



# SHARING SPACES

A guide for city-centre organisations

How to work with your colleagues and with people who may be homeless near your premises to provide safety and support for everyone.

Produced by It Takes a City (Cambridge) March 2022

# IT TAKES A CITY

A CAMBRIDGE HOMELESSNESS PARTNERSHIP



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## INTRODUCTION

We understand that people who are begging or may appear to be street homeless near your premises can negatively affect your organisation. For example, reports of theft, damage to property, or aggressive behaviour towards staff and customers.

The issue of homelessness is complex, challenging and constantly changing. Unfortunately, there isn't a simple answer for what is the 'right' thing to do. Most important are the values behind your chosen approach. We hope that the information provided in this guide will help your organisation:

- Develop your own positive approach to working with people who are homeless
- Improve your response to situations which involve people who are homeless
- Increase your understanding of homelessness
- Inform your staff about the support available for people who are homeless

This guide has been coproduced in partnership with Cambridge BID (Business Improvement District), Cambridgeshire Police, Cambridge City Council, local businesses, those with lived experience of homelessness and the Cambridge Street Outreach Team.

We believe there are a number of important elements to think about when working with people who appear to be homeless:

1. Informed signposting (finding the right help)
2. Values
3. Understanding homelessness and avoiding blame
4. Consistency
5. Building relationships
6. Managing risk
7. Giving food or money

This guide provides general guidance under each of these headings, and a further section about what to do in specific situations. It also introduces the bigger picture of homelessness and the work under way in Cambridge.

The mobile-friendly website [www.streetsupport.net/cambridgeshire](http://www.streetsupport.net/cambridgeshire) has been set up to provide comprehensive advice on how to find help and how to give help and has recently been extended to cover the whole County, in partnership with all District Councils. The front-page also provides quick links to:

- [Street Link](#) – to alert support agencies to someone sleeping rough
- [Cambridge Street Aid](#) – to give money in a way that helps homeless people directly
- [It Takes a City](#) – to find out about the other services and initiatives

We refer to Street Support Cambridgeshire frequently throughout this guide.

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## MAIN MESSAGES

There is a lot of information in this guide, but please read it thoroughly and discuss with your colleagues. If anything is unclear, or if you would like to arrange a more detailed briefing, please get in touch:

[info@ittakesacity.org.uk](mailto:info@ittakesacity.org.uk).

Here is a quick summary of our main messages:

1. Nobody chooses to become homeless. Homelessness is complex and street-homelessness represents only a small part of the homeless population in Cambridge.
2. Begging and homelessness are not the same thing. We need to approach from a place of support.
3. There is a lot being done to end homelessness in Cambridge, working together with people who have personal insight.
4. When working with people who appear to be homeless, values, consistency, signposting, and relationship building are important.
5. Daily meals are available for people who are rough sleeping in Cambridge, provided by reputable organisations offering professional advice and services.
6. Street Support Cambridgeshire, (<https://streetsupport.net/cambridgeshire>), provides a one stop shop for information on support available for homeless people in Cambridge (and other cities), including where to **find** help, and how you can **give** help.
7. If someone is behaving in a way which is consistently detrimental to your business, enforcement action can be taken. We recommend contacting the police or the City Council's Community Safety Team.

## GENERAL GUIDANCE

### GIVE INFORMED SIGNPOSTING

- If you are going to speak to someone who is homeless (and it is safe to do so) inform yourself about support available in the city.
- The starting point for many people needing help is the **Cambridge City Council Housing Advice Service** for advice on housing, referral to accommodation providers, and a place to register a homelessness application. Many people you come across will already have taken this step, or are unwilling to do so, or will have struggled to take the steps needed. It is unlikely that any are not in contact with services.
  - Office hours – call **01223 457918** between 9am and 5pm
  - Office hours emergency support – call **01223 457918** between 9am and 3.45pm for an immediate assessment
  - **Emergency outside the above times – call 0330 053 8109**
- The **Cambridge Street Outreach Team** is commissioned to provide support, working with anybody with a street presence. Advice and help in any situation can be sought from them.
  - Office hours – call **01223 366 292** between 8am and 4pm
  - Email – [sot.cambridge@cgl.org.uk](mailto:sot.cambridge@cgl.org.uk).



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- You can ask someone what help they need and use the **Street Support Cambridgeshire** website to direct them to the appropriate service. <https://streetsupport.net/cambridgeshire>. In the 'Find Help' section are details of support for specific needs (such as food, showers, or housing).
- We will be distributing window stickers highlighting the information service Street Support Cambridge and the donation scheme Cambridge Street Aid – please put them up!

## STAY TRUE TO YOUR VALUES

- The values that inform how we work include co-production<sup>1</sup>, collaboration, community based, change oriented, achievable, sustainable, holistic.
- You may have 'organisational behaviours' already, or your own personal values. We would ask that your approach to people who are homeless is guided by these. The intention behind your action is just as important as what you do.
- It can be useful to ask yourself what outcome you would really like and why. E.g., for the person to be moved-on, or get the support they need.

## UNDERSTAND HOMELESSNESS AND AVOID BLAME

- Homelessness is complex, and nobody chooses to become homeless. We believe that if everyone better understood the bigger picture it would help us to end it.
- We can deliver more detailed briefings for your staff. If you are interested, please contact us: [info@ittakesacity.org.uk](mailto:info@ittakesacity.org.uk)
- We'd ask people not to attribute blame but to inform themselves of the reasons behind homelessness.

## BE CONSISTENT

- It is frustrating for people who are homeless if an organisation changes their approach regularly. For example, if one member of staff asks them to move-on, but another says hello and gives them a cup of tea.
- Whatever approach you decide upon, make sure it is known and followed by all staff. If possible, have one point of contact for anything relating to homelessness.

## BUILD MUTUAL RELATIONSHIPS

- It may take time for the situation to improve for people who are rough sleeping near your premises. During this time, it can help to build a relationship with them based on mutual trust and respect. Keep conversations to 'neutral' topics which don't ask for personal and potentially traumatic information to be shared.
- Staff who volunteer with local services that support homeless people are better placed to build a relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> Co-production – people with experience of homelessness contributing to service design



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## RISK AND WHEN NOT TO ENGAGE

- Your personal safety is important. As you would with any member of the public, do not approach someone who you feel may pose a threat.
- Specifically, we would advise not to wake someone who is sleeping and not to move any refuse which may include drug paraphernalia (e.g., needles) or human waste without appropriate training and equipment.

## GIVING FOOD OR MONEY

- Giving food or money directly to people on the streets is a personal choice. Meals are available for people who are rough sleeping in Cambridge, every day. You can see a full list of services available on [www.streetsupport.net/cambridgeshire](http://www.streetsupport.net/cambridgeshire).
- This doesn't always mean that everyone can access provision, but there is a consensus from people who work in the homelessness sector that giving money, food, or other items directly to people doesn't always help them. This is because it is hard to know someone's full situation and needs. Sometimes it can enable people to stay on the streets and delay or stop them visiting services where they can get the professional support they need, to get off the streets permanently including referrals into accommodation.
- If you would like to support individual people financially, you can donate to **Cambridge Street Aid** by going to [www.streetsupport.net/cambridgeshire](http://www.streetsupport.net/cambridgeshire) and clicking on Cambridge Street Aid. Local agencies can apply to Cambridge Street Aid for grants for items for specific individuals which will help them get off and stay off the streets. This can include IT to help them get into employment, furniture, travel costs etc. You can also donate items or fundraise for a homeless charity – see Give Help on [www.streetsupport.net/cambridgeshire](http://www.streetsupport.net/cambridgeshire).
- If your organisation has food which would normally be thrown away, contact [www.cambridgesustainablefood.org/business-surplus-food-donation](http://www.cambridgesustainablefood.org/business-surplus-food-donation)

## SPECIFIC SITUATIONS

This section provides guidance on what to do in some situations often linked to homelessness. Individual circumstances are often more complex than they may first seem, so unfortunately there isn't a straightforward answer. This is not a comprehensive list. We would ask people to remain true to their values and use their best judgement in each situation.

## IF YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT SOMEBODY NEW

- Most people who are street homeless or begging will be known to the local services, but it is important that we monitor this.
- If you see someone sleeping rough who you have not seen before, go to <https://streetsupport.net/cambridgeshire/> and follow the advice under "Help someone sleeping rough" on the home page: this way local services can be alerted.
- We would rather many people report their concerns about a rough sleeper than assume somebody else has done so.



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## AGGRESSIVE OR DAMAGING BEHAVIOUR

- If someone who is begging or appears to be homeless near your premises is behaving in a persistent way that impacts your business negatively, Cambridgeshire Police have produced a guide for businesses, to use when dealing with anti-social behaviour. It is intended to direct businesses to report ASB in the most effective way to the correct people/agency, and to encourage the reporting of criminal offences.
- Examples of ASB covered by the guide include, rough sleeping, begging, discarded needles, discarded property in doorways, urination, banned customers / unwanted visitors.

## EMERGENCIES

- For anyone who you feel is in a life-threatening situation please do as you would for any member of the public and ring 999.

## DOMESTIC ABUSE

- For anyone who reports domestic violence –National Domestic Abuse Helpline on 0808 2000 247 (24hrs)

## YOUNG PEOPLE

- For anyone who appears to be under the age of 18, call the Cambridgeshire County Council Safeguarding Team: Office hours – on 0345 045 5203 8am to 6pm; Out of hours – on 01733 234 724

## WINTER AND SUMMER

- More extreme weather conditions put people's health and lives at risk.
- In summer we would suggest you offer people water and encourage them to move into the shade.
- In winter, during severe weather, additional emergency accommodation is available and extra effort is made by all agencies to ensure that rough sleepers are found. Please follow the guidance on the front page of [www.streetsupport.net/cambridgeshire](http://www.streetsupport.net/cambridgeshire) to alert local agencies of anyone sleeping rough.

## UNDERSTANDING HOMELESSNESS IN CAMBRIDGE

Everybody has the right to a decent, safe, secure, and permanent home. We would consider anyone who does not have this to be experiencing a form of homelessness. Often people think about street homelessness first, as this is the most visible, but this represents the smallest segment of the homeless population. We don't like to categorise people, but it can help to explain what we mean by different types of homelessness.

## OVERVIEW

The City Council has statutory duties to provide housing advice to all, to prevent homelessness where possible, and to provide accommodation to those homeless people who are "owed a housing duty" by fulfilling the statutory tests of being "homeless, eligible, in priority need and not intentionally homeless". Fulfilling the tests is a complex subject. However, most are eligible (immigration rules apart) for discretionary provision funded,



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arranged or allocated by the Council. Most find it very difficult to find private rented accommodation in the normal course due to high rentals and unwilling landlords. Finally, there is also a very small privately funded social housing sector working independently from the Council.

The Council and local Housing Associations provide publicly funded social housing in Cambridge and the City Council maintains a Register of all those in housing need, according to their level of need, allocating available social housing according to a strict queuing system. Not many single homeless people apply to go on the Register due to the waiting time.

The City Council and an array of local agencies work together to provide accommodation and support options for those that are not eligible for support, using discretionary funds and specific annual grants from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The work of It Takes a City, and the homeless agencies referred to in this guide, are mainly dedicated to this effort. Although it seems large to all concerned, and publicly visible, it is much the smaller part of the work of the Council mentioned above.

The County Council commissions the provision of supported accommodation in a variety of hostels run by well-known local charities in Cambridge. This funds part of the support element of hostel provision: housing and other related support costs are funded through Housing Benefit supplemented with charitable funds. A new commissioning strategy called “Street to Home” has recently been adopted within which an integrated support service will be provided independent of the housing journey. New contracts are expected to be awarded in April 2022.

The City Council, using local funds and government grants, together with local agencies, have worked extremely hard, and effectively, in creating a large number of new accommodation options for rough sleepers to ensure that those supported under “Everybody In” do not return to the streets. This work will need to continue for some time to come. In addition, the City Council has just approved its Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-26, with a comprehensive programme of work to prevent rough sleeping and provide relief where needed.

## LOCAL AGENCIES

There are many voluntary groups, charities, commissioned service providers and statutory agencies offering support to homeless people in Cambridge and surrounding districts. Most can be found when searching for specific advice or services on [www.streetsupport.net/cambridgeshire](http://www.streetsupport.net/cambridgeshire).

Many street homeless people understand the “system” and the services available very well.

We cannot give any specific advice here as to which organisations you should support. Most voluntary groups, charities and commissioned service providers have their own networks of supporters and sponsors: you may already connect with some.

## VERIFIED ROUGH SLEEPERS

These are those witnessed and identified as sleeping rough at least once by the Street Outreach Team (SOT) commissioned by the City Council, currently run by the national organisation Change Grow Live. These figures



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are collected daily, quarterly, and annually. The annual count (those found sleeping rough one November morning) rolls up into the national figures and is published as “the rough sleeping count.” Although a useful indicator of homelessness, it represents the tip of the iceberg. The annual published count for Cambridge has been growing over the last few years from 9 in 2010 to 33 in 2019, though this is down from a peak of 40 in 2016 and has reduced further following the Everyone In campaign. The total verified across the year is around 150-200 people. These figures are assiduously collected, assessed, and published.

## HIDDEN HOMELESS

These are those who may or may not be known to services but who do not have somewhere to call home and have not been verified as rough sleepers. Some may be sleeping rough whether on the street, in cars, sheds, tents, etc. Some may be under a proper roof, but it is not their home, for example sofa surfers. A large number approach services intermittently every year but find no immediate solution. This is a complex and large-scale picture of frequent unsatisfied, but often unknown, housing need. At the time of writing, the offer of immediate and safe COVID-19 accommodation has provided many with a more immediate solution and the time to find the permanent accommodation they need.

## HOSTEL AND SUPPORTED HOUSING RESIDENTS

Those in short term (up to 2 years) in shared accommodation, with support, waiting for a home to go to. This numbers about 350 people at any one time. The annual move-on to permanent accommodation, their own home, should be up to 350 people (in the ideal world of no evictions or abandonments). It is understood that the true figure is very much lower due to a) the lack of houses to go to, and b) the lack of support that can be provided to make a house a permanent home. A combination of the new County Council supported housing strategy of “Street to Home”, and the City Council’s new Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2021-26 is built around the recognition that the current system does not work for everyone and that new ways of providing the street to home journey are needed.

## HOMELESSNESS AND BEGGING

Not everyone who begs is homeless, and not everyone who is street-homeless would beg. There are also organised and criminal begging groups which operate in cities. Begging is as complex as homelessness, and more work is being done to understand this in Cambridge. We would consider anyone who is homeless and/or begging as being vulnerable and in need of support (such as accessing substance recovery services).

## WHY PEOPLE BECOME HOMELESS

Anyone can become homeless. Research says the most frequent reasons why people become homeless in the UK are related to relationship breakdown or loss of private tenancy (which sometimes means people who have been unfairly evicted). Whilst everyone can become homeless, the core of those remaining on the street have been subject to a series of traumas.

There are other factors in the UK which can contribute to someone becoming homeless and make it harder for people who are homeless to see their situation improve. These include:



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- Not enough social housing
- Social housing stock being privately owned and managed
- Not enough affordable housing
- Building houses but not building neighbourhoods & social infrastructure
- People not being part of a community or other social support networks
- Cuts to local government budgets
- Reforms to the welfare system
- Wealth distribution
- Cyclical poverty and associated patterns of behaviours