

# **Support Don't Punish: A holistic harm reduction centred approach to working with people who use drugs and live street-based lifestyles**

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# City Centre Policing Context

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**844** incidents of  
begging and  
vagrancy

**818** incidents of  
shoplifting

**616** illegal drug  
possessions

**1,167** public  
order offences

**9/10** arrestees  
(n=**885**) tested  
positive for heroin  
and/or (crack)  
cocaine



# Research Context

- Commissioned to:
  - Establish whether the Street Engagement Hub has reduced begging and anti-social behavior in the city centre
  - Identify whether the Hub enables service users to engage with services, reduce harm and move away from a street-based lifestyle



# From Enforcement to Support

In the past, most of the people that came to the Hub had been arrested previously when we were doing the enforcement around the begging. But **we realised that that type of enforcement was unsustainable. It wasn't practical and it was a revolving door.** So, we just needed a different approach. . . . You could say to someone on the street, you know, "You're committing an offence, you can be arrested for it. **We don't want to arrest you. We've got all these services available.** However, if you choose not to get any help and you carry on doing it, then at some point, it's likely you'll be arrested." (Street Engagement Police Officer)

**Do you feel like you were pushed to go to it?** No. I was advised that it would be beneficial for me just to access the services, . . . because **I was in a very bad way. I was very poorly. A lot of people didn't think I was going to live, me included.** (Male, 30s)

**STREET ENGAGEMENT HUB**  
Our aim is to help you access services so you can live a safe and healthy life.

Name: .....

A referral has been made for you at:  
**Mustard Tree, 110 Oldham Road,  
Ancoats M4 6AG**

On ..... between ..... and .....

If you need help getting to the session telephone / text:  
**07393 781598 / 07393 782158**

Ready to help you will be representatives from:  
DRUGS & ALCOHOL SERVICES,  
HOUSING & BENEFITS ADVICE, CHARITIES & FIRST AID

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL GREATER MANCHESTER POLICE



# Street Engagement Hub Data

## Hub Attendees

- Average of **13** people per day (minimum 2, maximum 27)
- 2022 **332** (284 men/48 women)
- 2023 **322** (275 men/47 women)
- 2024 **516** (458 men/58 women)

## Treatment Data (2024)

- **113** individuals assessed
- **86** prescribed OST (19 opiates only, 67 opiates & crack)
- **60** Issued with Naloxone
- **44** Screened for BBVs
- **6** Hep C+ referred to treatment
- [In addition, Hep C Nurses tested **113** people, 18 Hep C+]

# Rapid Prescribing

It was very quick actually, because I got here, they saw me straight away, and **within an hour they'd got me on a script for the next day.** I come here on the Thursday and was picking my script up on the Friday morning. So, it was good, really fast, **it usually takes three weeks to get on the script,** but I just come here, and they got them straight away, the next day. So, you can't ask for any better. (Male, 40s)

**I went on the Thursday, and the script was there Friday.** [. . .] If you go to any other agencies, you're talking weeks, **if you go to [treatment provider] itself, you have to book an appointment to see a doctor, it's maybe a week or two** but because I came straight here, it's here the next day. They've been so helpful. (Male, 50s)

They're processing it now, they're doing it now. **I'll be back on it today,** pretty quick that, isn't it? **that's proper important, it means you're not sat on the street rattling for drugs.** How long have you been off your script then? Seven days, since I left [temporary accommodation] because of the drug debt and got back on the street. **It's made me really, really, really ill.** (Male, 40s)

# Reducing Health Harms Through Increasing Engagement with Health Care Services

... this is **the first time I've ever had my Hep C** [test] and I'm 48 and I've also had both my COVIDs [vaccines] and that's through this Hub. (Male, 40s)

I was **homeless for 11 years and coming here saved my life.** [...] I ended up with an ulcer on this leg, on my right leg. That got really badly infected. I ended up with sepsis to start with. It turned to septicaemia, so I had full on blood poisoning. I was touching death. I don't say that lightly. I had stage two hypothermia. The Hep C nurses were always on my case. Housing. CGL. St John's. St John's were brilliant with me. **If it wasn't for them, I daresay I wouldn't have my legs now.** That's gospel truth that. (Male, 30s)



# More Positive Police Relationships

I think the way they're [the police] doing it now is **a more positive experience than the way they were doing it, where they were just arresting you.** At least this way, you know, they're giving you the opportunity to try and get housing, benefits, and whatever else sorted out. (Male, 50s)

You're not looking at them as, "Are they just there to arrest me?" They're here to hopefully try and put **a more stable system in place for the homeless, so that they're not vulnerable on the streets,** they're not getting beaten up, they're not dying on the streets. (Male, 50s)

**... for the first time, I've had people from the street community supporting police action,** four or five victims onboard, willing to give statements through the action of the street engagement team. (Street Engagement Police Officer)



# Benefits of a co-located multi-agency Hub model

It's a good thing because you can get everything done while you're here. **You might only come here for one thing but end up getting three or four different things sorted out at the same time.** (Male, 40s)

... we've seen people from coming into the Hub having nothing, [who have gone on] to have a script, to benefits being reinstated, to actually **being accommodated** - which is a massive, massive journey! It happened in the space of less than a couple of hours, you know, for someone. So, I think that is invaluable. (Street Engagement Hub Manager)

**Interviewer: So, I was just wondering, what's the view on the street like about the Hub?** Yeah. Really good. Because every day all the services are in one place. So, you don't have to travel about [to] different places. So, it's all in one. So, they find it easier. **You can engage with Mustard Tree. Do your services and then get about your day, rather than going all over Manchester trying to get your prescriptions and appointments.** (Female, 30s)

## Has Manchester found an innovative way to tackle begging?

People caught begging on Manchester's streets are sent to the street engagement hub to get support rather than facing a fine. It's an idea that has the Met Police and government looking on with interest

LIAM GERAGHTY | 1 Jun 2023

## Conclusions

- Positive impact on the safety, health and wellbeing of people who are homeless
- Valuable co-located multi-agency service provision that maximises engagement and reduces harm
- Limited engagement with women
- More trauma-informed model of working
- Longer-term benefits limited by lack of suitable housing options (e.g., low threshold, women only, disabled access accommodation)