

# **Rough Sleeping – Care Cards**

## **Introduction**

There is acknowledged public concern at the increased numbers of Rough Sleepers in Manchester. This concern is two fold; a concern for the individuals involved and a lack of understanding as to the availability and effectiveness of resources being applied to address the problem.

The concept of 'Care Cards' aims to provide a direct method of achieving improvements in public awareness whilst making a direct impact on the lives of those living on the streets.

## **Needs addressed**

In seeking to provide immediate effective support for those having to live on the streets of Greater Manchester whilst also aiming to provide a route out from this existence there are a number of needs that the concept of 'Care Cards' could address.

### **Immediate Support**

The 'Care Card' could have a 'value' allowing the user to immediately access food and drink from designated outlets.

This could be via commercial outlets or charities depending on policy and/or availability.

### **Promotion of Support Services**

The 'Care Card' could also have brief details of where the user can gain access to immediately available resources covering short term accommodation and access to resources designed to deliver longer term solutions.

This would be easier if there was an all encompassing single point of contact invoking a fast and effective response.

### **Public Awareness**

The 'Care Card' could also be a clear communication vehicle for the Public to be aware of how Rough Sleepers can gain access to resources which (ideally) remove the need for them to be on the street.

Again, this would be more effective if there was a single point of contact providing a simple and clear message that help is effective and available.

### **Reduce the Street Cash Economy**

Whilst not wishing to stop individuals making a personal choice to give cash to Rough Sleepers, many if not most people active in supporting Rough Sleepers typically recommend not giving cash, as a high percentage use cash donations to maintain their addictive life styles. With a cash street economy, there is an underlying motivation to those needing to fund poor life choices to maintain their current life styles. By giving the public a choice to 'purchase' and distribute 'Care Cards' it should be possible to reduce the street cash economy and reduce the motivation to maintain a 'living on the street' existence.

## **How would it work**

There are potential variations on how a 'Care Card' could work, from being a simple charity funding 'phone this number for help' card, to one which encompasses a 'value' which provides access to commercially provided services.

Assuming the approach encompassing 'value', the 'Care Card' could be a combination of an outer 'wallet', which provides details of available services, and within which could be contained printed 'vouchers' which would have the value of 'one hot drink', but could be used in multiples to obtain food, to the value of 2 or more vouchers, from a sub set of an outlets menu.

The 'wallet', which could be distributed on its own, would have contact details from which a user could find details of support services available to them and additional details for the public, educating them how they can best assist someone they find on the street.

A small, potentially voluntary, organisation would work with local food and drink outlets to obtain their support to provide a selection of options for those presenting 'vouchers' in a trade for food and drink. Those outlets and others would sell 'Care Cards' to the general public, with funds being returned to the CC organisation, from which they would also claim for any goods provided via encashed 'vouchers'.

There would be additional overhead costs, including some office space, Care Card production and potentially paid staff, but it should be practical to initiate and evaluate such a scheme at a low cost, and on a voluntary basis, if it is considered to be relevant and a practical aid to reduce Rough Sleeping in Manchester.

Publicity is likely to be major limitation to implementation. Without the concept being well known, the public will be unaware of this option. However, this parallels the existing challenge of making the public aware of what services and options are already available to those living on the streets. The 'Care Card' concept can actually be used to address the existing awareness problem whilst at the same time delivering a practical solution to aiding those in need.

## **Benefits from the scheme**

### **For users**

- Immediate access to food and drink
- Guidance on resources available to address their problems, particularly short to medium term.

### **For Support Organisations**

- Improves awareness to users and public
- Provides an additional income source – where the public buy cards or vouchers
- Provides an immediate non cash facility for providing access to food and drink.

### **For the Public**

- Improves awareness of the ways in which the rough sleeping problem is being effectively addressed – and not just being ignored
- Provides a way in which they can be generous, whilst reducing the effects of supporting a street cash economy underpinning poor life style choices

## Appendix I – Megabite Vouchers, Southampton



A similar concept to 'Care Cards' was promoted in the early 2000s, led by the Christian charity, Just Housing (Churches National Housing Coalition) under the 'MegaBite' banner.

The project involved selling £1 Vouchers to the public or street support services, who would then give them (recommended minimum 4 at a time) to people they found living or begging on the streets.

The vouchers could then be used at selected outlets in return for food and drink.

A number of locations participated in the project, but currently only Southampton appears to continue to operate (January 2018, on a small scale due to limited resources available from the supporting charity, SCRATCH. [www.scratchcharity.co.uk](http://www.scratchcharity.co.uk)).

Feedback from SCRATCH indicates that the vouchers do provide a useful function, being distributed mainly by street support organisations to facilitate access to food and drink including Asylum Seekers who can have no standard access to support.

A limited number of food outlets in central Southampton support the initiative, mainly take aways as other outlets are generally not keen on having those living on the streets in their premises.

Given the restricted resources supporting the MegaBite initiative in SCRATCH, 346 vouchers were distributed in 2017 with minimal overheads invested to manage this.

It was also noted that the vouchers are not always accepted by those to whom they are offered.

## **Appendix II - St Petrocks Exeter Food Vouchers**

The aforementioned MegaBite project was established based on the experience of the St Petrocks Charity in Exeter who were running a food voucher scheme in Exeter at the time (turn of the century).

This is no longer operational, as local food retailers found the process of redeeming vouchers wasn't always convenient for them and attracting the 'rough sleeping' community was not seen as beneficial to their businesses.

The scheme was eventually closed some years ago as there was eventually only one food retailer accepting the vouchers who themselves closed.

Public feedback was positive as they liked to buy the vouchers and have something to hand out to someone they think will benefit from it, without handing over cash.

It was noted that there is a necessary level of administration which must be taken into account if establishing such a scheme.