, modern slavery and what to do if someone can't speak English.
- 'Approaching someone begging' covers considerations officers should have before approaching someone. Possible signs to look for include those who may be vulnerable or have complex needs, organised begging or signs of modern slavery.
- 'Engaging with a person begging' highlights initial checks and observations that should be made by officers. It also provides information on Surrey Police's begging process, including issuing verbal warnings, community protection warnings (CPWs) or community protection notices (CPNs), warning of CPW or CPN breaches, and what to do after the person begging is moved on.

Community protection warnings and notices

To manage begging effectively, officers consider the use of CPWs and CPNs. Both CPWs and CPNs must go through the ASB team before being issued. The ASB team consists of seven police staff specialists, who work alongside other police teams and partner agencies across the force to build cases and gather evidence for the purpose of prevention, intervention or enforcement. The legal team was consulted to find specific conditions that they could impose on those involved in organised begging.

The wording of CPWs and CPNs was important because specific mentions of behaviours – such as 'sitting' or 'standing' – would lead to people who beg adapting their behaviour. Individuals identified as moving around would be considered for a countywide ban where appropriate and where intelligence supported this. To help individuals know where they are banned, they are given a map to explain the areas where they can no longer go.

Surrey Police paid for the legal documents (a CPW and a CPN) to be formally translated into Romanian at a cost of £224. Conditions for individuals involved in local begging would be based on

intelligence of offending history and other criminal behaviour. For local begging, a partnership referral – for example, a community harm and risk management meeting (CHaRMM) or local support agency – outreach or a criminal behaviour order may be more appropriate.

Officers use discretion when deciding on their response for each individual. Officers can signpost support services, with individuals involved in local begging signposted to local support, while individuals involved in organised begging can be signposted to national charities. Officers can give multiple verbal warnings if the individual is begging out of need before issuing a CPW or CPN, depending on the situation.

Reporting

People who beg can come to the attention of the police through different routes. In some areas, calls may be received from the public or businesses. In other areas, town wardens may be employed and may report people who beg to the police. The town wardens have good working relationships with police community support officers, who can access and use the begging guide.

Officers may also come across people who beg during their patrols, especially if the patrols are in identified hot spot locations. The locations of people who beg can differ but will often be situated in areas of large footfall and near key locations and buildings, such as shops, cafes and restaurants.

Language barrier

From the intelligence that the force already had and through interacting with the individuals concerned, it became clear that there was a language barrier. To aid officers in managing the live incident, the team created videos to play to individuals if they are issuing a CPW, a breach of a CPW or a CPN.

These videos contain two Surrey Police officers speaking in English and Romanian, with subtitles in both languages to help improve the dialogue and understanding between the officers and individuals. The videos explain the offence and provide the individuals with an opportunity to nod to the officer to indicate if they (or their family) are at risk of harm.

Contact details for support services are also highlighted in the video, with an opportunity for the individuals to take a photo, write the numbers down or indicate to the officer, who can then write the information down for them. Officers recognised that the individuals may be victims and may require immediate safeguarding. The begging guide also provides contact details for interpreters that officers can phone to help with any translation.

Identification

The begging guide also advises officers to take a photo of the individuals with their ID (if there is no offence, then officers need the individual's consent for this). Officers can also scan the individual's fingerprints if they suspect an offence and think that the individual is concealing their identity. The photo can be added to their Niche report for intelligence and identification purposes. Officer feedback suggests that individuals consent to having their photo taken.

Logic model

Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Surrey Police noticed an increase in people begging but did not have an accurate way to record the incidents.• Begging was being coded under other ASB occurrences, such as 'nuisance'. This meant that Surrey Police did not have any information on the scale of the issue or on those involved.• Surrey Police also wanted to put together a guide to increase officers' understanding of begging and how to respond.
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Creation of an 'ASB begging non-notifiable' occurrence on Niche to accurately record begging and the individuals involved, to aid understanding of the problem and the scale of the issue, to build up intelligence and to track any patterns regarding peak times.• Creation of a begging guide that functions as an app accessible to all officers on their devices. The app clearly lays out the steps that officers should take, in line with Surrey Police's processes and procedures.

Resource

- The prevention and problem-solving team has developed this work.
- Analysts have used the new begging occurrence on Niche to understand the scale of the issue and the patterns of begging. They have also been able to track the number of times that the guide has been accessed.
- Multiple teams have been consulted and involved throughout the development of the begging guide, including the modern slavery team, legal team, communications team and IT.
- The ASB team consists of seven police staff specialists, who work alongside police teams and partner agencies across the force to build cases and gather evidence for the purpose of prevention, intervention or enforcement.
- Multi-agency working – the prevention and problem-solving team engaged with outside organisations to help their response to begging. Agencies included national charities, local homeless charities and local councils.
- Technology – the begging guide is on Crew Mate, which is an app on officers' devices. It can be navigated by officers and contains various links to information and resources.
- Documentation – the ASB begging non-notifiable occurrence enables begging to be recorded accurately. The begging guide is an interactive PDF but functions like an app.
- Costs – Surrey Police paid £224 to get the legal documents of CPWs and CPNs formally translated.

Outputs

- Number of begging occurrences on Niche.
- Data analysis of begging occurrences.
- Number of times that the begging guide is accessed by officers.
- Amount of intelligence gathered.
- Number of CPWs and CPNs issued.
- Number of individuals receiving help from national or local charities.
- Number of reports of begging.

Outcomes

- Increase in the number of occurrences on Niche for ASB begging non-notifiable crime.
- Increase in quantity and quality of data on begging, providing an improved understanding of the issue, the individuals involved and any patterns that other teams can build on, such as the modern slavery team.
- An increase in individuals receiving support from either national or local charities based on their needs.
- Reduction in reports of begging.
- Improved community satisfaction.

Implementation

Recording begging

A key starting point was having an accurate way to record begging on Niche. Without this, the issue of begging could not be tracked or understood. Begging instances may have got lost in other ASB occurrences, such as 'nuisance', or may not have been recorded at all. Now that there is a begging occurrence on Niche, the problem can be much better understood in terms of the hot spot locations, peak times and individuals involved.

Begging guide

Having the guide on Crew Mate means that it is easily accessible for officers. It sits on the homepage, so that guidance can be reached within a few clicks. The guide works like an app and is user-friendly. There are menu buttons that you can click on to view the guide covering the topic of begging, how to approach someone and how to engage with someone begging. All sections of the guide include Surrey Police's procedures and processes. Officers can easily follow links to other supporting documents if needed.

Multi-team working

The prevention and problem-solving team has worked with and consulted other teams and agencies throughout the project, including the following:

- Engaging with other police teams that are also involved in this area. For example, the victim care navigator from the modern slavery team and the force and regional lead for modern slavery were consulted closely to discuss their team's work and the support available for individuals involved in

organised begging. This ensured that the teams' work was complementary, with no unnecessary duplication.

- Feedback received from the modern slavery team was mostly to make sure that the guide was sensitive and that the tone was suitable.
- Surrey Police's legal team was consulted for advice on specific conditions that they could impose on individuals involved in organised begging.
- Officers who speak multiple languages have helped with translation. One officer who speaks Romanian was filmed for the verbal warning video, which can be played to an individual before issuing a CPW or CPN.
- The IT team helped to add the guide to Crew Mate, so that it is easily accessible for officers to use on their digital devices.

Partner agency working

- The prevention and problem-solving team engaged with local councils before the guide was created, to get their perspective on begging and the impact it was having in their area.
- Discussions were held with homeless charities to understand their perspective on the issue of begging. The guide was also shared with them for feedback before rollout.

Surrey Police's communications team has played an important role in creating and publicising the guide internally. There was a launch campaign where the begging guide on Crew Mate was added as a tool for officers to use via Surrey Police's intranet page and emails. The problem-solving team intends to consult with the communications team to increase awareness of the begging guide leading up to peak times of begging occurrences.

- Senior leadership support work was driven by the head of ASB, who is part of the senior leadership team and has had senior support. Messages were communicated from senior leaders into operational teams.

Outcomes and impact

Assessing outcomes and impacts

There is no formal evaluation for the begging guide. However, there are findings from data analysis, as having an accurate way of recording begging on Niche has enabled a better understanding of the problem.

The data shows that begging is less likely to take place on a Sunday but is consistent across all other days, with a slight peak on Thursdays. December has the highest number of occurrences, followed by November. This is most likely due to high footfall of people shopping during the festive period and because people may be inclined to give more generously at this time of year.

So far, 2023 has shown a reduction in the number of begging occurrences compared with the time period from April 2021 (when the begging occurrence was created on Niche) to September 2022 (when the begging guide was introduced).

In 2023, October was the month with the highest number of occurrences. It is anticipated that November and December 2023 will be higher, following the pattern of previous years (data not available at time of publication).

Number of begging occurrences recorded between April 2021 (when the begging occurrence was created on Niche) and October 2023 (the most recent data available at time of publication).

Month	Occurrence in 2021	Occurrence in 2022	Occurrence in 2023
January	n/a	11	6
February	n/a	19	7
March	n/a	10	15
April	13	22	7
May	10	11	3
June	13	11	3
July	10	14	8
August	11	7	19
September	8	8	8
October	11	17	20
November	21	24	n/a
December	32	34	n/a

Data analysis has also shown hot spot areas. Guildford is the largest town in Surrey, with a big shopping area, and has the highest number of begging occurrences across the county. West Surrey, which includes Guildford, has the highest number of begging occurrences compared with the other two districts (East Surrey and North Surrey). This data allows Surrey Police to target hot

spot areas and promote the guide among officers who work in hot spot districts, especially at peak times of the year.

There is some data tracking on the Crew Mate app itself, which enables monitoring of how many times the begging guide has been accessed. Over an 18-month period, the begging guide was the sixth most frequently clicked-on area of Crew Mate. There was a peak in December 2022, which was soon after the guide was released and during the peak time for begging. The data also shows that it has been consistently used in 2023. This data cannot provide the number of new or repeat users accessing the guide.

Learning and recommendations

Surrey Police has highlighted the following considerations for implementing the begging guide.

Recording data

- Training officers to record more in-depth descriptive information on a begging occurrence. The increased data and quality of this data being recorded around begging and organised begging may help other teams and operations. Be aware that individuals involved in organised begging may be victims of modern slavery and/or human trafficking. There is potential for the modern slavery team to build on this intelligence.
- Currently, there is no way to track whether an officer logging a begging occurrence on Niche used the guide. Surrey Police is looking into adding a template on Niche for a begging occurrence, to prompt the officer to confirm whether they have used the guide or any resources.

Communications

- Demonstrations to officers of how to use the begging guide, where to access the guide and the resources available on the app.
- An increase in communications is recommended to highlight the begging guide to officers. This is especially important leading up to peak times – for example, in November and December, where there is a pattern of increased begging occurrences. Communications have included information on Surrey Police's intranet page and messages sent via email.
- The team has suggested running a survey with officers to get their feedback on the guide, including whether they use it, how they use it and whether there are any gaps in the resources supplied. This would then feed into any improvements that can be made.

- Increase public awareness of organised begging, including what it is, how to recognise it, its possible links with modern slavery and how to report this to the police. This public awareness is important, as it has been reported that the public do not support the police dealing with people who beg and can sometimes act as a barrier.

Partnership working

- Neighbouring forces were consulted at the beginning of the process. Having close working relations with neighbouring forces will help to share good practice and information if displacement starts to happen. However, there is no evidence of this so far. Sharing data and intelligence across forces will help to understand the scale of organised crime links.
- There are intentions to work with British Transport Police, to help question and build intelligence around individuals travelling into Surrey to beg.
- Other agencies, such as Border Force, may be able to help with individuals who may need immigration checks. There is guidance on the app around immigration checks. However, it is stated that if an individual is a victim, the priority is on safeguarding and investigation.
- Engage with local shops and businesses in hot spot locations to make them aware of the police response and to encourage them to report people who beg to the police.
- Work with local councils to share information of known individuals, so that the council can support those who qualify for local support with housing or other needs.
- Have a close working relationship with national charities to provide support for those who do not qualify for local support agencies.
- The begging guide is due to be reviewed and Surrey Police is aware of potential changes mentioned within the Criminal Justice Bill. These updates and changes will be carried out efficiently and in line with any new law.

Copyright

The copyright in this shared practice example is not owned or managed by the College of Policing and is therefore not available for re-use under the terms of the Non-Commercial College Licence. You will need to seek permission from the copyright owner to reproduce their works.

Legal disclaimer

Disclaimer: The views, information or opinions expressed in this shared practice example are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or views of the College of Policing or the organisations involved.