**Beds, Begging and Business**

**19-20 January 2018**

Below is a report from the homelessness conference held at Central Baptist Church, Southampton. The event was hosted by Southampton Connect and Love Southampton.

More than 70 stakeholders came together to discuss rough sleeping and homelessness in Southampton in a conference entitled, ‘Beds, begging and business’. The City Conversation, hosted by Southampton Connect and Love Southampton, included representatives from Southampton’s homelessness organisations, local businesses, community organisers, health providers, faith groups, public bodies, councillors, and people with lived experience of rough sleeping.

The conversation was organised to look afresh at issues of street homelessness as well as aggressive begging in the city, with the aim of finding a common understanding of what causes rough sleeping and street homelessness in Southampton – and find the means to tackle the issue.

**Superintendent Alison Heydari, Southampton District Commander and Chair of Safe City Partnership said** ‘This conference was a valuable opportunity for a diverse range of stakeholders to openly discuss the issues related to homelessness and begging.  Working in collaboration and active citizenship will ensure that we as a City can pull together to protect the vulnerable and make people safer’.

**Cllr Dave Shields, Cabinet Member for Health & Community Safety at Southampton City Council** – who in November slept outside with Society of St James to raise money for those sleeping rough, **said:**

“We are determined to help homeless people in Southampton get back on their feet and off the streets and we currently spend millions of pounds each year providing beds and support services to do this.

“To tackle the root causes of homelessness we must take a compassionate approach and involve the whole community. This conference is a welcome opportunity for us to work together to come up with fresh ideas and new projects to help those that are most vulnerable and ensure Southampton remains a safe and attractive place to live and work.”

**Itchen MP Royston Smith** said "The reasons for homelessness and particularly rough sleeping are many and complex. There isn’t a single solution. Tailoring our approach to the individual is key and I am pleased that the Homeless Vulnerable Adult Support Team is now fully operational and making contact with some of those most difficult to reach clients.

There is a great deal more to do but identifying the needs of individuals, persuading them to engage with those who seek to help them and taking advantage of some of the support packages available will, I hope, improve the life chances of many of those who are today struggling to access the assistance they need."

**Saints’ 1976 FA Cup-winning manager Lawrie McMenemy MBE,** spoke after dinner and encouraged everyone in the room to work together as a team to make a difference to those that are sleeping rough and to see their situation improve. Other speakers included Superintendent Alison Heydari, Trevor Pickup from Society of St James, Spencer Bowman from Go Southampton and Pam Campbell from the Solent Health Care.

**Operations Manager Southampton Street Pastors - Mike Sarson** said, ‘It was wonderful to be part of this conference. There was an obvious willingness to accept that homelessness and begging are hugely complex issues and that no single person / agency has the answer. This engendered a perfect atmosphere for listening, sharing and understanding the collective experience. There was fresh appreciation of the good work being done by many but an acceptance that it needs to improve, be more joined up. I was also struck by how valuable an opportunity it was for the secular and faith groups to appreciate one another’s work in this difficult area. The Street Pastors were able to give insight into the realities of rough sleeping and the often chaotic life choices made by some of these vulnerable people. The solution must surely come through greater understanding, communication, collaboration and compassion which were so admirably displayed during the conference.

**Conference organiser, Jo Ash CBE** said, ‘this event was a positive start to bringing together our collective commitment, knowledge and resources to tackle this complex issue in the city together. This is a start point for taking action to ensure that Southampton is a city where no one needs to be street homeless and where public generosity and concern is harnessed effectively to make a lasting change.’