

**NOT PROTECTIVELY MARKED**

5 December 2013

Your Ref:

Our Ref: A41.10/12/21

Mr Neil Carnegie  
Service Manager -  
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Housing and Environment  
Aberdeen City Council  
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**POLICE  
SCOTLAND**

Keeping people safe

Sir Stephen House QPM  
Chief Constable

Aberdeen City Division  
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[AberdeenServiceCentre@scotland.pnn.police.uk](mailto:AberdeenServiceCentre@scotland.pnn.police.uk)

Dear Mr Carnegie

**PROHIBITION OF BEGGING BYELAW**

I refer to the above subject and your recent circulation of the draft documents regarding the proposed introduction of a byelaw to address street begging in Aberdeen City. I thank you for the opportunity to respond on behalf of Police Service of Scotland.

I note that you have made reference to the position adopted by the Scottish Government in terms of their reluctance to support a byelaw to criminalise the act of begging, and acknowledge your observations in this regard.

Street begging is a relatively long-standing issue in our City Centres across Scotland and is a matter of varying levels of concern to the communities and retailers which populate them, and indeed the local elected members who represent them. These concerns are occasionally reflected in complaints made to the Police, which we naturally have to deal with by way of immediate unilateral operational responses and/or longer term problem solving strategies with partner agencies

Our overarching position is that we will tackle aggressive and organised begging robustly using the powers we currently have at our disposal. We are not seeking additional powers in this regard.

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With regard to the number of reports made to Police Service of Scotland since April 2013, we have recorded 32 incidents in Aberdeen City Centre where reference has been made to street beggars. Not all of these related to begging activity. Incidents are the mechanism by which we record contacts from members of the public reporting matters to us on our Command and Control systems. We will often receive multiple contacts regarding one matter, but not all incidents will result in a Crime Report being generated.

In the same period, we have detected 15 crimes in relation to street begging. Many of these were proactively initiated by Police Officers.

I would ask that you amend the opening paragraph of the section, titled 'Complaints, Criminal Charges and Views' to reflect these statistics.

For those crimes detected, these relate to instances where it has been perceived that the activity of the person begging has been aggressive or intimidating to members of the public. Examples include begging within 20 metres of an Automated Transaction Machine (ATM), or where an element of harassment or threatening behaviour has been apparent. Our response to such reports is tiered. For example, a beggar in proximity to an ATM device will normally receive a warning prior to being charged and be asked to move from their location, although this position can vary dependent upon the circumstances.

I also note the reference you have made within the report to migrant beggars in Aberdeen City, particularly the historical prevalence of Romanian or Bulgarian nationals. We agree that this will require a degree of monitoring when the rules regarding travel to the United Kingdom from these countries are relaxed in 2014, to determine if the profile or activities of street beggars in the City changes significantly, be that positively or negatively.

However, I would ask you to note that of the 15 people charged by Police Service of Scotland in relation to street begging in Aberdeen City since 1 April 2013, only two have been from Eastern European states. By far the majority have been local residents of Aberdeen City, principally of white Scottish ethnicity.

I would also add that, in recent months, there has been a visible decrease in the number of people begging on the streets in Aberdeen City Centre. This has recently been referred to by members of the public during meetings and local media outlets.

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In addition to enforcement and support activity, we will also seek to gather intelligence and evidence as to the extent to which such City-based begging is criminally organised. There is some anecdotal evidence that this may be an emerging threat in some areas and we would wish to test and validate this.

We absolutely recognise that street begging is an increasingly complex social issue, which will not be resolved sustainably by Police enforcement alone. It requires a sophisticated, innovative and multi-stranded partnership approach, based upon the local context and led by the partners who can make the sustainable differences, such as Local Authorities and charities.

We would therefore be supportive of such lead partners developing broad local strategies to deal with the issue, whether these strategies consider the introduction of byelaws or not, and look forward to working in partnership to identify long-term sustainable solutions to this complex issue.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Watson  
Chief Superintendent  
Local Police Commander