



Glasgow City Council

**Wellbeing, Equalities, Communities, Culture
and Engagement City Policy Committee**

**Report by Councillor Allan Casey, City Convener for
Workforce, Homelessness and Addiction Services**

Contact: Jane Laiolo

Ext: 77207

Item 3

6th March 2025

GLASGOW BEGGING STRATEGY & ACTION PLAN (2020 – 2025)

ANNUAL UPDATE REPORT

Purpose of Report:

To provide Members with:

- an update on the progress made to date
- a strategic review based on key findings from delivery of the Action Plan

Recommendations:

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (i) Considers the contents of this report
- (ii) Considers the progress made with the Glasgow Begging Strategy to date
- (iii) Notes the implementation of BAU models and future strategic proposals

Ward No(s):

Citywide:

Local member(s) advised: Yes No consulted: Yes No

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Members will recall that the [Glasgow Begging Strategy](#) (GBS) was previously approved by City Administration Committee (CAC) on 25 March 2021 following a public consultation exercise. The relevant report can be viewed [here](#).
- 1.2 At that time, it was agreed that annual reports would be provided to the Wellbeing, Empowerment, Community and City Engagement City Policy Committee (WECCE). The last annual report was presented on 29 February 2024 and can be viewed [here](#).
- 1.3 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an annual update whilst noting delivery of the original five-year action plan. As such, this document provides an overview of progress achieved over the lifetime of the project, as well as an overarching strategic review.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The development of a city begging strategy was first instructed by the Glasgow City Centre Strategy Board, chaired by the Leader of Glasgow City Council.
- 2.2 This established a Short Life Working Group (SLWG) in June 2017 as a multi-partner forum, chaired by Councillor Allan Casey, and comprising a wide range of public sector agencies, third sector groups, and private businesses and networks.
- 2.3 A draft Glasgow Begging Strategy (GBS) was approved for public consultation by City Administration Committee on 3 September 2020, and engagement took place between 11 September and 23 October 2020, with feedback informing the document's final shape.
- 2.4 The final GBS sought to address three strategic objectives:
 - 1) To support people on the street who are begging
 - 2) To reduce the need for people to have to beg
 - 3) To provide cash-alternatives for people who wish to support those begging
- 2.5 To achieve these objectives, an Action Plan was created with four Key Projects:
 - 1) Alternative Giving Scheme
 - 2) Financial & Digital Inclusion
 - 3) Environmental Strategy
 - 4) Public Perceptions
- 2.6 Annual update reports have been provided to the Wellbeing, Empowerment, Community and City Engagement (WECCE) City Policy Committee.
- 2.7 Quarterly update reports have been provided to the SLWG which was reconstituted as the project Steering Group upon formal GBS project launch.

3. CONTEXT & CHALLENGES

- 3.1 Though previously reported, it is worthwhile re-highlighting the various challenges which have impacted project delivery to date, including the Covid-19 pandemic,

the ongoing cost of living crisis, and other related economic and resourcing concerns.

3.2 Given the nature of the Glasgow Begging Strategy and the complex issues associated with street begging, these challenges and their associated impacts can be summarised as follows:

- Continuing economic uncertainty
- Corresponding impacts on employment opportunities
- Increased likelihood of health risks
- More individuals/households slipping below the poverty line
- Increased likelihood of street begging

3.3 At the City Administration Committee (CAC) on 30 November 2023, Councillors declared a housing emergency following unprecedented pressures facing the council in relation to homelessness. This has been especially pertinent within the context of GBS, and officers and project partners have continued to support efforts to mitigate against the worst impacts.

4. PROGRESS & OUTPUTS

4.1 Alternative Giving

4.1.1 As the name implies, alternative giving schemes offer the public options beyond direct donations, instead collecting money in a central fund which can then be accessed by multiple organisations providing on-street care and outreach services.

4.1.2 These funds are spent on interventions to assist individuals who are begging and to help support routes to positive destinations.

4.1.3 The scheme selected for GBS has been [Street Change Glasgow](#) (SCG), an initiative developed and managed by Simon Community Scotland (SCS).

4.1.4 In its original iteration, SCG involved the use of physical infrastructure; public facing donation points enabling card transactions.

4.1.5 Formally launched in Central Station in March 2020, SCG was initially successful but did have some issues:

- The physical infrastructure involved capital costs to procure and install
- The range of locations was restricted by these costs and venue availability
- Transaction processing costs and infrastructure maintenance required recurring revenue budget to maintain
- The Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns precluded their effective operation (i.e. in person donations)

4.1.6 As a result, it was agreed that the original infrastructure be replaced with a more flexible approach, and QR code posters have instead been utilised to help address the related issues.

4.1.7 As well as increasing the number of host venues, several vinyl wraps have been installed in the city centre, and other branded materials have been distributed across the city to encourage public donations.

4.1.8 Furthermore, a range of collaborative project partners have been vital in promoting SCG and managing different fundraising activities on the scheme's behalf. The example of Best Bar None should be especially highlighted in this respect.

4.1.9 A summary overview of SCG related datasets is provided in **Appendix A**.

4.2 Financial & Digital Inclusion

4.2.1 This was the first key project to commence delivery following early project scoping, and a Financial & Digital Inclusion officer post was created in 2018.

4.2.2 Jointly funded by GCC and SCS, the Digital Inclusion Officer operated as part of the SCS outreach team, directly engaging with vulnerable individuals to help navigate the benefits system and to ensure access to full entitlements.

4.2.3 This role remained funded until 2020 i.e. the anticipated activity duration under the GBS Action Plan. Since then, members of the SCS outreach team have been upskilled to provide the same services as before.

4.2.4 Furthermore, a range of additional services have been developed by SCS and other project partners to provide a wider support network. These include:

- Digital literacy training via Glasgow City College
- Simon Community's Get Digital and Get Connected activities
- Street Support Glasgow (with support from Glasgow Helps)
- Employability referrals to Jobs & Business Glasgow
- Weekly welfare rights clinic via the Govan Law Centre
- Referral partnerships with GHeat and the Fuel Bank Foundation
- Financial support services through the Money Matters project
- Service provision through SCS Women's Centre

4.2.5 Additional reporting and related datasets is provided in **Appendix A**.

4.3 Environmental Strategy

4.3.1 A city functions best when its public spaces operate effectively, supporting and facilitating local communities and businesses, and encouraging positive uses whilst restricting opportunities for negative activity.

4.3.2 Additionally, vulnerable people on the street are more likely to be victims of crime and/or violence. In this way, increasing public safety for all also benefits those most at risk.

4.3.3 Envisioned to reflect the emerging ethos of the City Centre Strategy, including e.g. the Avenues programme, and District Regeneration Frameworks (DRFs), the Environmental Strategy originally targeted:

- Improving cleanliness and safety
- Restricting antisocial behaviour
- Addressing local issues through focused interventions
- Encouraging positive uses of the public realm
- Supporting local communities and businesses

- Cooperative working with key stakeholders and support services
- 4.3.4 Again, the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic fundamentally impacted how related activity might progress in practice, as planned capital and revenue projects were delayed and/or reprioritised against the outputs of the City Centre Task Force, and the City Centre Recovery Plan.
- 4.3.5 Despite these challenges, the most significant environmental enhancements continue to be progressed through the Avenues programme, the DRFs, and other place-based interventions.
- 4.3.6 Furthermore, interim operational activities have since been aligned with GCC's Environmental Tasking and Coordination (ETAC) Group for Ward 10. Some of the most recent relevant actions include e.g.:
- A pilot needle bin scheme with a view to introduce additional sites across the city at key sites
 - Assisted support to vulnerable people by GCC's Community Enforcement Officers (CEOs)
 - Data collection and business intelligence gathering of people begging and rough sleeping by on site operational resources
 - Continued liaison with related project partners e.g. Best Bar None
- 4.3.7 The UK's first Safer Drug Consumption Facility ('The Thistle') opened in Glasgow on Monday 13 January 2025 and aims to:
- Reduce negative impacts of injecting outdoors and discarded drug paraphernalia on residents, communities and businesses
 - Reduce drug related casualties and deaths
 - Engage and support people to seek help and improve their lives

4.4 Public Perceptions

- 4.4.1 The Public Perceptions key project has sought to integrate the various narratives arising from the wider work of the GBS into a clear public awareness campaign, whilst being informed by the views of those with lived experience.
- 4.4.2 This has included public messaging around the various GBS outputs, liaising with project partners, scoping sponsorship opportunities, promoting key objectives, and encouraging wider public engagement and participation.
- 4.4.3 As the profile of SCG has increased since its inception, this messaging has more frequently targeted supporting the scheme itself, given that it has become the most prominent aspect of GBS, and the most immediately accessible by the public.
- 4.4.4 The scope of this messaging has included the use of GCC's social media channels, updated project information via the GCC website, shared links to project partners, responses to enquiries, and media articles in local and national outlets.
- 4.4.5 In short, the Public Perceptions key project has sought to ensure a transparent flow of information between the work undertaken through GBS and the wider public.

4.5 A summary overview of project activity carried out as part of GBS is provided in **Appendix B** for review.

5. PROJECT PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

5.1 As noted in **section 3**, there have been a range of different factors which have significantly impacted project delivery during the lifetime of GBS.

5.2 Despite these challenges, the Key Projects contained within the GBS Action Plan have been successfully delivered against the proposed timescales.

5.3 Furthermore, in several instances, project delivery has surpassed the original scope of the GBS Action Plan, most specifically in relation to the additionality of support services now provided by SCS and other project partners (as noted at **item 4.2.4**).

5.4 An underlying constraint has been the difficulties in effective project monitoring and benefits measuring. This is largely due to factors inherent in outreach activities – most vulnerable people tend to avoid direct engagement and are unlikely to provide detailed responses to contextual questions for reporting purposes.

5.5 To help address some of these concerns, SCS has instituted a Glasgow Begging Census. It is hoped that this exercise will continue to take place on a six-monthly basis to help inform future interventions from those with lived experience. The first such census document was generated in August 2024 and is available in **Appendix C** for review.

6. LESSONS LEARNED

6.1 Aside from the challenges already noted in **section 3**, several key lessons can be learned from GBS development and delivery.

6.2 Whilst the success of GBS was predicated on collaborative working models, this has not always been possible in practice. Different organisations have faced different pressures and initial commitments, though made with the best of intentions, have not always endured. This reflects the ongoing and overarching economic uncertainty affecting project partners and support services.

6.3 Effective public messaging may have suffered from the lack of a recognisable GBS brand. As noted in **item 4.4.3**, SCG became the public face of GBS – but the broader narrative may have been lost amongst the wider strategic framework of e.g. homeless initiatives (Homeless Network Scotland, All In For Glasgow etc.), as well as the competitive space of charitable public fundraising.

6.4 As with any strategic body of work, especially those taking place over several years, appropriate resourcing has been challenging – whether in the form of budgets and funding streams, internal officer resources and service capacities, including operational services.

6.5 Beyond initial funding for the Financial & Digital Inclusion Officer post, and the original physical SCG donation point infrastructure (procured through

Community Benefits provision) GBS has been an unfunded project and has relied upon in-kind service support.

- 6.6 It should also be noted that GBS has been a pilot project, a demonstrator of a wholly different approach to addressing the issues and challenges of street begging, one based on compassionate outreach and support. This made it an outlier to other similar activities which were primarily enforcement based and punitive in nature.
- 6.7 Whilst the Glasgow approach has since become a model for more recently emerging projects across the UK, it did lack clear comparators to draw and benefit from, especially in its initial development and delivery phases.
- 6.8 Edinburgh now has its own begging strategy which has borrowed from GBS, though project delivery is based on a commissioned services model. Further information about this matter can be found in **Appendix D**.
- 6.9 The originality of GBS was also recognised by the Town and City Management Industry (TCMI) Awards 2022, as it won the category for 'Best Social and Community Contribution'¹.

7. NEXT STEPS

- 7.1 Consistent with the agreed pilot project terms, the initial five-year Action Plan has now been delivered. Ongoing activity will continue to be progressed by the relevant service points through the business-as-usual model which has now been established.
- 7.2 Simon Community Scotland will continue to manage and administer the Street Change Glasgow initiative and are currently exploring options to expand this into a wider, national scheme (to align with the emerging Edinburgh activity).
- 7.3 Similarly, SCS will continue to work with established project partners in respect of the support services developed through the Financial & Digital Inclusion key project (as per **section 4**).
- 7.4 GCC will continue to lead on actions contained within the Environmental Strategy key project through existing strategic plans, whilst providing broader GBS support as appropriate.
- 7.5 It is proposed that the SLWG/Steering Group be reconvened to undertake a strategic review of GBS. This would assess project effectiveness to date and identify any future activity shape/scope. Any related resourcing implications would be considered thereafter based on proposed options.

¹ <https://www.atcm.org/atcm-summer-school-and-awards-returns-for-2022>

8. POLICY AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Resource Implications:

Financial: None

Legal: None

Personnel: None

Procurement: None

Council Strategic Plan:

Specify which Grand Challenge (s) and Mission (s) the proposal supports. Where appropriate the relevant Commitment can also be listed.

The project supports the following items:

- **GRAND CHALLENGE ONE – Reduce poverty and inequality in our communities**
 - MISSION 1: End child poverty in our city using early intervention to support families
 - Commitments: 7
 - MISSION 3: Improve the health and wellbeing of our local communities
 - Commitments: 1, 2
- **GRAND CHALLENGE TWO – Increase opportunity and prosperity for all our citizens**
 - MISSION 1: Support Glasgow residents into sustainable and fair work
 - Commitments: 7
 - MISSION 2: Support the growth of an innovative, resilient and net zero carbon economy
 - Commitments: 2

Equality and Socio-Economic Impacts:

Does the proposal support the Council's Equality Outcomes 2021-25? Please specify.

People begging on the street do not necessarily fall within the protected characteristics groupings. However, the Begging Strategy supports the following Outcomes:

- Outcome 1 – access to training opportunities
- Outcome 3 – signposting Council Family services
- Outcome 4 – provision of spaces/services for women
- Outcome 6 – improved social inclusion

What are the potential equality impacts as a result of this report?

An EqIA screening process has been completed. GBS is intended to have positive impacts and supports identified Outcomes.

Please highlight if the policy/proposal will help address socio-economic disadvantage.

Yes. People engaged in street begging are usually the most socially and economically disadvantaged amongst us and may come from the most deprived areas of Glasgow. The Glasgow Begging Strategy will look to reduce barriers to accessing services across areas such as Health & Wellbeing, Housing, Education, and Learning Skills & Employment whilst encouraging vulnerable users to access appropriate support services.

Climate Impacts:

Does the proposal support any Climate Plan actions? Please specify:

GBS indirectly supports various actions, primarily through aspects of the Environmental Strategy Key Project which seeks to encourage positive uses of space, thereby promoting active travel i.e.:

Climate Plan Theme 1: Communication and Community Empowerment

- Aim: To foster participation and collaboration.

Climate Plan Theme 2: Just and Inclusive Place

- Aim: Ensure that the transition to a net-zero society is a catalyst for building a fairer, healthier, prosperous, resilient, and greener city for all.

Climate Plan Theme 3: Well Connected and Thriving City

- Aim: Support decarbonisation of transport systems by helping to improve infrastructure for walking, cycling, wheeling, and reducing the need to travel.

Climate Plan Theme 4: Health and Wellbeing

- Aim: To support equitable access to good quality open space and green infrastructure in the city.

Climate Plan Theme 5: Green recovery

- Aim: Supporting improved infrastructure for walking, cycling and remote working.

What are the potential climate impacts as a result of this proposal?

The GBS Environmental Strategy Key Project will support and benefit from other projects such as the Avenues programme, DRFs, and via the City Centre Strategy. These are intended to bring significant environmental enhancements to Glasgow city centre, such as increasing active travel and improving the public realm across the city centre.

Additionally, supporting vulnerable individuals will promote and enhance social cohesion thus supporting the broader community.

Will the proposal contribute to Glasgow's net zero carbon target?

As above, increasing and promoting the amount of active travel routes across the city centre will lead to a reduction in CO2 emissions.

Privacy and Data Protection impacts:

A DPIA is required by law where the processing of personal data is likely to result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.

Are there any potential data protection impacts as a result of this report Y/N

The project will not collect personal data except through the provision of contact details for the purposes of community engagement. Permission for any other use, or any ongoing use, will be sought at the point at which contact details are provided.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 It is recommended that Committee:

- (i) Considers the contents of this report
- (ii) Considers the progress made with the Glasgow Begging Strategy to date
- (iii) Notes the pilot project closure and proposed BAU model going forward

10. APPENDICES:

10.1 APPENDIX A – SCS/SCG Project Activity Reporting

10.2 APPENDIX B – GBS Summary Outputs

10.3 APPENDIX C – SCS Glasgow Begging Census (August 2024)

10.4 APPENDIX D – SCS Edinburgh Begging Strategy (January 2024)

10. APPENDICES

10.1 APPENDIX A – SCS/SCG Project Activity Reporting

Glasgow Begging Strategy - Street Change Glasgow statistics and additional datasets (January 2025)

1. Introduction

This short report provides a breakdown of the utility of Street Change Glasgow, Glasgow's Alternative Giving campaign (both the income and donations achieved, and how the funds have supported those begging, or at risk of begging) since inception. It also provides figures relating to services provided to support people to be better financially and digitally included, largely operated through our Access Hub - that may support them not to need to beg. There is some variation in the length of time in which data are available for these services, and some figures are estimates. We also provide statistics on the impact of the Connect Hub, a recently opened drop-in service to support women experiencing or at risk of homelessness. All are components of, or have benefitted from the presence of the Glasgow Begging Strategy.

2. Street Change Glasgow

This section provides an account of Street Change Glasgow, the Alternative Giving component of the Glasgow Begging Strategy. An overview of the funds raised is provided, followed by a breakdown of the QR code campaign, and finally the uses of Street Change Glasgow and case studies as to how the fund has been utilised.

2.1 Street Change Glasgow funds raised

Fundraising for Street Change Glasgow was initially launched in 2020 using contactless tap points placed in Central Station and other strategic locations around the city. These tap points have not been in use for some time as Goodbox, the supplier of these, went into Administration in June 2022. Goodbox are no longer in administration, and as such we are preparing to reintroduce these tap points. So far, the tap points have raised £6,950.

The QR code campaign was introduced in August 2022, as a less costly way of promoting Street Change Glasgow more widely. This QR code links to a Street Change Glasgow Just Giving page and has raised £11,778 as of December 2024. Donations to the Just Giving page have so far consisted of £7,060 of incidental donations, and £4,718 donated during Best Bar None Awards events in 2022 and 2024.

Best Bar None - and the premises involved in this scheme, have been a great supporter of Street Change Glasgow. These events have also raised an additional £3,325 through event auctions, and £4,385 was raised at the 2019 Best Bar None Awards event. One off business donations of £875 and £1,025 have been received during the course of the campaign. As such, the total raised for Street Change Glasgow so far is **£28,577**. We are continuing to investigate means of fundraising. As an example, we are currently organising a benefit gig with King Tuts to take place in 2025.

2.2 Street Change Glasgow QR code statistics

The QR code campaign was first introduced through posters placed in bars and restaurants around the city (primarily now over 40 premises affiliated with Best Bar None), shops, and local authority buildings. Vinyls with QR codes have been promoted on Glasgow City Council (GCC) premises Mercat Buildings and electronic billboards, and in Glasgow Central Station too. The posters have consistently been the most effective form of receiving scans from the public.

Figures 1-3 provide QR code scan statistics for these methods of promotion. **Figure 4** provides the total number of QR code scans across all methods of display since the launch of the QR codes element of the programme in August 2022.

We have also printed the QR code onto drink mats and have started distributing these to bars and restaurants (largely those that are Best Bar None members). These have been largely ineffective in attaining incidental scans but were very successful in facilitating donations at the Best Bar None awards nights. If this is to be continued as a method of promotion, substantial support is likely to be needed to support bars in promoting these.

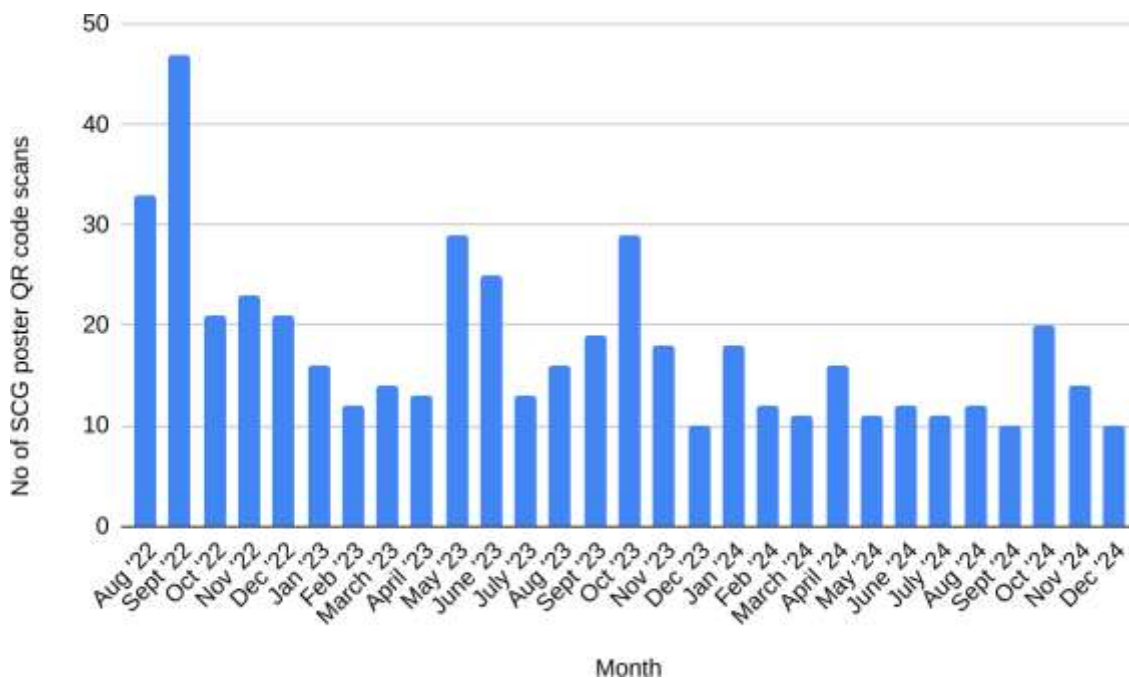


Figure 1. Number of Street Change Glasgow poster QR code scans since their introduction (August 2022-December 2024).

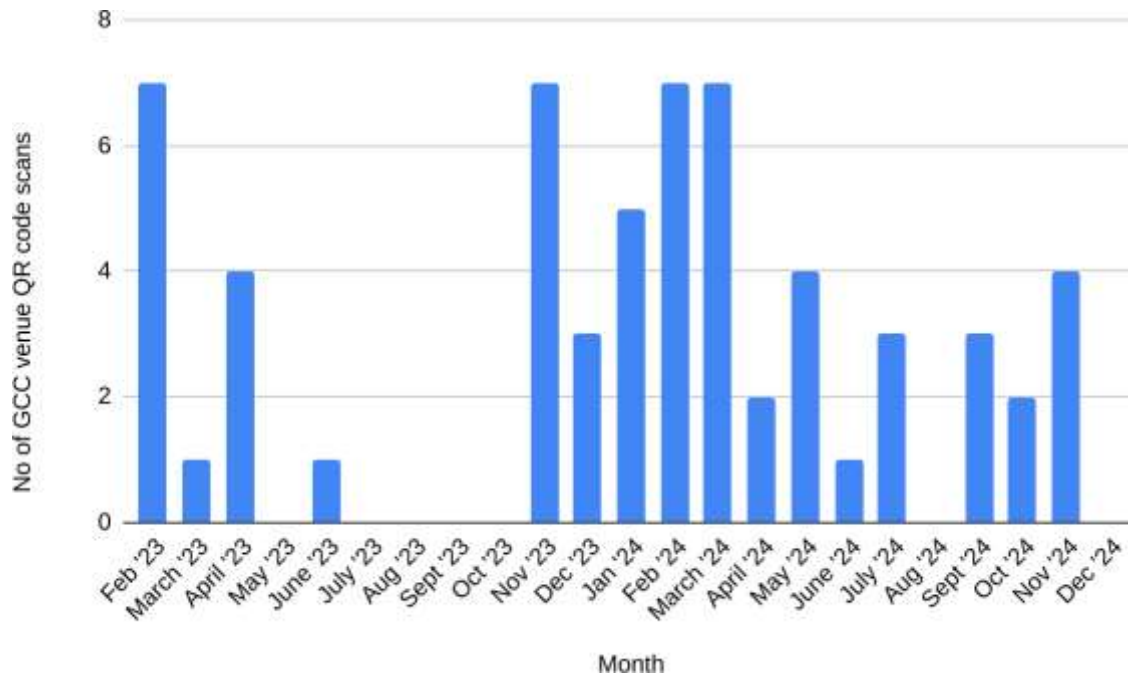


Figure 2. Number of Glasgow City Council venue QR code scans since their introduction (Electronic billboards and later Mercat Building) (February 2023-December 2024).

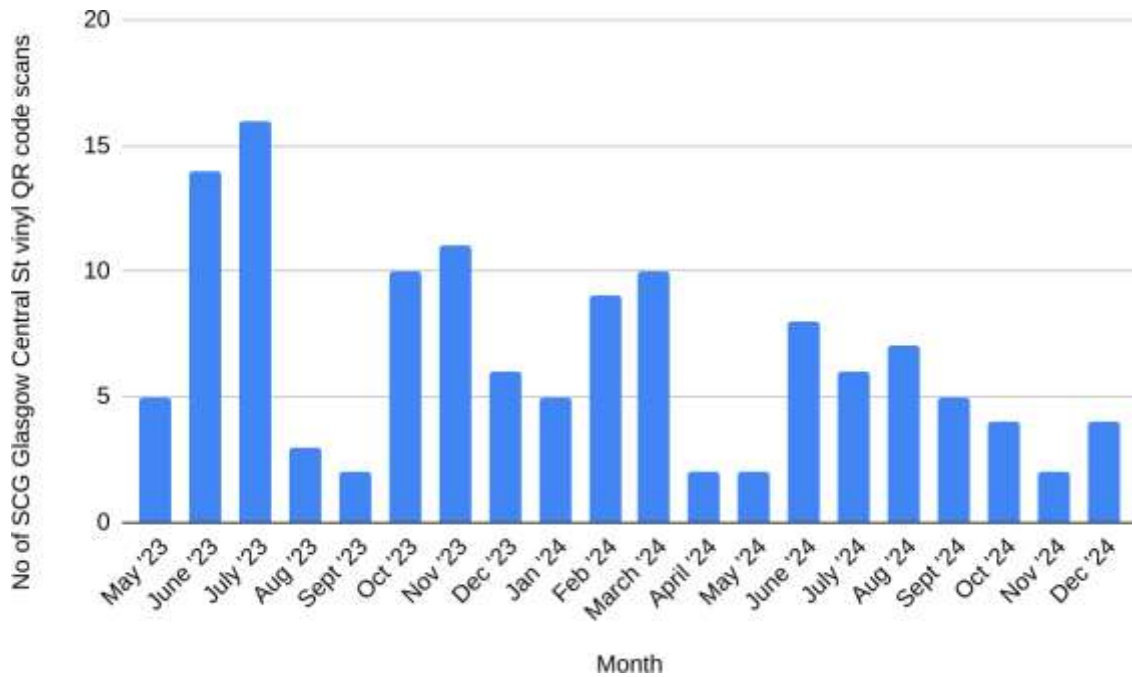


Figure 3. Number of Glasgow Central Station vinyl QR code scans since introduction (May 2023- December 2024).

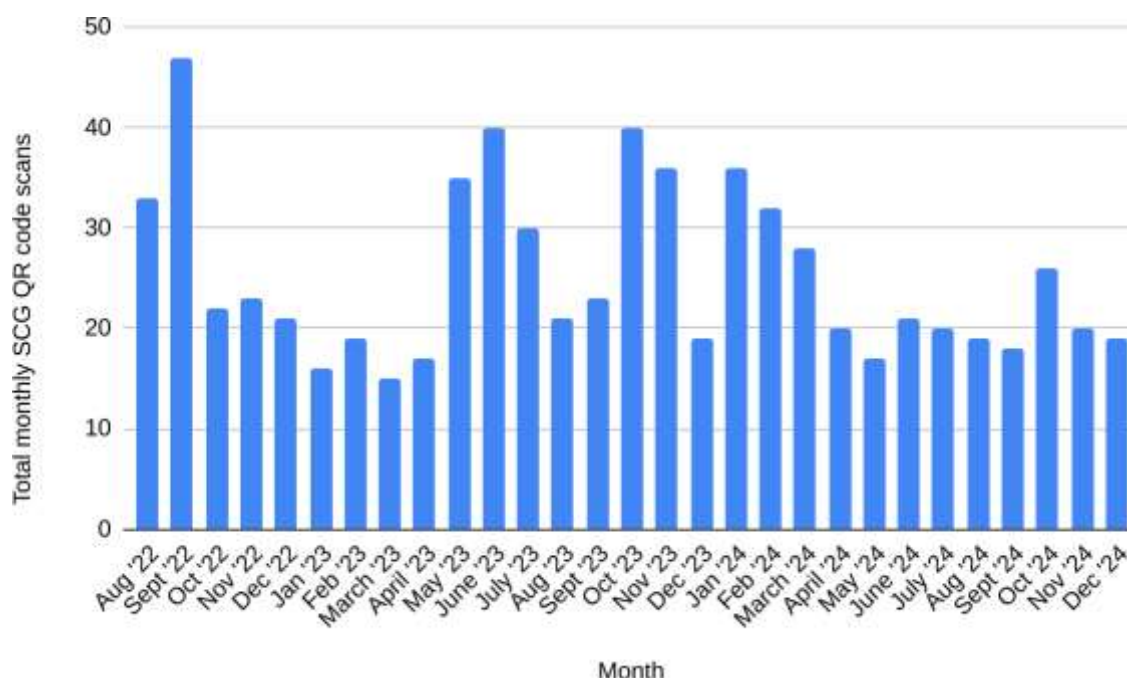


Figure 4. Number of total Street Change Glasgow QR code scans across all modes through duration of project (August 2022-December 2024).

2.3 Street Change Glasgow applications

The Street Change Glasgow fund has been accessed at least 309 times between June 2020 and December 2024 (**Figure 5**) - making a huge difference to those who have accessed the fund. The total amount utilised to date is £20,735. Whilst support workers are requested to complete a 'referral' form once they have utilised SCG funds to support someone, this number (309) may be an under-reporting of the number of times it has been accessed, due to occasions where a form may not have been completed.

Figure 6 provides data on the most common reasons for the fund being accessed since it became live in June 2020. In some instances one application is submitted to assist someone in more than one way (e.g. to purchase food and travel). Since its inception, the most common reason for an application being made was to purchase clothing for someone being supported, followed by purchasing food or essentials, mobile phones and top up, supporting someone with travel (for example to appointments or to return to loved ones), and to purchase electrical goods, for example televisions to help prevent and tackle social isolation.

The 'other' category is made up of applications for furnishings to make a living space into a home, activities and hobbies (e.g. to purchase art materials, and a gym membership to support connectivity and health and wellbeing, and healthier alternatives to begging), and in few cases, to pay for temporary accommodation.

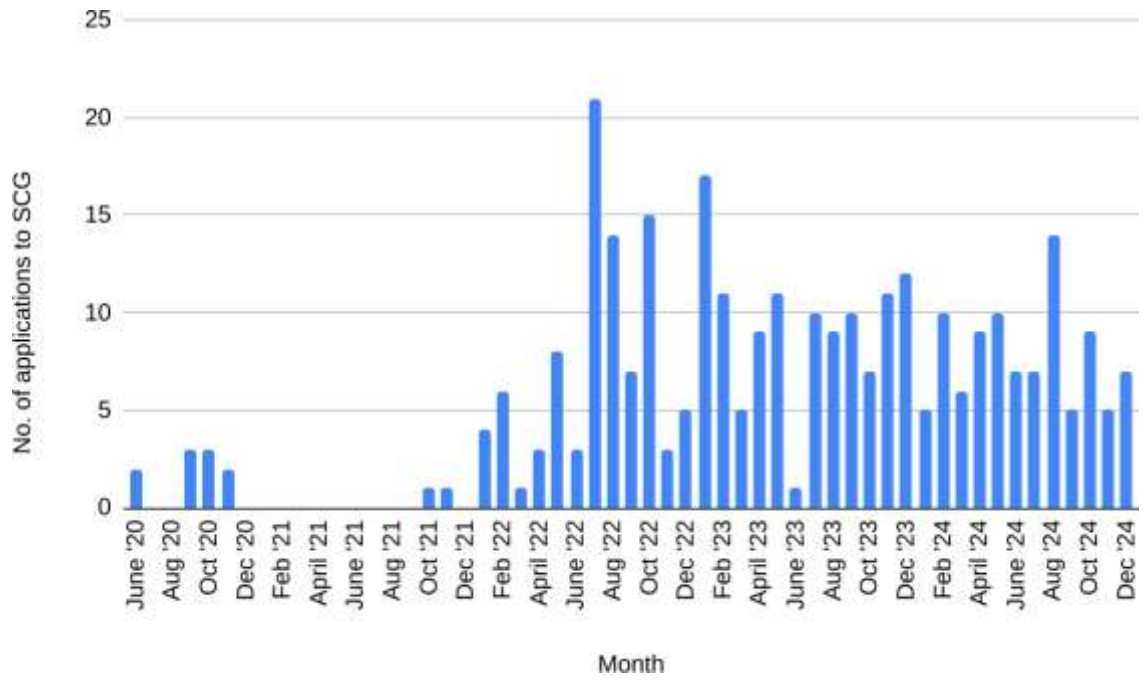


Figure 5. Number of applications made to the Street Change Glasgow fund since inception (June 2020-December 2024).

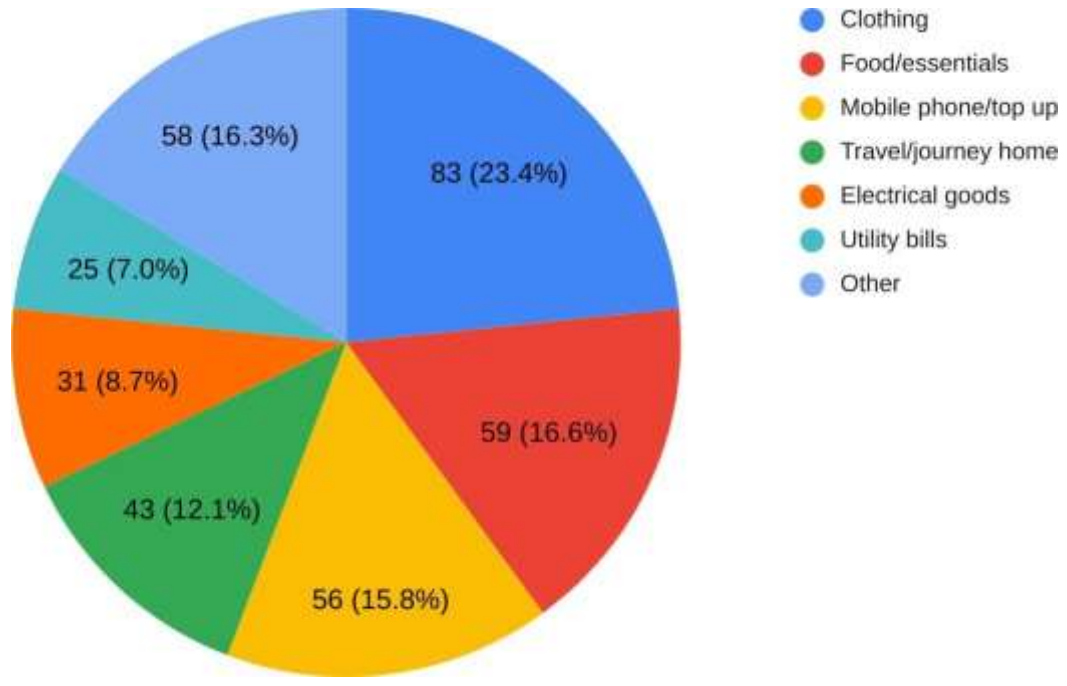


Figure 6. Breakdown of Street Change Glasgow fund application categories since project inception (June 2020- December 2024).

2.4 Street Change Glasgow - impact case studies

Sam's story - SCS Access Hub support worker

£75 from the Street Change fund was used to support Sam (not their real name) who had fled Ukraine, with funding the final part of a course that would lead to employment. Sam had indicated that he may beg to be able to pay for this, as he had been refused assistance from the JobCentre for this:

"I was supporting Sam, who was self-funding a course that would allow him to get into work. He had passed the course but there was a final part that he needed to pay for before being accredited for the qualification. He had been refused assistance by the JobCentre and had mentioned to me that he was going to beg to pay for it. I accessed the Street Change fund to pay for the final part of the course which secured his qualification and will hopefully lead to a job in the future."

Sophie's story - Simon Community Scotland support worker

The generous donations from the people of Glasgow allowed us to support Sophie (not her real name), who has recently moved into her own tenancy after years of rough sleeping and stays in emergency accommodations. She has been sleeping on a used bed that she found on the street. This bed is unsuitable for use and has a significant amount of black mould on it which is contributing to her health problems. Using Street Change funds, we were able to provide Sophie with a new bed and bedding:

"Using Street Change funds, we were able to support Sophie in her own tenancy to purchase her own bed, mattress and bedding. She was delighted to be able to choose the design on her duvet cover - something that had never been an option for her before. Having spent years rough sleeping and moving between emergency and temporary accommodations, it was so important for us to be able to make her home comfortable and feel like her own. She is now in a safe, warm and comfortable environment of her own."

Peter's story - Lodging House Mission staff member

Lodging Housing Mission have been supporting Peter (not his real name) for many years. He has received practical and emotional support from them and has given a great deal back by way of volunteering. Peter has his own tenancy and has held down several jobs for short periods of time. The transition from benefits to salary has often been difficult, leaving him with rent arrears and other financial difficulties. Peter has taken on a new position as a night porter in a hotel. While he was delighted to be back in the working world, he was very anxious and concerned as there were a few barriers in his way.

His start date was two weeks before his next universal credit payment, and Peter needed specific items that we were unable to provide, in order to be presentable in his new role. He was very agitated and stressed, wondering how he was going to manage.

Peter's support worker utilised £30 from the Street Change Glasgow fund to buy him new black trousers and denture adhesive cream, to increase his confidence when starting his new job.

"Peter was so relieved to get the help and support he needed, he pops in for breakfast most mornings after his night shift. His mental health has improved enormously. Both he and I are so grateful for the easy accessible assistance from Street Change."

SCS Support worker, Access Hub

"I have used the StreetChange fund to buy a couple of weekly bus tickets for a vulnerable young man that I am supporting. These purchases have been vital in enabling him to attend his appointments with his support network and as well as the We See You group which have been crucial in supporting his mental health and wellbeing."

SCS Support worker, Intensive Outreach Support service

"I used the Street Change fund to buy a TV (a luxury some might say) for a man I was supporting. After a considerable amount of time living on the streets, he was offered more settled accommodation and agreed to go although he was worried that after so long on the streets with people around him all of the time, he would struggle with the isolation and 'being in his own head'. The TV was purchased to serve as a distraction and this worked. He managed to maintain this accommodation until he moved into his own permanent tenancy and the TV went with him."

SCS Support worker, Intensive Outreach Support Service

"I would like to share my thoughts on the Street Change fund in relation to the people we support and my role in providing practical and psychological support to those individuals. There are many examples I could cite where individuals have benefited from receiving clothing, footwear, food, transport, heating, assistance when transitioning from homelessness into mainstream housing or more independent living, and practical help to attend training courses and enter into education. The list of provisions provided by this fund could go on and on."

Like many colleagues, we primarily work with people that have been entrenched in a lifestyle of homelessness and all its well known associated problems that have also been well researched and documented over a number of years. It is well established how poverty is a key driver at the root of homelessness. It is to this end that the Street Change fund directly addresses these issues by the examples given above. People remember and respond to kindness and generosity, they know when it is genuine from the giver without judgement or delay. It helps to create trusting working relationships. As a Support Worker who has used the Street Change fund at times of immediate need for people in homelessness, its benefits are often multifold.

The most important purpose of this fund is to improve the quality of someone's life. However, I have also witnessed how it has helped to create better conditions for individuals to break through their own personal, psychological and emotional barriers, often built up as a consequence of spending long periods in homelessness and uncertainty. This creative use of the Street Change fund, I believe, critically reduces their feelings of loneliness and helplessness. This fund has proved to be a vital, practical and psychological tool when supporting people suffering from their experiences of homelessness."

3. Additional datasets supporting Financial and Digital Inclusion

There are other activities taking place, primarily through our Access Hub, that are supporting people with increasing financial inclusion and stability, and digital inclusion, that may help achieve an improved financial situation and connection with the community - all which may support someone not needing to beg. Some activities are alternatives to those which were identified in the initial Financial and Digital Inclusion element of the Strategy.

3.1 Partnership with Fuel Bank Foundation

The Begging Strategy had initially looked to assess the impact of a drop-in service at the Access Hub provided by GHeat. Staffing levels meant this service was not possible, and instead Simon Community Scotland became a referral partner for the Fuel Bank Foundation in October 2022. This partnership meant that we were able to assist those needing help in attaining up to a £50 prepayment meter top up - or alternative support for those using other fuel types. Street Change Glasgow funds had previously more so been used to support with utility bills, and as such this partnership has allowed Street Change funds to be utilised elsewhere. **Figure 7** provides a breakdown of monthly referrals to the Fuel Bank Foundation.

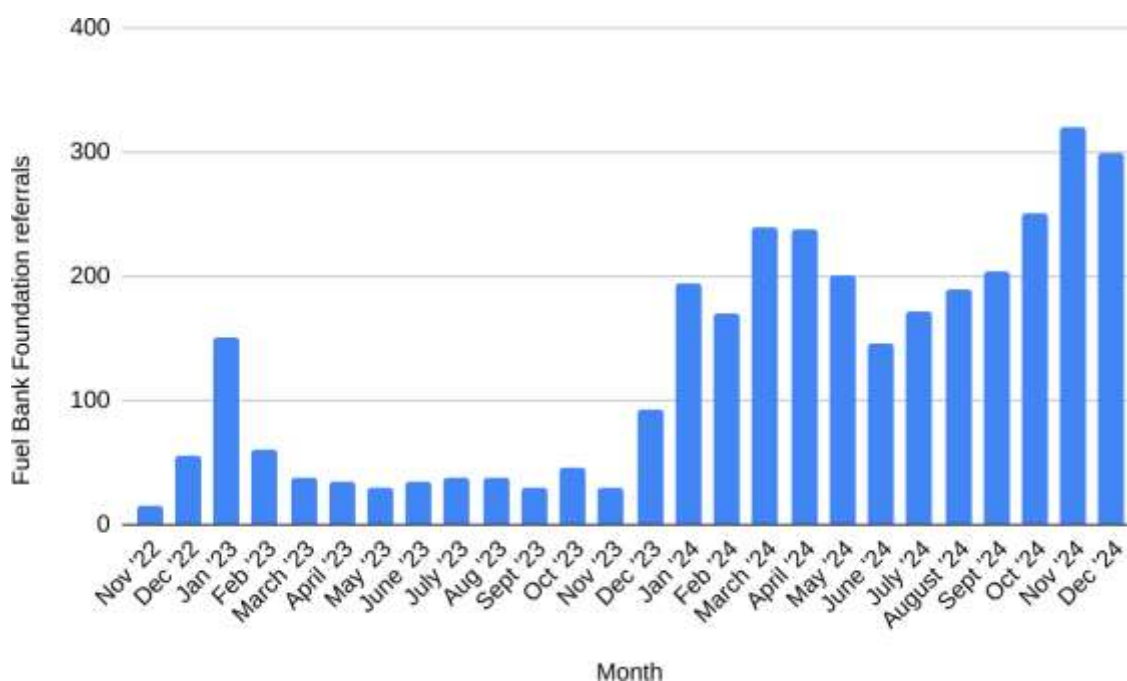


Figure 7. Applications made to Fuel Bank Foundation through Simon Community Scotland Access Hub since partnership began (November 2022-December 2024).

3.2 Courses offered through Glasgow City College

The Financial and Digital Inclusion component of the strategy had initially looked to understand the training activities offered in partnership between SCS and Glasgow Life, with whom discussions had taken place. Instead, training courses have been provided by Glasgow City College through the SCS Access Hub. These courses have

covered digital inclusion, budgeting, health and wellbeing, and creative activities, and have been running weekly for three years. They have been attended regularly by ten individuals supported by Simon Community. As well as supporting their financial and digital inclusion through the content of these courses, the act of attending these courses in themselves may have provided an alternative to begging at that point in time. Should the delivery of these courses end, we may approach Glasgow Life again to further investigate digital and other training options.

3.3 Support from Govan Law' Welfare Rights Officer

Govan Law's welfare rights drop-in started when the Access Hub opened in September 2021 and finished up in the summer of 2024 due to the funds for the Welfare Rights Officer post being redirected to Govan Law's legal services team due to increased demand. This service helped an average approximately 4-5 people each week and was proving a very useful service. The drop in was increased from two hours to four hours per week to meet demand.

3.4 Partnership with HSBC

Attaining a bank account is one element of financial inclusion that many people supported by Simon Community may find particularly difficult due to not having a fixed address. SCS have partnered with HSBC since Aug 2021, with HSBC providing a drop in at the Access Hub to support people with opening bank accounts. From November 2023 to October 2024 96 people have been supported to open bank accounts through this service.

3.5 Support with benefits and Department of Work and Pensions drop in

As the Financial and Digital Inclusion officer role was not implemented, support for income maximisation has instead been provided by SCS support workers and partner organisations. Since October 2023, a Department of Work and Pensions staff member has held a weekly drop-in session at the Access Hub to support people with maintaining benefits claims and preventing sanctions from happening. This service has on average supported approximately six people per week. Additionally, **Figure 8** details the total number of people supported by Simon Community Scotland with benefits applications - either new applications, support with existing claims, or contacting DWP, from April 2023.

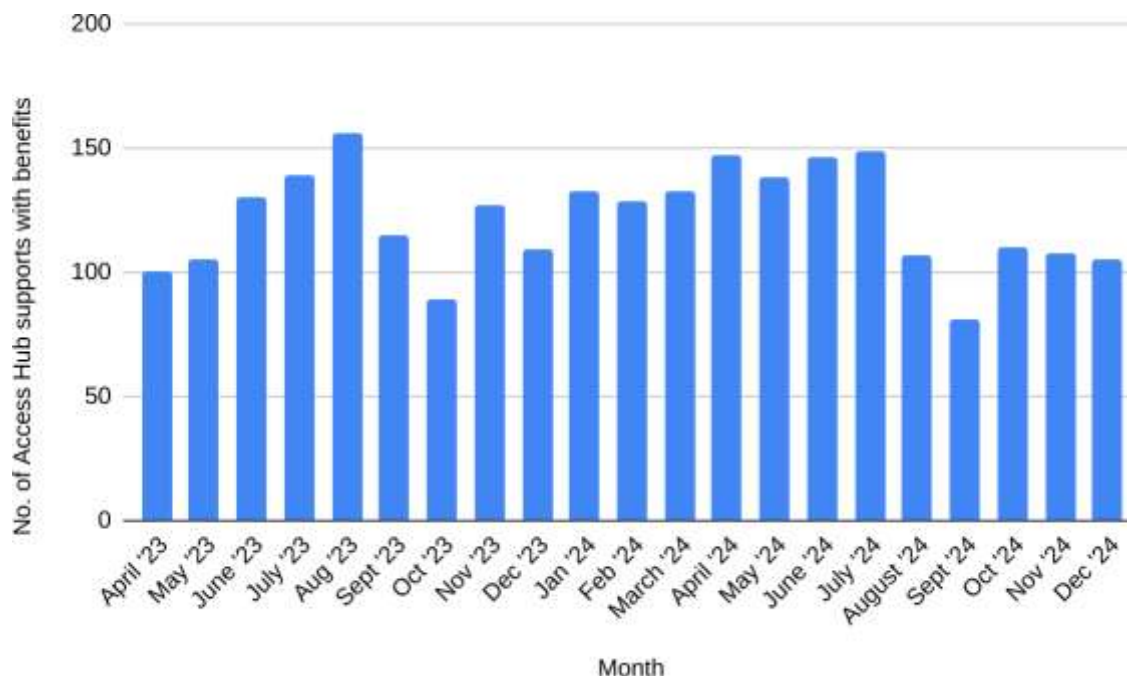


Figure 8. Number of benefits supports provided through Simon Community Scotland Access Hub (April 2023-December 2024).

3.6 Get Digital - Digital Inclusion

Get Digital is Simon Community Scotland's digital inclusion programme, that supports people experiencing homelessness by providing them with a smartphone or tablet, tailored support through a digital champion, and unlimited data. So far, 1000 devices have been provided to people being supported, offering an opportunity to connect with loved ones, their community, and build their confidence and new skills. Of the people spoken to about accessing a Get Digital device:

- 88% of people said they had used their device to *learn new things*
- 87% had *accessed financial help online*

Through the Glasgow Access Hub, between November 2023 and October 2024, 36 of these digital devices have been provided along with 220 sim cards. Further project information can be found via the relevant [Get Digital](#) webpage.

3.7 'We See You' support programme

Simon Community Scotland's We See You programme was initiated in 2022 as a three-year pilot. Operating out of the Access Hub, this was introduced as a low threshold service to support people who use substances and who are experiencing homelessness in Glasgow City Centre. It was introduced on the premise that there were no safe spaces for people who use substances outside normal office hours, and as such operates seven days a week, in the evenings and at weekends. It offers psychosocial group work sessions (e.g. walking groups, drama classes and there have been educational outings to support National Trust sites), college courses and access to harm reduction interventions and a harm reduction training course.

271 individuals attended We See You in its first year, with 30 people consistently attending. Twelve people completed the harm reduction training course, and twelve people completed a college course. We See You offers a consistent daily psychosocial activity for people who use substances and may be involved in street activity in Glasgow City Centre.

As such - it may be providing an alternative to begging at that point in time. Further, the opportunities to build confidence and skills within the sessions may over time support people into education and employment - supporting them away from begging. We See You continues to be a popular offering, with 514 individual attendees between November 2023 and October 2024.

4. Connect Hub - supporting women experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Glasgow

When the Financial and Digital Inclusion officer role ceased in 2020, existing support workers were upskilled to take on the activities that had been carried out as part of this role. Remaining funding for the FDI officer post was generously reallocated to support the renovation of the old premises of Simon Community's drop-in Hub, into a community support space providing pathways out of and away from homelessness for women - the Connect Hub, which opened in May 2024. As such, we wanted to share some early evidence of the impact this space is having.

The Connect Hub operates as a drop-in low threshold centre, delivering trauma-informed support in collaboration with multi-agency partners to improve the health and wellbeing of women experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The Connect Hub focuses on building confidence, self-esteem, and skills, guiding women toward education and employability opportunities through psychosocial group work programmes, partnerships with educational bodies, and community connections.

In the first six months of opening (mid-May to October), the Connect Hub had 734 total visits from 138 women, and 2,607 support interventions were provided. Below is a quote from a person who has accessed support through the Connect Hub, describing their experience:

"The Connect Hub is a place that I feel safe, I don't have to worry about nothing, I feel free, I feel good. You make me feel wanted, I feel like I'm part of a community. It's an open space where you don't have to worry about guys coming, you feel safe, you don't have to worry about nothing. It's a good environment, secure, and it should be because it helps. To be honest, since this service has been opened, I've seen more women use it than other spaces." **Woman supported by the Connect Hub**

There have been over 70 welfare rights supports provided, nearly 20 supports for people accessing welfare funds, over 300 attendances at activities and group work sessions such as yoga, creative writing, and college courses.

As well as providing direct financial support through welfare support, the group work programmes and activities are helping to support women build their confidence, skills that may support them into education and employability, providing them with positive alternatives to potentially looking to beg. As with the Glasgow College courses and We See You activities offered, the very engagement with these groups may be providing alternative activities to begging.

10.2 APPENDIX B – GBS Project Activity Summary

Alternative Giving (Street Change Glasgow)

Initial project scoping is undertaken by Simon Community Scotland (SCS) as part of the wider GBS development phase.

A more detailed Street Change Glasgow initiative is proposed by SCS and accepted by the SLWG as the preferred alternative giving model for GBS.

Procurement of a physical donation point infrastructure (6No. units) is carried out through existing corporate Community Benefits tender framework provisions.

Identification of original SCG participating venue hosts is completed, and delivery and installation of infrastructure follows.

Testing and calibration of equipment is completed and service provision for related banking transaction delivery is agreed.

Street Change Glasgow is formally launched with an event in Central Station in March 2020.

The subsequent impact of Covid-19 means only 2No. donation points (hosted by Central Station) draw any residual income. Efforts are made to relocate the other 4No. units (hosted in city centre bars/clubs) to more effective sites but prove unsuccessful due to lockdown restrictions.

Recurring technical issues (such as IT failures and vandalism) arise with the donation points in Central Station and remedial support is sought from the infrastructure provider. However, the longer-term effectiveness of these units is now under review.

SCS give notice of their intention to relaunch Street Change Glasgow once conditions improve.

In the meantime, SCS support the launch of another project – [Street Support Glasgow](#) (SSG). SSG signposts services and provides emergency advice for anyone experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The initiative involves a coalition of over 80No. organisations working together to provide over 200No. services, including meals, drop-in services, food banks and accommodation in Glasgow as well as signposting to financial help, health services and training and employment opportunities.

SSG is monitored as part of the now expanding GBS scope towards understanding how appropriate support might be best provided within existing project constraints.

SCS successfully relaunch SCG at an event hosted by the social enterprise Blankfaces at their Great Western Road shop in August 2022.

Given the recurring issues affecting the donation points, it is decided to promote the use of QR codes as a more appropriate alternative platform. Not only does this reduce running costs and increase flexibility, but it has already encouraged several retailers to display signage and support the SCG scheme.

GCC show their support for SCG by installing QR code posters at various locations within City Chambers and Council offices at 231 George Street, whilst other additional sites are explored.

Best Bar None (BBN) continues to provide generous support as a key project partner, sponsoring SCG at the BBN Awards Glasgow events, and generating vital funds. Opportunities to explore similar strong relationships with other organisations remains ongoing.

With GCC support, a range of SCG branded promotional materials is created as “welcome packs” to help encourage interested businesses to get involved. This platform also encourages exploration of a proposed SCG Ambassador Programme, and work is undertaken to better understand potential initiative shape/scope, as well as to identify possible key partners/stakeholders.

SCG branded vinyl signage is produced and installed within Central Station’s main passenger concourse (as per **Figure 5** below). A similar intervention is applied to dress vacant retail units on the Mercat Building at Glasgow Cross (as per **Figure 1** and **Figure 2** below) with associated social media activity (as per **Figure 4** below).

Additional GCC and Glasgow Life buildings/venues become SCG QR poster host sites.

SCG branded t-shirts are produced for GCC staff taking part in the annual Glasgow Kiltwalk events for fundraising purposes.

Opportunities to promote SCG through sponsored events continue to be explored, as is possible celebrity support/endorsement. Ideas like this become increasingly important as donation levels drop during the second half of 2023, a reflection of wider economic factors.

It is intimated that City of Edinburgh Council may be developing their own Begging Strategy, and Alternative Giving scheme. It is felt that discussion and liaison between Glasgow and Edinburgh may help identify mutual benefits from aligned strategy/activity.

From a reporting perspective, efforts to improve data collection mechanisms remain ongoing. SCG have suggested the creation of an information dashboard and the methodology behind this is scoped.

Increasing numbers of BBN members agree to support SCG, promoting the scheme and hosting QR code posters and beer mats within their premises. This trend continues throughout the lifetime of GBS.

SCS improve the SCG website, with additional content added to help the public understand the project benefits, and the inclusion of personal testimonies from those with lived experience to encourage wider project engagement and donations.

Financial & Digital Inclusion

The role of Financial & Digital Inclusion (FDI) officer is developed as an early GBS action, predating the strategy’s formal adoption but included within the indicative action plan.

GCC’s Transformation & Financial Inclusion team provide development support, while the post is funded by GCC and Simon Community Scotland (SCS).

With longer-term funding options unclear, and the recurring costs of the FDI officer appearing increasingly prohibitive, existing members of SCS's Outreach/Street Team are upskilled, enabling them to provide the same services. This follows the methodology and lessons learned from the original post.

Additionally, further financial inclusion services are identified within the Money Matters project in Govan.

As the need for a dedicated FDI officer is now superseded, an agreement is reached that remaining funding be redirected towards other related activities, including the creation of a proposed women's centre within SCS facilities.

Introductions are also made between SCS and Glasgow Life towards facilitating a range of education/training services including digital skills.

Further opportunities for collaboration between SCS and GCC's Glasgow Helps service are also explored to help improve streamlined signposting through a single point of contact.

SCS begin to see increasing numbers of clients who have lost housing through rising unemployment. Consequently, collaboration between SCS and Jobs and Business Glasgow (JBG) is pursued to assist people back in to work through a referral programme.

SCS establish a process of monitoring and assessment to ensure targeted service delivery continues.

A digital skills training project if progressed by Glasgow City College in collaboration with SCS, adding to and supporting similar arrangements with Glasgow Life.

Internal refurbishment works are progressed at SCS premises to embed the new women's centre. This is supported by additional funding from the Glasgow Communities Fund.

Weekly welfare rights clinics are delivered by Govan Law at SCS premises. An initial pilot is extended due to demand. This weekly drop in now lasts for four hours instead of two. Govan Law also hold a women's only drop-in service providing legal advice relating to accommodation.

SCS staff make referrals to GHeat for service users requiring support in this area. Opportunities to provide support clinics are also being explored but are subject to resource availability. Additionally, SCS have also become a referral partner for the Fuel Bank Foundation, providing monetary support to those needing assistance with utility bills and who are on a prepaid meter.

Environmental Strategy

Officers liaise on actions being undertaken through the Glasgow Economic Recovery Group and City Centre Task Force, and which overlap with the aims and objectives of GBS e.g. outputs linked to encouraging the positive use of public space.

This includes monitoring and supporting related activities for mutual benefit, and links to the work being carried out by NRS City Services and the support which continues to be provided to local businesses.

Other strategic outputs, such as the Avenues Programme, District Regeneration Frameworks, and City Centre Lane Strategy, are also monitored given the significant environmental enhancements they will bring to Glasgow city centre.

This enables Key Project activity to be targeted at other interim and meantime outputs i.e. smaller-scale catalyst actions. Related activity relies upon support from NRS City Services, and in alignment with operational outputs progressed via the Environmental Tasking and Coordination (ETAC) group for Ward 10.

Such cooperation includes the introduction of new solar panel bins in Buchanan Street precinct between Argyle Street and Nelson Mandela Place to support the Environmental Strategy's Cleaner City Centre work strand.

As vacant shopfronts were identified as a specific issue within the GBS Action Plan, efforts focusing on identifying and mitigating against affected retail units are also progressed, with legal guidance being sought on possible enforcement measures.

As part of the Safer City Centre work strand, intelligence gathering continues to identify key city centre locations where street begging tends to take place. This data collection also includes rough sleeping sites. Over time, the scope of this activity extends beyond the city centre. This information is passed to on-street outreach teams to assist engagement.

Whilst this process continues, parallel efforts to address associated environmental issues are also pursued. For instance, while the Argyle Street Avenue works are pending, interim measures to improve the quality of the Heilanman's Umbrella area are currently being pursued in collaboration with key stakeholders such as Network Rail. This follows previous similar projects such as the Central Station Action Plan.

GCC Community Justice Glasgow establishes a Strategic Partnership Group to focus on issues and challenges arising at the Four Corners area of Glasgow city centre (i.e. Argyle Street/Union Street junction). This activity involves a wide range of different stakeholders including various GCC services, Police Scotland, ADP, HSCP, and a variety of different charitable organisations, local businesses, and resident groups. A list of recommendations emerges as GBS continues to inform and support this initiative.

Best Bar None (an accreditation scheme supported by the Home Office and drinks industry to improve standards in the evening and night-time economy) continues to support GBS actions. Their re-engagement with licensed premises is intended to increase night-time safety through a combination of responsible management and operation of licensed premises, ongoing improvements, and social responsibility.

Elsewhere, a range of different project activities are undertaken through various strategic workstreams, including:

- **City Centre Action Plans**

Various location-based activities including:

- Re-boarding and dressing of Victoria's site
- Vinyl applications to vacant shopfronts in Sauchiehall St/Argyle St
- Targeted environmental actions around Buchanan Bus Station
- Exploring feature lighting opportunities

- **Graffiti Action Group**

A multi-strand action plan is generated with actions progressing.

- **Hielanman's Umbrella redevelopment**

Procurement of a design consultant, and delivery of design proposals to identify and progress environmental enhancements.

- **Locally Targeted Actions**

- Refurbishment of Argyle Street benches
- Installation of new street furniture in Dunlop Street
- Interventions in New Wynd including proposed installation of gated area
- Improved lumen levels in Mitchell Street

Development of the new City Centre Strategy (2024-30) provides a broader vision city centre regeneration, supporting GBS related activities. Actions continue to target enhancing public perceptions and positive use of public place, increasing safety, and supporting the city's wider economic recovery.

Remedial public realm works are completed as part of the Buchanan Bus Station action plan.

A pilot needle bin scheme in New Wynd is completed with follow up assessment to inform potential activity expansion.

Targeted feature lighting interventions are undertaken to help support city centre businesses, especially within the Sauchiehall Street area.

Additional environmental enhancements are informed by funding availability, especially where external service provision is required. Various proposals are considered for delivery using an evidence-based methodology, though subject to resourcing.

GCC continue to address an increase in local business complaints. Striking a suitable balance remains paramount i.e. resolving complaints whilst treating vulnerable individuals with compassion.

Council officers highlight increased numbers of people presenting with suicidal thoughts/intentions. Additionally, reporting for West/Central Glasgow notes an increase in the number of individuals presenting to GCC as homeless, as well as those engaged in street begging. Frontline staff receive additional refresh training to help support their efforts in responding to these issues as appropriate.

Public Perceptions

A draft comms plan is generated which details communication activity in relation to the work of the GBS (e.g. aims, key messages, stakeholders/target audiences, action plan and timeline) whilst emphasising positive outcomes.

Some initial key objectives are implemented, including the creation of a GBS webpage within the GCC website. This acts as a “landing page” and provides the public with useful information as well as links to other associated projects, initiatives, and the work of partner organisations.

Data analytics are discussed towards understanding how they can assess and improve the reach and impact of this webpage and the usefulness of the information it contains.

It is envisioned that webpage content will be regularly updated with relevant information, and be informed by key project partners and the personal testimony of those with lived experience, as well as e.g. case studies, videos, images, blogs etc.

This content will help promote the positive impacts of GBS and can be shared via social media platforms.

Initial scoping toward the development of a recognisable GBS brand is carried out in the hopes that this will boost public messaging, and assist alignment with potential events and sponsorship opportunities.

Officers continue to promote the aims and aspirations of GBS by highlighting the work undertaken, including Key Project outputs, though primarily focusing on SCG. This provides a platform for increased exposure in local and national media channels, promoting the project, and encouraging wider engagement and participation.

SCG increasingly becomes the most prominent public-facing element of GBS, leading to further liaison with SCS staff to better promote the initiative and coordinate messaging. The SCG website is enhanced with more detailed project information and curated content to demonstrate positive impacts, whilst providing opportunities to link and facilitate promotional activity through other organisations, including Steering Group members and the Glasgow Family.

Improved reporting processes help provide a contextual narrative to any public facing messaging, more fully informing perceptions on the issues associated with street begging.

Efforts to develop and grow the range of project partners remains vital. Each new SCG venue host presents an opportunity to promote the scheme and encourage wider participation. The support of iconic venues such as King Tut’s Wah Wah Hut, is therefore hugely helpful.

BT Hub digital screens are used as part of an SCG promotional campaign with associated social media activity (as per **Figure 3** below).

The project’s Town and City Management Industry (TMCI) Awards 2022 (operated by the Association of Town & City Management (ATCM)) success highlights the meaningful positive impact which GBS can play in people’s lives. Again, this recognition also presents an opportunity for wider promotion, brand awareness, stakeholder engagement, and potential marketing, events, and sponsorship alignment.

Supporting Images & Information

Figure 1: Mercat Building SCG vinyls




Figure 2: Mercat Building SCG vinyls



Figure 3: Social media activity - BT Hub digital SCG adverts (Feb 2024)

X (Twitter):

Tweet activity ×



Glasgow City Council @GlasgowCC
New digital adverts with QR codes which you can scan to help people involved in street begging are now on the city's BT Hubs.

Scan the QR codes to donate to Street Change Glasgow - the city's alternative giving scheme run by @SimonCommScot. The ads were free. pic.twitter.com/Y2UxYRRX0w


Impressions	25,762
Total engagements	347
Detail expands	132
Media engagements	88
Likes	49
Profile clicks	38
Retweets	20
Replies	16
Link clicks	3
Follows	1

Facebook (post above):
 Impressions – 34,247
 Reactions – 143
 Comments – 86
 Shares – 41
 Other Clicks – 1,647

Figure 4: Social media activity - Mercat Building SCG vinyls (Feb 2024)

X (Twitter):

Tweet activity ×



Glasgow City Council @GlasgowCC
Striking new vinyls highlighting Glasgow's alternative giving scheme for people involved in begging are in place on the Mercat building, Gallowgate.

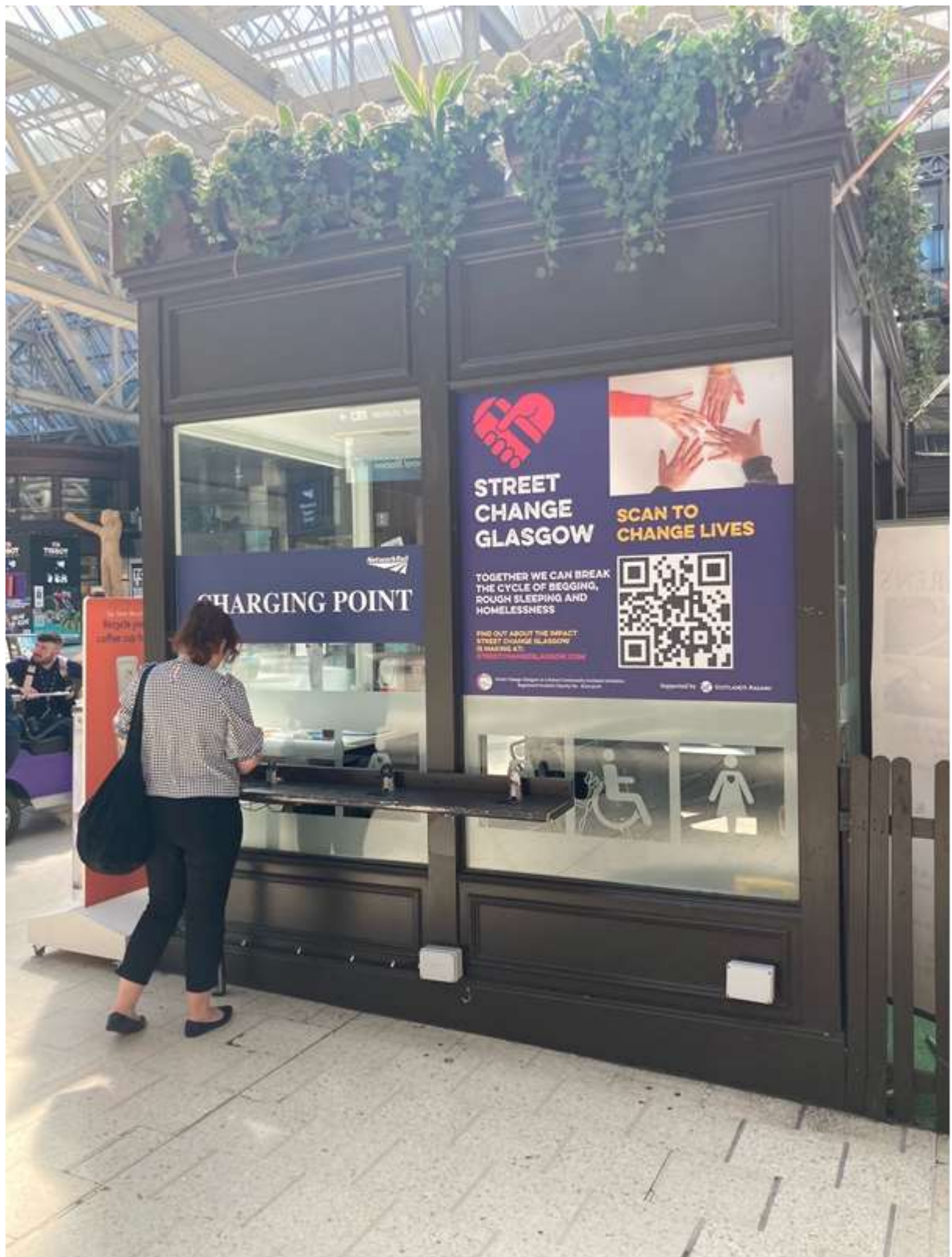
You can scan the QR code to donate to #StreetChangeGlasgow and help a vulnerable person this Christmas! 🥰

@SimonCommScot
pic.twitter.com/30ON13JOCn

Impressions	3,449
Total engagements	63
Detail expands	24
Media engagements	13
Profile clicks	8
Retweets	7
Likes	5
Hashtag clicks	3
Link clicks	2
Replies	1

Facebook (post above):
 Impressions – 7,051
 Reactions – 20
 Comments – 4
 Shares – 4
 Other Clicks – 133

Figure 5: Central Station Main Concourse – SCG vinyls





Glasgow Begging Census August 2024

Simon Community Scotland

Combatting the causes and effects of homelessness

Glasgow Begging Census August 2024

Introduction

Simon Community Scotland delivers street outreach services, in partnership with Glasgow HSCP, 7 days a week to people who are rough sleeping, at risk of rough sleeping, engaged in street life activities (including using substances, survival sex and people who beg on the streets of Glasgow). There is a close relationship between these elements however it doesn't mean that everyone who is rough sleeping, begs, nor that all people begging are rough sleeping, though most are homeless, i.e. in temporary, insecure, unsafe or exploitative accommodation.

Since April 2024, on average Glasgow will have around 55 people begging on the streets during the course of a day. Regular contact and experience suggests that a significant number will be experiencing some form of compelling addiction, alcohol, drugs or gambling. There has always been a high level of insecure accommodation, untreated physical health issues, vulnerable mental health and poverty.

The Street Team regularly coordinates multi-agency rough sleeping counts and regular begging counts in the city. This census was the first occasion the team engaged a large number of people begging to elicit greater insight into their circumstances and reasons for begging. Simon Community allocated additional staff and teams of two, including volunteers, sought out, engaged and asked a series of set questions about people's circumstances. Staff in the Street Team have regular contact with people begging so in the vast majority of cases there was an existing relationship. No incentives were used to take part in the census.

Glasgow Begging Strategy

Simon Community Scotland is a member of the Glasgow Begging Strategy, which was developed by public sector agencies and third sector organisations as well as private businesses and business networks to provide a citywide response to specific concerns over street begging.



Glasgow begging strategy has three strategic objectives:

- To support people on the street who are begging.
- To reduce the need for people to have to beg.
- To provide cash-alternatives for people who wish to support vulnerable individuals
- Street Change.

Street Team

The Street Teams are active 7 days a week in the city preventing people from rough sleeping, supporting people off the streets into safer spaces and supporting people who continue to be roofless. The team also engages with people begging in the city with many known to the street team over a number of years. Whilst the majority of people begging are not rough sleeping, almost all of them are homeless and living in temporary, insecure and sometimes unsafe accommodation.

Almost without exception the people engaged in rough sleeping and begging have multiple and complex disadvantages including homelessness, substance use, history with the justice system, physical and mental health issues, poverty and exposure to risks and trauma in combination with significant past trauma.

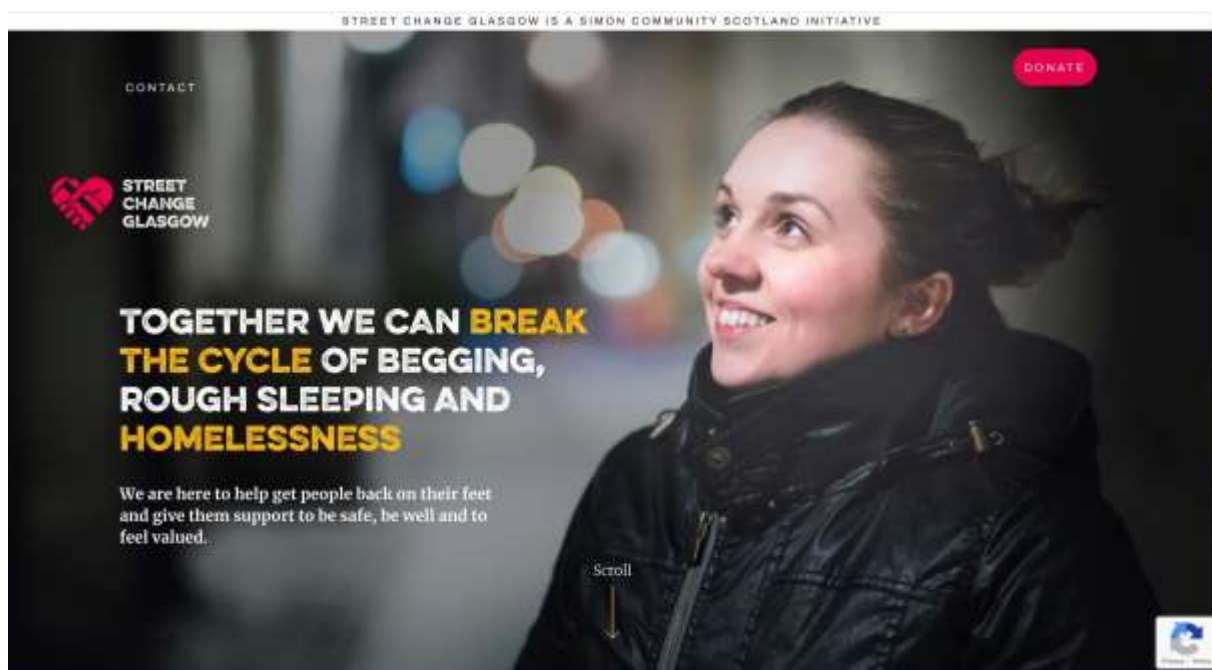
The Street Team support people to address their immediate needs:

Emotional support and human connection, high calorific food, hot/cold drinks, kettle packs to return to their accommodation with, fuel bank referrals/vouchers, pet food and vet support, warm clothing & dry footwear, injecting equipment provision (IEP) and overdose intervention, support to access accommodation, support to get to their accommodation, sleeping bag & items to keep them safe and warm if having to rough sleep, support to return home (Glasgow & beyond) - street change budget utilised for this.

The team works with agencies already supporting people or connects people with agencies that can provide assistance, for example housing via the HSCP, with direct engagement via integrated complex case staff within the Access Hub. Follow-up support would be to advocate for accommodation if they are not accommodated, potentially referring to Shelter or Govan Law depending on delays in accessing accommodation. The Street Team is integrated into the Access Hub allowing for links in with other support services - access hub for links to partner clinics & provisions / resources, addictions, casework, health, dwp, harm reduction.

The Street Team are able to draw on volunteer support through Street Cycles and access Street Change funding through the ISN (Interagency Street Network).

Street Change Glasgow



Street Change Glasgow is the city's Alternative Giving initiative, supporting those who are begging and rough sleeping, as well as those at risk of. Managed by Simon Community Scotland, it is the first campaign of its kind in Scotland, and provides a quick and simple way for people to donate to those in absolute times of need - via our QR codes and Just Giving page.

Street Change Glasgow is unique - all donations are held in a dedicated Street Change Glasgow fund - which Simon Community Scotland support workers, and those from other charities involved with the ISN have immediate access to when working with people experiencing or at risk of begging or rough sleeping. There's no need for a lengthy referral process - support workers can access the fund there and then to support the individual in need.

So far, the Street Change Glasgow fund has helped those experiencing extreme hardship over 270 times. Donations have helped assist people with clothing, food and essential living items, mobile phones and top up to ensure people being supported can connect with family and support services, travel to new employment, appointments or to return to their family, and much more. Please read below some stories as to how this initiative makes a real difference:

"Using Street Change funds, we were able to support a woman in her own tenancy to purchase her own bed, mattress and bedding. She was delighted to be able to choose the design on her duvet cover - something that had never been an option for her before.

Having spent years rough sleeping and moving between emergency and temporary accommodations, it was so important for us to be able to make her home comfortable and feel like her own. She is now in a safe, warm and comfortable environment of her own." Outreach Worker

“A woman who we have been supporting and working alongside for a while was facing eviction from her tenancy due to reasons beyond her control. Unfortunately the property she was offered, although technically habitable by the barest of standards, didn't really meet the standards that I myself or my colleagues would consider acceptable to move into.

Thankfully, Street Change was there and available and we were authorised to use a small budget of the pot to make small improvements. We repainted the walls a lovely bright white, and were able to get donated flooring if the cost of laying it was covered.

The woman we work with moved in happy and calm and with an incredible weight taken off her shoulders ...with the help of Street Change we managed to go beyond providing immediate acute support – we were able to prevent somebody from re-entering into the cycle of homelessness.” Outreach worker

The 2024 Census

Respondents - 52 people were identified as begging in the city on 01 August. Of those, 10 declined to answer questions, 5 were an apparent result of language barrier. 42 people engaged with the census though not all questions were answered by all people.

Nationality - Of the 42 people who were engaged over 36 identified as white UK nationals, (7 English). 4 people originated from Romania, 1 from Hungary and 1 from Poland. Over the last 5 years there has been a consistent presence of people believed to be Roma begging in the city. The street team regularly connects with people however there has never been an opportunity to provide assistance, as this is consistently refused. For the most part the begging appears organised however it appears to be family/community groups and not obviously exploitative or trafficked. During the census the team anticipated lower numbers as there is often a greater focus on Edinburgh during the festival.

Gender - The vast majority were male with only two females identified. The team is particularly sensitive to any indications that the women are being exploited. These are regular contacts with the street team and they are being encouraged to engage with the women's Connect Hub.

Age - Ages ranged from 25 to 64. There were no young or elderly people begging in the city at the time of the census.

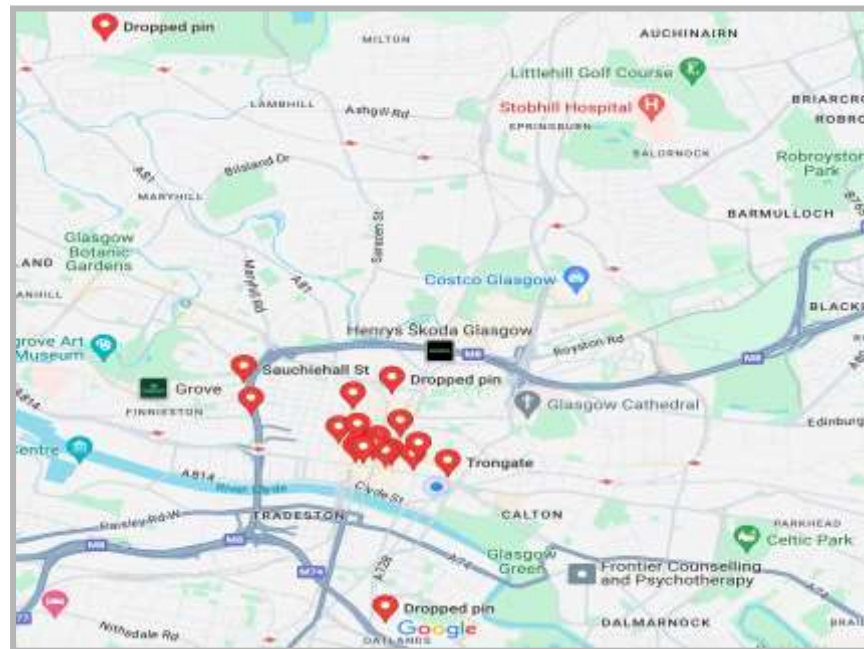
Location - There were over 30 locations where people were begging, most of these were clustered around the city centre, across the centre of Glasgow, south of George Square to the Clyde.

Sites tend to be where there is busy footfall and often close to traditionally cash sales like Greggs and smaller local supermarkets near cash machines. Begging is not illegal in Scotland though aggressive begging is, there is no evidence of people being or feeling threatened or harassed by people begging.

Glasgow City Centre -



Wider Glasgow View -



Abuse - A third of respondents reported having been subject to verbal abuse, a quarter disclosed being physically abused whilst begging. A third said this happens often, and a third occasionally. The majority of abuse is from members of the public with some instances involving local businesses and security staff. 7 people commented about disputes around begging pitches by other people begging.

Accommodation - 7 people were rough sleeping at the time of begging. This compares with 25 people identified as rough sleeping that week, highlighting the fact that not all those who beg are experiencing rooflessness ie. rough sleeping, and vice versa. Six people had their own accommodation, 1 person was using a local night shelter, 23 were in council funded accommodation including 11 Supported Accommodation, 5 temporary furnished flats and 7 B&Bs.

17 people said their current accommodation met their needs. The main areas that people said could be improved were, improved access (subject to curfews), cooking facilities, rules, staffing, safety, bedroom facilities. People reported not returning to their hotel accommodation by a designated time and being refused entry and forced to sleep rough and potentially losing their place. People also reported being required to leave their accommodation during the day, prompting them to beg as they had nothing else to do, or no place to go.

Service Access - The majority of people were accessing existing services; Street Team, Access Hub, Fairway Team, We See You provided by Simon Community. Other services included Housing First, Glasgow City Mission, Marie Trust, Social Bite, Abbey Chemist, TPS Harm Reduction Van, Complex Needs Team and 1 person was accessing Homeless Project Scotland.

Improvement - When asked what would make the greatest impact on improving their circumstances:

- 40% access to mental health services
- 34% accommodation
- 30% access to street pharmacy
- 31% access to emergency/crisis funds
- 16% social opportunities
- 13% welfare rights / harm reduction
- 10% banking support / dentist

Income - 27 people were able to say that they had control of their begging income. 5 people gave their earnings to friends and family and 6 people did not want to disclose. The majority of respondents said they earned less than £40 a day. This is likely to be a gross underestimate. We believe pre-covid income was in the region of up to £200 a day. The shift to card payments since covid may have resulted in reduced begging income.

Armed Services - There were 4 armed services veterans. People who served are eligible for additional support and specialist services including housing options.

Employment - No one declared any work in the last three months.

Bank Account - 5 people said they had no bank account. The Access Hub works with HSBC to provide people with bank accounts, a successful partnership that can overcome many of the barriers people face in relation to documentation, ID and addresses. This service can be delivered on the street with people if willing and able. Interventions on the street tend to be quick as people do not want to lose income by spending time with the teams.

How do you feel? - Depressed, low, terrible, unhappy, humiliated, horrible, don't care, embarrassed, afraid, don't like it, sad, a bit down, like sh*t, suicidal. There were some positives, people engaging with those who beg were nice and there was lots of positive engagement and support, it was for a purpose - not sitting in an empty flat, something to do.

Length of time begging, frequency, and reasons for begging - Fourteen of the 40 respondents describing how long they had been begging reported begging for at least two to five years, with thirteen people begging for between one and two years, and five people between six months and a year (Figure 1). 75% of those responding to their length of time begging had been doing so for at least a year. With regards to frequency of begging, thirteen people responded that they beg every day. 90% of respondents reported begging at least once a week (Figure 2).

How long have you been begging for?

40 responses

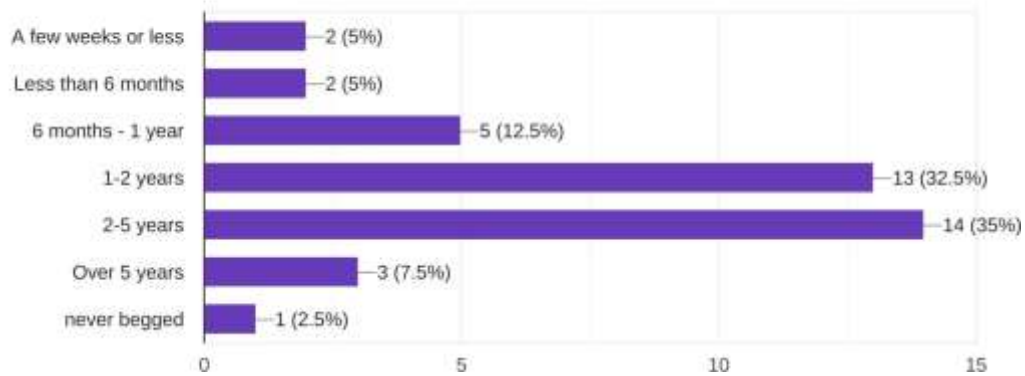


Figure 1. Length of time begging amongst begging census respondents.

How often do you beg?

40 responses

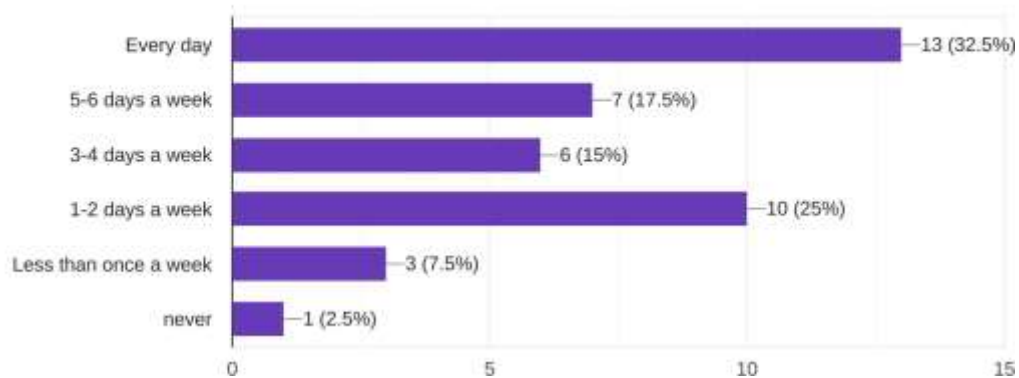


Figure 2. Frequency of begging amongst begging census respondents.

Reasons Why People are Begging

The most common reasons for begging were to fund substance and alcohol addictions, to remedy inadequate benefits and financial support, and due to poor mental health (Figure 3). A number of people spoke about boredom, isolation, nowhere to go and one commented about being 'kicked out' of their accommodation during the day, this may have been at Homeless Project Scotland?. Begging actually offered purpose, human interaction, meaning and income. Boredom and isolation were key factors in people returning to the city centre to beg, or for other reasons.

I used the Street Change fund to buy a TV (a luxury some might say) for a man I was supporting. After a considerable amount of time living on the streets, he was offered more settled accommodation and agreed to go although he was worried that after so long on the streets with people around him all of the time, he would struggle with the isolation and 'being in his own head'. The TV was purchased to serve as a distraction and this worked. He managed to maintain this accommodation until he moved into his own permanent tenancy and the TV went with him. Street Team Outreach Worker.

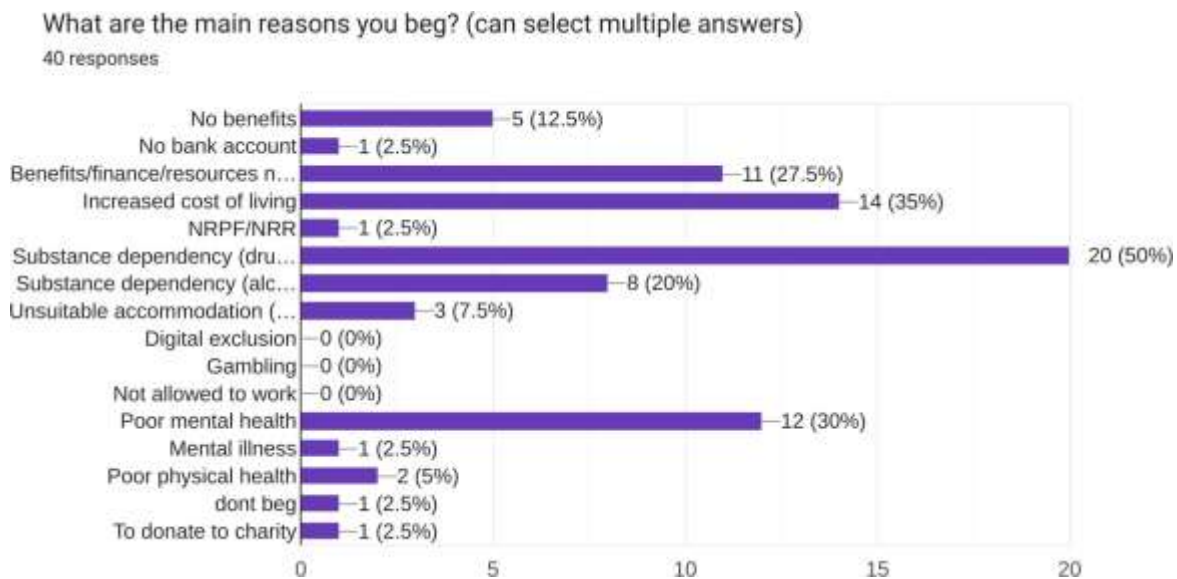


Figure 3. Reasons for begging amongst begging census respondents.

Summary

Overall the census reiterated what we already understood about the reasons for begging in Glasgow, the impact on people and the challenging circumstances people face. Substance use and addiction continues to be a significant driver of begging alongside poverty and a lack of involvement in meaningful activity and feeling purpose, combined with social isolation.

People on the streets experience significant hostility, including physical violence though on the whole the public and businesses are caring and supportive and there remains a high level of generosity in play.

The majority of people begging do have some form of accommodation though the quality, safety and isolation of that may drive people onto the streets. We were concerned to hear that curfews which we understood ended during covid appear to have resurfaced and that rules of accommodation services are there to suit the needs of the B&B provider, not the residents.

Regardless of the income being generated, the vast majority of people expressed negative feelings about begging, from embarrassed to feeling scared. We did not find any evidence of exploitation by others though we suspect that partners or money lenders and drug dealers may be driving some of this activity.

Most of the people on the streets had been begging for significant periods of time and there was no simple or easy answer to enable people to make the choice not to beg.

The Street Team are in regular contact with people on the streets and often have the ability to resolve issues, including finding a safe place to stay. There is some evidence that people may choose to sleep rough because they feel safer on the streets than in a city centre B&B whilst at the same time they may receive further donations when pubs/clubs close and late into the night.

What Next

Winter Planning - We are mindful that winter is coming, despite a summer that can best be described as a washout. Being on the streets for prolonged periods in hot, cold or wet weather is fundamentally unhealthy. Going forward we will maintain a focus on street activities in our winter planning and partnership arrangements. We will further ensure that Street Support Glasgow is fully up to date and encourage people to use this resource to identify key support services and resources.



Alternative Giving - Street Change enables city centre teams accessible fund to prevent people having to return to rough sleep alternatives to begging. We will refresh the online impact of Street Change Glasgow, promote the use and support of QR codes across the city centre and work with partners to address issues that reduce begging.

To date we have partnered with more than 40 bars and restaurants who are promoting Street Change Glasgow through displaying our QR codes. We want to continue to develop relationships with Best Bar None venues - displaying more posters, adding a pound to your bill etc, organising benefits gigs.

Increasing Support - Many of the people on the streets have multiple and complex needs. The Street Team already provides harm reduction support and IEP along with income maximisation, support to access services and practical help to improve safety. We will seek to increase the engagement and impact through Street cycles volunteers specifically targeted at supporting people begging.



Women - Although the number of women on the street

is low there are significant additional risks of exploitation, trafficking and predatory behaviours that women are exposed to. The Street Team will as a priority, increase support to prevent the need for begging and support women to utilise the Connect Hub.

Understanding the Environment - We will undertake regular street begging counts and commit to an annual survey to gather more data and information.



Beggars and Choices

Developing a city-wide strategy to address the harms of begging in Edinburgh

January 2024

Combatting the causes and effects of homelessness

Our vision is that everyone should have a safe place to live and access to the support they need.

For over five decades we've been developing and delivering services with and for people who experience homelessness. We tailor what we offer to what people need. We are always looking for ways to give more and make life a little better for the people we work with. Please get in touch if you would like to help.

Simon Community Scotland

Tel: 0131 344 0825

Email: hello@simonscotland.org

www.SimonScotland.org

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Background

In April 2023, the City of Edinburgh Council commissioned a Strategic Coordinator for Street Begging for a minimum of 2 years. This role is hosted by Streetwork at Simon Community Scotland, with the objective of delivering a strategy to enhance Edinburgh's response to Street Begging. The role reports to the Begging Strategy Group; Community Justice, Safety Partnership and to Edinburgh Council Commissioning Team.

In developing this draft strategy, we have drawn on Simon Community's long relationships with people who beg in Edinburgh, as well as our connections with local businesses, public services and all the other citizens who don't beg but are concerned for or by those who do. In developing this strategy we have recognised that begging can be a divisive issue, however there is a universal understanding that begging can be harmful and undignified.

How we developed this strategy

The research phase for the strategy comprised four key elements:

1. Review of the Scottish and Edinburgh legislative and policy context to ensure that any recommendations are compliant and advanced existing policy
2. Direct engagement with people who beg and our teams who provide day-to-day support, year round
3. Direct engagement with stakeholders who do not beg but are concerned by the potential impact on the individuals, the local economy and the community - public services, businesses and the general public.
4. Review of literature and best practice from around the world, and analysis of historic local data.

The nature of street begging in Edinburgh

Streetwork at Simon Community Scotland works each day with individuals begging on the streets of Edinburgh. In 2022 we provided support to an average of 98 individuals each week with our Street Outreach team flexing and responding to seasonal changes as required.

It's typical for us to see peaks in those begging during key holiday times such as Easter and the Festival in August, as well into Christmas as there is increased footfall in and around the City Centre.



Through our regular Street Begging Census, we take the opportunity to formally and empirically supplement the knowledge we gain from working alongside people who beg every day. Our Street Team and Street Cycles Team engage with people on the street every day and our experience, reach and connections with people on the streets is second to none. From our work in 2022, we confirmed the main reason for people begging on the streets of Edinburgh to be poverty, insufficient benefits and employability to provide for basic necessities with perceived lack of opportunities and pathways out of destitution.

Of those we support whilst street begging, typically half are UK nationals with others coming predominantly from states in the east of European Economic Area Eastern. With the changing political landscape, post-Covid and post-Brexit, we have observed this ratio swinging towards a greater proportion of non-UK nationals street begging in Edinburgh as it becomes more difficult to access benefits and support, including accommodation, for those considered to have no recourse to public funds.

Understanding stakeholder interests and their concerns

With our experience of working both in Edinburgh and across Scotland, we have unique insight into the wide range of stakeholders who are interested in begging, with those on the streets at the heart of it all as we work to support them.

Colleagues across the 3rd Sector and Public Bodies are vital in supporting us to find solutions which are trauma informed and person centred.

For those with a broader interest across Edinburgh, we've had the recent opportunity to be involved in

the Hunter Square Working Group with representation from a broad cross-section of the community, including those with commercial interests. From this Group, our pilot initiative *Wellbeing Wednesdays* was developed, with positive feedback from all stakeholders with great outcomes for over 25 people accessing support. For the local community we were able to achieve reduced instances of anti-social behaviour and wider understanding of the challenges facing those we support.



With our well publicised Freephone line, we have a direct line from the public in Edinburgh with a good sense of their perception of begging. The majority of people are found to be sympathetic to those who have fallen on hard times, though people on the street also report experiencing verbal, and sometimes physical abuse.

Key Findings from Focus Groups and Stakeholder Consultation

A series of focus groups, multi-agency meetings, consultations and conversation cafes have been created to gather data from third sector agencies, statutory services and city centre businesses and stakeholders. Key begging data has been collected and presented to Shape, Community Justice and Safety Partnership, Homelessness Task Force, Hunter Square and Nicholson Square working groups offering consultation, discussion insight and has informed the proposed strategy, objectives, action and implementation plan.

- Ensure that Edinburgh Begging Strategy meets the needs of those people with lived and living experience of begging
- Places and Community Spaces should complement the infrastructure of the city which discourages negative use of space (people have the right to beg but not anti-social behaviour)
- Edinburgh Begging Strategy needs to meet the needs of businesses and residents in Edinburgh city centre through offering adequate incident reporting pathway
- Reduce stigma and get messaging right for people who are begging - communications strategy. Educate members of the public on causes and effects of begging.
- Create pathways out of poverty for those who are UK Nationals - immediate needs (benefits/banking/provisions/self care) and employability/education.
- Create pathways out of poverty for those who are Non UK National - linking with specialist services to understand rights, causes, effects of begging. Explore and create options for people.
- Financial Strategy - to include investment from stakeholders and functional and effective Alternative/Diverted Giving/StreetChange
- Explore apprenticeship and employability schemes with DWP and SSS
- Sustainability of Strategy will be dependent on a City Wide Response, including 1st, 2nd and 3rd tier stakeholders.
- Establish a commissioned street based outreach team for people begging - addressing immediate, medium and long term solutions for people who wish to have alternatives to begging.
- Create *Safe Spaces* for building relationships and community for people who beg who may be isolated.
- Influence legislation policy and practice in Scotland, across justice, human rights, welfare, immigration and housing.

Summary conclusions and recommendations

Begging is not a safe, healthy or dignified activity. There are serious mental health and physical health impacts that can reduce quality and quantity of life. We recognise that retailers, tourists and members of the public would wish to see an end to begging in the city, and we share that view. What motivates us to end street begging is multifaceted, however that shared desire to prevent begging can unite us all in finding solutions that work. By implementing an effective Edinburgh Begging Strategy collectively we can make huge strides towards reducing and ending the need for people to beg and in doing so we can significantly improve people's life chances and opportunities.

Based on our research and experience, we believe that collectively, following these recommended actions with appropriate resources and shared accountability, Edinburgh can become a city at the vanguard of taking a trauma informed approach to reducing the need for begging and the harms it creates.

We want to achieve a future where agencies and communities unite in addressing the causes and consequences of begging and where people who are experiencing challenges are supported to access and receive the help they need.

- Change public perception and understanding of begging in the city
- Provide accessible and responsive support to people who beg, and prevent people from having to beg.
- Work collaboratively with retailers, businesses and residents in responding positively and effectively to begging concerns in their communities.
- No one is forced to beg and the city collectively adopts a zero tolerance approach to human trafficking and exploitation.
- The implementation plan is co-produced with people on the streets; their experiences, choices, needs and wants.

Together we can significantly:

- Reduce the harms experienced by people who beg by end of 2025
- Reduce the negative community impact of begging by end of 2026
- Reduce the number of people who beg by end of 2026 and,
- Improve public and policy understanding of the reasons why people beg by mid 2025

Draft Implementation Plan

Recommendation 1 Change public perception and understanding of begging in the city				
Objective	Suggested Actions	Resource	Outcome	Measure of success
<p>Increase awareness of the causes and consequences of begging.</p> <p>Produce a positive and sensitive narrative.</p>	<p>Develop & promote information, support & signposting services</p> <p>Ensure public aware of strategy plan and actions</p> <p>Promote alternative giving initiative</p>	<p>Branded Street Begging Campaign</p> <p>Website</p> <p>Align campaign with existing events</p>	<p>Significantly improve public and policy understanding of the reasons why people beg by mid 2027</p>	<p>Participation in Public Consultation Sessions</p> <p>StreetChange Engagement</p> <p>Freephone Line Monitoring and evaluation</p>
Recommendation 2 Provide accessible and responsive support to support people on the streets and prevent people from having to beg.				
Objective	Suggested Actions	Resource	Outcome	Measure of success
<p>Reduce the need for people beg</p>	<p>Create effective networks of agencies that have or could have a street support presence</p> <p>Create effective infrastructure for alternative giving and alternative cash options</p>	<p>Coordinate and communicate with existing agencies and partners in the city</p> <p>Income maximisation strategies that avoid sanctions</p>	<p>Create an effective interagency person centred approach</p> <p>Significantly reduce the number of people begging by the end of 2026.</p>	<p>Partnership Network Event</p> <p>Street Begging Counts and Consultations - biannual report or street begging data.</p>

Recommendation 3 Work collaboratively with retailers, businesses and residents in responding positively and effectively to begging concerns in their communities.

Objective	Suggested Actions	Resource	Outcome	Measure of success
Businesses and residents understand how to access support and positively engage with people begging near their premises	<p>Develop training and awareness raising packages.</p> <p>Involve businesses to support street change and street design.</p> <p>Businesses to consider their role in development of employability options.</p>	Employability opportunities that avoid sanctions	Provide bespoke training for businesses, services and stakeholders	<p>Encourage businesses to support strategy</p> <p>Report to Hunter Square/ Tron Square People and Place Groups. Meet quarterly.</p>

Recommendation 3 Work collaboratively with retailers, businesses and residents in responding positively and effectively to begging concerns in their communities.

Objective	Suggested Actions	Resource	Outcome	Measure of success
Reduce the likelihood of people who beg engaging in harmful or offending behaviour (not resort to crime)	<p>Engage with HMP Edinburgh for Prison Liberation Planning.</p> <p>Ensure hospital in reach & Discharge Planning.</p>	Prison and hospital in reach/ outreach with existing services, building new partnerships	20% reduction in reports of anti-social behaviour and aggressive begging in city centre	<p>Police Scotland data reflects reduction in anti-social behaviour</p> <p>ISN monitoring and evaluation of health, housing and harm reduction of the begging population</p>

Recommendation 4 The implementation of strategy action plan is co-produced by people on the streets; their experiences, choices, needs and wants.

Objective	Suggested Actions	Resource	Outcome	Measure of success
People whose lives are street-focused are fully involved in designing services and approaches that affect their lives	Street-based engagement with people who beg, creating a community panel of peers with living experience.	Street Outreach Services - Homelessness Provider	Surveys, conversation stations, outreach data, community panel of lived and living experience	Data Monitoring and Evaluation with those with lived and living experience. Review Impact of strategy and scope for continuation post 2025. Stories and testimonies

Recommendation 5 No one is forced to beg and the city collectively adopts a zero tolerance approach to human trafficking and exploitation.

Objective	Suggested Actions	Resource	Outcome	Measure of success
Noone is forced to beg in Edinburgh (exploitation/trafficking or modern slavery)	Engage with specialist services eg SOHTIS, Migrant Help, to ensure rights potential survivors of exploitation are identified and supported. Develop community in-reach specialist service (hubs and partnerships).	Home Is A Journey - Supporting People to Return to Place of Safety Community Outreach and Specialist Service Response	Significantly reduce the harms experienced by people who are begging by end of 2025	Digital mapping and street engagement; Safety Pin Street Support - ensuring that all people who are street focused and those supporting those street begging have access to relevant support. Street Support Evaluation.

Staffing

To deliver the strategy, two posts are required - the Strategic Coordinator post that has led the development of this strategy and in the next phase, will lead the implementation and further development; and a specialist in our Street Team who will work directly and exclusively with people who beg. We believe that to maximise the opportunity, both posts should be full time. This will allow the strategic postholder adequate time to meet and work alongside the wide range of vital stakeholders and ensure the campaign and alternative giving work are given the right level of input needed to make this significant investment a success.

The new operational post will provide face to face support, capacity build across the street team and volunteers, manage the biannual census, contribute to and deliver training, facilitate engagement of people who beg in strategy implementation. It too requires to be full time so that it can work flexibly across the week, including the need for evening, late night economy and weekend engagement and support.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The implementation, progress and monitoring and evaluation will follow the EFQM model. This promotes a cyclical process of evaluating current performance and identifying ways of improvement to achieve desired results. SCS will resource this and no additional funds are requested for this work.

We have already collected really robust baseline data that informs how we've set our ambition for the city's strategy. We will use this benchmark and the qualitative and quantitative outcomes and measures of success in the action plan, to monitor and evaluate our impact. This will include a full stakeholder evaluation and will include people with lived and living experience of begging.

Our approach will allow us to remain agile as the implementation develops. We propose monitoring progress at no less than 6 monthly checkpoints and evaluating if the approach is working. If we identify areas of development then we will refine our approach to help achieve desired outcomes stated above.

The action and implementation strategy will report to Edinburgh Community Safety and Justice Partnership biannually.