

TOP TIPS

- Begging and homeless are not the same thing. Not everyone who is homeless begs and not every beggar is homeless. The causes of both issues can be complicated and for some individuals may overlap.
- Local Authorities have a clearly defined statutory responsibility to help those who are homeless. This support can be withdrawn if individuals do not engage with housing teams.
- If you are concerned about someone who is begging and you think they are homeless you can report them either to your local council or via <https://www.streetlink.org.uk/> who will notify the local authority. If the person appears under 18 call the police. If the person is in immediate danger or needs urgent care dial 999.
- If a beggar becomes aggressive, do not hesitate to try and get away, contact the police, or ask people for help.



Whenever you are in a place with high footfall you are likely to encounter people who ask you for money via begging.

Some of these people will be vulnerable and need assistance from various organisations to address physical or mental health conditions and access safe accommodation. Multi agency teams and charities can support these individuals and refer them to services to address these needs.

However, it is not uncommon for organised crime groups to use people to beg to take advantage of the empathy felt towards vulnerable people and generate income. It should not be forgotten that the individuals used by crime groups in this way may also be victims of crime through exploitation.

Aggressive Begging and Anti-Social Behaviour

Whilst begging offences remain in England, Wales and Northern Ireland prosecutions for these offences have declined and the legislation which created the offences is being reviewed. In Scotland the offence of begging has been decriminalised but it is illegal to beg aggressively.

The current begging and vagrancy offences were created in the 1800's and are recognised as not always being fit for purpose. The focus has changed to the conduct of the person who is begging and whether their behaviour is anti-social. If their behaviour is likely to cause alarm, harassment, or distress to another person then the powers within the Anti-Social Behaviour, Policing and Crime Act 2014 could be used if local areas deem it appropriate. See the NBCC's related guides on [Anti-social behaviour](#) for further details.

If begging involves the use of children, coercing another individual to beg, false representation by pretending to be injured or destitute, the use of fear or violence, or is linked to organised crime there may be offences under other legislation that may apply. The College of Policing's [ASB Toolkit](#) contains details of these pieces of legislation.

Ways To Help

It is natural to want to help those who may be vulnerable, but it is often hard to know the best course of action to take. Below are suggestions that can make a difference to those in need.



Charities and Support Services

Donations to charities enable them to provide ongoing temporary housing, food, legal advice, and support workers to vulnerable or at risk people across the UK.

Before you donate any money to charity use the Charity Commission's public register to check the charity is legitimate.



Community Safety Partnerships

These partnerships have a statutory function to protect the public and are made up of agencies with different areas of expertise working together. Community Safety Partnerships can assist vulnerable people with referrals to support services to prevent them becoming victims of crime or, if they are offenders, to help break the cycle of reoffending. Local authority websites will list community safety partnership details.

