

**Decision Session - Executive Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods 12 October 2015**

(This decision will be taken in consultation with the Executive Member for Transport and Planning)

Report of the Assistant Director of Housing & Community Safety.

**Petition – To remove the bench arms installed on Rougier Street.  
Summary**

1. On 16<sup>th</sup> July 2015 the Council received a change.org e-petition with approximately 5400 signatures, of which approximately 3600 stated York as their location. The petition stated:

*‘Remove the anti-homeless bars in Rougier Street bus stop’*

2. The e-petition suggested that the bench arms were:

*‘Anti-homeless bars’ and that these bars - and spikes - have been increasingly used to deter homeless people from sleeping throughout the UK’.*

3. The supporting information went on to say that:

*‘Sadly, this is yet another move in a long line of "defensive architecture" aimed at deterring homeless people from sleeping in highly visible places. If City of York Council is so uncomfortable at the sight of homeless people - even terming it 'anti-social behaviour', they should intensify work to getting the help and housing required rather than decanting them out to the darker corners of York’*

**Recommendations**

4. The Executive Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods, in consultation with the Executive Member for Transport and Planning, is asked to:
  - a. Note the petition and the information set out within the report highlighting the reasons for installation of the bench arms;

- b. Agree option 1, to retain the bench arms, as set out at paragraph 25 of the report.

Reason – To ensure that the city continues to take a proactive approach to supporting individuals who are homeless, street drinkers or who find themselves in difficulty whilst at the same time ensuring that the benches are available for use by bus users and where possible be compliant with the guidance adopted by the council in the Streetscape Strategy & Guidance document.

## **Background**

5. It is clear from the information posted as part of the supporting information to the petition that the organiser believes that the benches in question are used by homeless people, however this is not the case. Yes, individuals may have slept on the benches, however they were predominantly individuals who have access to accommodation, or have chosen not to access accommodation and fall into the category of 'street drinkers' who used the benches during the day time early evening. This is not a location highlighted as used for 'rough sleeping' during the night.
6. The Rougier Street bus shelter is central to the bus network in York and the made the decision to install bars on the benches wasn't taken lightly. The problem presenting itself was that the location was being used by two groups of vulnerable people, whose uses of the facility were mutually exclusive. As a local authority we have a duty of care to both groups.
7. On the one hand, the bus shelter is used by many hundreds of bus passengers a day. The bus passengers represent a spectrum of society and include elderly people, people with medical conditions, young people, parents with pushchairs and so on. Many of these people need to be able to sit down when they are waiting for their bus, and the benches in the shelter are for them to do this.
8. At the same time, the council also received numerous complaints from bus passengers about street drinkers at Rougier Street being aggressive, drinking in this location and fouling the footway, something which is a public health issue and needs to be tackled under any circumstance. Despite concerted efforts by the council and our partners to support the individuals as well as to minimise the anti-social behaviour at this location (e.g. issuing warnings and confiscating alcohol), individuals weren't engaging with services and changing their behaviour.
9. The council therefore had a situation where the benches were not being used by those they were intended for, complaints were being received about the often aggressive and ant-social behaviour of the street drinkers

that were using the benches and they were not engaging with the support that was in place.

10. Having consulted with the Police about the problems at Rougier Street – and the Council’s own Anti-Social Behaviour team, it was felt that the most appropriate action to tackle the street drinking problem at Rougier Street was either to remove the benches entirely or fit them with arms/ underbars. Removing the benches would harm all users of the passenger shelter, many of whom are elderly or have restricted mobility (or may simply be carrying heavy shopping), so the action taken was to (a) put arms on the benches/ bars underneath them and (b) to improve the cleaning regime for the shelters to tackle the public health issues – and this is the action we took.
11. In 2014 the council adopted the ‘City of York Streetscape Strategy & Guidance’ document which covers all elements of street furniture. Part 3 of the guidance is associated with the provision of benches within the city and suggests that:

*‘The default standard throughout the city should be BS 8300 compliant and be between 450mm and 475mm in height; have a reasonably straight back and horizontal base; and, have arms to assist older people in particular’.*
12. The benches in the Rougier Street bus shelter had no arms to assist older people using the benches whilst waiting for the bus and therefore create a difficulty, especially for elderly users in using them.
13. It is also acknowledged that the street drinkers are themselves a vulnerable group, although in the main they have access to accommodation and are not homeless. Support is provided on an ongoing basis to not only the street drinkers who used these benches but also other street drinkers in the city. In terms of rough sleeping / homeless people, we are not aware that the shelter is used as a location to sleep rough overnight

### **Support to Street Drinkers**

14. The following list details the range of interventions available in the city to support street drinkers:
  - Substance Misuse team - Floating support for people in accommodation;
  - York Housing floating support scheme;
  - Alcohol Link worker - Peripatetic support for people with alcohol as their main support issue;

- Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) - Intensive support and works out innovative approaches to individuals who are multiply excluded from services;
  - Salvation Army Early Intervention Prevention team works with rough sleepers and street drinkers (where homeless) to access appropriate accommodation;
  - Lifeline - support around alcohol use 1-1 counselling, support groups and prescribing;
  - Oaktrees - Rehabilitation day programme taking people through steps 1-3 off the 12 step programme and linking people into the fellowships of AA to continue through to step 12) intensive group therapy lasting for 3 months and aftercare.
  - Carecent - Food service / breakfast club.
15. All of the above services work collaboratively to support service users. Substance Misuse team, Alcohol Link worker and MEAM worker all visit Carecent regularly to see customers. Carecent staff are also trained to be able to sign post and do Single Access Point referrals for people into support if required.
16. Those street drinkers that are homeless can also access all of the supported accommodation provision in York.
- Arc Light 39 beds
  - Peasholme 22
  - No Second Night Out - An emergency bed system for rough sleepers to help prevent new rough sleepers spending a second night on the streets (entry level services in resettlement pathway)

### **Homeless accommodation in York**

17. The council and its partners have a comprehensive approach to supporting those individuals who find themselves homeless or threatened with homelessness, rough sleepers and street drinkers.
18. The City's Homelessness Strategy sets out the main aims of the service which are:
- **Strategic aim 1.** Ensure people who are at risk of homelessness are aware of and have access to the services they may need to prevent it.
  - **Strategic aim 2.** Ensure the provision of, and fair access to, accommodation sufficient to meet the identified housing needs

- **Strategic aim 3.** Ensure that people with housing related support needs have these fully assessed and have access to service required to sustain successful independent living and prevent homelessness
- **Strategic aim 4.** Ensure the effective multi-agency and partnership working occurs across all services to prevent homelessness and provide appropriate accommodation and support to meet the needs of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- **Strategic Aim 5.** Deliver and develop early intervention strategies to tackle predicted trends in homelessness.

19. The petition suggests that homeless people in York “have nowhere to go” and as such installing the bench arms is deterring homeless people from sleeping rough in high visible locations. The clear position of the council is that no one should have to sleep rough.
20. City of York Council makes numerous interventions to ensure no one has to sleep on the streets. As part of the Resettlement Service we have over 90 “tier 1” hostel beds in York (for use by people who have been recently made homeless), including 8 “emergency” beds for individuals who are found sleeping rough, and over 50 “tier 2” beds for use by people who are longer term homeless. The ‘No Second Night Out’ initiative is specifically to assist people sleeping rough in the city and help them find a place in a hostel.

### **Support to Rough Sleepers**

21. The Primary aim of all homeless services is to prevent homelessness or help someone into accommodation in a planned way. The approach that the council take has been very successful in reducing the number of people homeless within the city. In 2014-15 there were 665 households who were prevented from becoming homeless, 56 people were housed having completed a resettlement programme, 192 people were housed for a total of 2274 bed-nights in emergency accommodation in the city.
22. The nature of support to address homelessness in the city can generally be broken down into four categories, Advice & Support, Emergency Accommodation, planned accommodation and specialist services.

### **Advice & Support**

- The Salvation Army Early Intervention and Prevention Team - For information, advice and guidance regarding housing issues and homelessness. Referral service for those needing to secure hostel accommodation. Sign posting to other support services

within the York area. Street walks, outreach and street counts.  
Respond to NSNO reports.

- City of York Council's Housing Options Team - Housing Options Advice, Prevention, Statutory Homelessness assessment, Bond Guarantee Scheme, Housing Registration and contact point for referral to mediation services. Contact point for Young Persons accommodation worker and older persons housing specials it.
- Castlegate - Offers a specialist advice and support service for homeless people
- Citizens Advice Bureau - General advice for housing issues and homelessness, benefits, relationship breakdown, consumer law, employment law, immigration. Specialist advice for debt and welfare benefits. Housing and Debt Project (various outreach sessions)
- Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) - There is currently a 12 month pilot project to work intensively with street homeless to help support them into services.
- StreetLink (National contact point to report a rough sleeper) – Street Link enables members of the public to quickly connect rough sleepers to local services by:
  - a) telephoning the 24/7 StreetLink phone line 0300 500 0914
  - b) using the StreetLink website ([www.streetlink.org.uk](http://www.streetlink.org.uk)) from a desktop computer or mobile
  - c) downloading the StreetLink App from the iTunes or Google Market store free of charge
- Carecent, - Breakfast club for homeless and socially isolated.
- There are also a number of voluntary / faith groups that provide food / informal support

### **Emergency Accommodation (for single people / couples)**

- York Nightstop - Emergency beds for 16-25 year olds in a volunteer home. Providing safe place to sleep, shower, evening meal and breakfast. **Referral only by Nightstop accredited staff**
- No Second Night Out (NSNO) - Emergency beds provided at Arc Light, Peasholme Centre, Howe Hill for Young People and YACRO for 'new

rough sleepers'. The aim is to prevent 'new' rough sleepers spending a second night on the streets and helping them into accommodation. Offers safe place to sleep, shower, evening meal and breakfast. Referral following NSNO assessment by Salvation Army or Housing Options

- Statutory Homeless - Homeless assessment for temporary accommodation (Ordnance Lane, Holgate Road and Crombie House) via Housing Options Team.

### **Planned Accommodation**

- Single Access Point - Referral point for majority of accommodation / supported housing in York [SAP@york.gcsx.gov.uk](mailto:SAP@york.gcsx.gov.uk)
- Arc Light Hostel - Tier 1 service with 40 bed spaces (male and female) for those that are single homeless, generally 18+. Project is staffed 24 hours per day:
- Howe Hill for Young People - Tier 1 service with 20 bed spaces (male and female) for those that are single homeless or care leavers aged between 16-21 years old. Project is staffed 24 hours per day.
- YACRO - Specialist accommodation for offenders offering both 24 hour staffed project and shared housing
- Peasholme Resettlement Centre - Tier 1B service with 22 bed spaces. Project is staffed 24 hours per day but customers are expected to engage with the resettlement programme and be moving towards independent living.
- Foundation shared housing scheme - Tier 2 service, providing semi-independent living in 20 units.
- Melborne Project (Peasholme Charity) - Tier 2 shared accommodation for those with alcohol / substance misuse problems.
- Southlands Road (Foundation) – Tier 2 service for young people 16-25 providing semi-independent living in 5 units.
- Scarcroft Road (York Housing Association) - Tier 2 service for young people 16-19. providing semi-independent living in 9 units.

- Safe and Sound Homes (SASH) - Tier 2 service for young people 16-11 providing supported lodgings in a volunteers home. Provides 14 placements
- Restore - Restore (York) Ltd is a Christian charity set up to provide homes and support for people in York who would otherwise be homeless. Restore works in partnership with Green Pastures Housing and other local landlords to lease and manage properties and provide support for its tenants so that having found a home they are also equipped to sustain their tenancy. **Referral via SAP or direct to Restore.**

### **Specialist Services**

- Women's refuge IDAS - Specialist advice, support and accommodation for women and children fleeing domestic abuse.

23. As can be seen there is significant interventions provided to support to street drinkers and individuals who find themselves homeless, at risk of homelessness.

### **Consultation**

24. The report is a response to a petition and as such no direct consultation has taken place on the report. However, as part of the development of the Homeless Strategy, which the interventions outlined in this report support, significant consultation was undertaken.

### **Options**

25. **Option1** – To acknowledge the support and interventions provided to street drinkers and those individuals who are homeless or threatened with homelessness. Recognise that the reasons for installing the bench arms was two fold, to address the anti-social behaviour associated with their use by street drinkers and to ensure that they were available and accessible by bus users in accordance with the adopted Streetscape Strategy & Guidance document and to therefore agree to retain the bench arms

26. **Option 2** – To remove the bench arms.

### **Analysis**

27. The majority of the analysis is set out within the body of the report.



28. Retaining the bench arms will ensure that the benches are available for their intended use by bus passengers. The removal of the bench arms is likely to result in the return of the street drinkers to this area.

## **Council Plan**

29. The recommended course of action supports the priorities set out in the draft Council Plan and is closely linked to a number of element of the draft council plan specifically around providing 'A focus on frontline services'

- Support services are available to those who need them
- Residents are encouraged and supported to live healthily
- Residents are protected from harm, with a low risk of crime

## **Implications**

30. The implications arising directly from this report are:

- **Financial** – There are no financial implications.
- **Human Resources (HR)** – There are no HR implications.
- **Equalities** – There are no direct equalities implications. However, ongoing support to those who find themselves homeless, threatened with homelessness or street drinkers will ensure that the most vulnerable in our city are supported.
- **Legal** – There are no direct legal implications.
- **Crime and Disorder** – There are no direct crime and disorder implication arising from the recommended option. However, a decision to remove the bench arms is likely to result in the street drinkers returning to this location and further anti-social behaviour.
- **Information Technology (IT)** – There are no IT implications
- **Property** – There are no property implications
- **Other** – There are no other implications

## **Risk Management**

31. Clearly a large number of individuals have signed the petition calling for the council to remove the bench arms. However, it is clear that this was presented in such a way as to suggest that this was about moving homeless individuals on with a suggestion that they are not supported. This report clearly sets out the level of intervention and support provided within the city for this vulnerable group. However, in reaching a decision Members should consider any reputational impact.

## **Contact Details**

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**Report**  **Date** 29<sup>th</sup> September 2015  
**Approved**

**Wards Affected:** Micklegate

**All**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

Background information:

York Homelessness Strategy 2013 – 18

[https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/1948/homelessness\\_strategy\\_2013pdf](https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/1948/homelessness_strategy_2013pdf)

Streetscape Strategy & Guidance document

[https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/3346/streetscape\\_strategy\\_and\\_guidance\\_low\\_resp.pdf](https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/3346/streetscape_strategy_and_guidance_low_resp.pdf)

## **Abbreviations**

IDAS	Independent Domestic Abuse Service
MEAM	Making Every Adult Matter
NSNO	No Second Night Out
SASH	Safe and Sound Homes
YACRO	York Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders