

Addressing anti-social behaviour at stations

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Practice note: reducing homelessness and anti-social behaviour at London Bridge Station

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In September 2021, I joined British Transport Police (BTP) as a police community support officer (PCSO) assigned to London Bridge Station. During my initial patrol, I observed a significant number of rough sleepers in the vicinity. Despite my efforts to engage with them, they ignored me.

Identifying the problem

Speaking with other officers and station staff, it was clear there was an ongoing issue with rough sleepers, specifically regarding anti-social behaviour (ASB). These individuals would sleep in front of the station at night and beg for money inside the station during the day, with up to 15 rough sleepers present outside the station at night. Station staff faced challenges in trying to move them along, as the individuals often responded abusively and refused to move.

Concerns also arose regarding drug use, specifically crack and heroin, among the rough sleepers. This raised safety issues for themselves, station staff and the public. The presence of drug use in the area could potentially attract drug dealers, leading to an increase in crime at London Bridge Station. Furthermore, their sleeping location obstructed a fire exit for The Shard, posing a safety risk in case of emergencies.

Planning a solution

Recognising the need for action, I initiated a problem-solving plan. I began by clearly identifying the problem and set out the objectives, building the intelligence picture from basic data. This information came from speaking with staff, the public and local officers, as well as intelligence reports and crime logs.

I ensured that the objectives were specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely. I took this approach as I knew it would be a complex issue, so I needed to analyse all aspects. I also

recognised that I was not going to solve the homelessness issue with the plan, but ensured I set out everything I could to improve it.

Implementing the plan

I started by establishing a good working relationship with the homeless community by changing my approach to engaging with them. I began speaking to them more on an engagement level and increasing the frequency of my visits. I gradually increased the conversation from a simple 'hello' as I walked by to in-depth, meaningful conversations. I wanted them to see beyond the uniform. We're all human and we all have different life experiences – sometimes these experiences have led people to a life on the streets. They all still deserve to be treated with dignity and respect and I wanted to support them to help themselves.

I gradually gained their trust and discovered that they were not receiving adequate support to access the necessary services. Understanding that a collaborative effort was required to assist these individuals, I contacted community wardens from the local council and began conducting regular joint patrols with them. These weekly joint patrols also involved charities specialising in substance misuse and housing, as well as local officers from the Metropolitan Police. The aim was to provide on-street referrals and support to the rough sleepers.

The patrols were very successful and helped many individuals access appropriate services. Many were housed after living on the street for weeks or even months. Many also received assistance for substance misuse. I also contacted the designing out crime team for their advice regarding the area in which they were sleeping. The aim was to discourage them from using this spot and instead encourage them to access housing services.

Regular briefings

Regular briefings were conducted for all local London Bridge officers to ensure a consistent approach in dealing with the homeless community and any updates related to them. Many individuals from the homeless community engaged and began accessing the necessary services.

Some individuals, who continued to engage in ASB, refused to cooperate and therefore, enforcement measures were taken. These individuals were issued a withdrawal of implied permission (WIP) from the station, and a civil banning order lasting for six months. Over the course

of 12 months, a total of 14 WIPs were issued.

Persistent offenders were further issued community protection warnings (CPWs) and community protection notices (CPNs), with nine CPWs and two CPNs issued overall by BTP. The CPWs and CPNs were issued to address the ASB specific to the individual. This proved an effective approach to those who refused to engage. It encouraged them to disengage from the ASB and engage with the services they require.

The outcomes

Through consistent efforts involving multiple agencies over 12 months, rough sleeping and ASB-related behaviour decreased by 82% in the London Bridge area. These individuals have also accessed services they require and are no longer living on the streets, so the issue has not just been dispersed. While new individuals occasionally engage in rough sleeping around the station, immediate engagement and support services are provided to them.

As of now, over a year since the completion of the problem-solving plan, rough sleeping is no longer a concern at London Bridge Station. The strengthened working relationship between BTP and station staff has led to increased safety and efficiency in helping individuals in need. Joint patrols continue to be conducted as required to address any emerging issues effectively.

- Peer reviewed by Hayley Griffiths, Anti-social Behaviour Manager, South Wales Police

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