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THE BIG ISSUE IN THE NORTH

Vendors 1999

Annual Survey of The Big Issue in the North

EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND GB

THE BIG ISSUE IN THE NORTH TRUST

Contents

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1. Introduction

We carried out this Audit in February 1999. Each year, The Big Issue in the North conducts a survey of all its current vendors in order to:

- **produce statistical information about vendors which can be compared to previous research;**
- **provide information to assist us to develop our policies so that we can provide informed, practical services for vendors;**
- **collect information to support our strategy for attracting funding;**
- **act as an opportunity for Vendor Support Workers to introduce vendors to The Big Step programme.**

The last Audit was conducted in October 1997. Before that we conducted our first large-scale vendor survey in 1996.

This year's audit shows much the same picture as in previous years. However, on the positive side, a smaller proportion this year are sleeping rough and the proportion of Manchester vendors with drug problems dropped sharply. On the negative side, there was a rise in drug use in Leeds and, overall, vendors seemed to be less confident about their futures than they had been in 1996.

2. Summary

2.1. Introduction

This section describes the key findings to emerge from this year's audit. More detail is contained in the chapters that follow.

2.2. How many Big Issue in the North vendors are there?

- The Audit provides a snapshot figure. In February 1999, we had 300 vendors, almost exactly the same as the last audit in October 1997 when there were 295.
- There are 119 vendors in Manchester, 116 in Leeds and 65 in Liverpool. Not all these vendors actually sell The Big Issue in the North in these cities. The magazine is sold across the whole of the North West, Yorkshire and Humberside.
- Between October 1997 and February 1999 we badged up 1,370 vendors (564 in Leeds, 241 in Liverpool and 565 in Manchester).

2.3. Who are our vendors?

- The results from this year's Audit are broadly similar to those from 1997.
- 91% of our vendors are male and 9% are female. The proportion of female vendors has fallen slightly in the last year but is higher than the figure of 5% in 1996.
- 97% of our vendors are white. This is a very similar proportion to 1997.
- 29% of our vendors are under 25 years old, whilst 77% are under 35. These are very similar figures to 1997. Our first Audit in 1996 showed a younger age profile as 43% were under 25 years old and 87% were under 35.
- A slightly lower proportion of vendors this year had spent time in care than in previous years. This year's figure was 27% compared to 31% in 1997 and 34% in 1996. Virtually all of these are men.
- This years' study again showed that vendors who had been in care were more likely than other vendors to:
  - have a disability or long term illness;
  - have been homeless for a longer period;
  - have become homeless at a younger age;
  - have slept rough during the last 12 months.

2.4. Becoming homeless

- 65% of vendors became homeless before they were 25 years old, exactly the same as last year, but fewer than the 78% in 1996.
- Men were more likely to have become homeless at a younger age, with 67% becoming homeless before they were 25 years old, compared to 44% of women. This reverses the findings from 1997.
- 25% of vendors became homeless due to leaving home because of problems and 27% became homeless because they split up with their partner. These were also the two most frequent reasons in 1997.
- In last year's survey 23% of vendors in Liverpool became homeless due to leaving prison, compared to just 7% in Manchester and 2% in Leeds. This year the figures were much more even. 8% of all vendors became homeless for this reason.
- 40% of vendors have been homeless for at least 3 years, similar to 1997 but lower than the figure of 50% in the 1996 study.

2.5. Vendors' housing situation

- 11% of vendors had slept rough the previous night. In previous years, the figure was higher (17% in 1997 and 13% in 1996) but the question was phrased slightly differently so the figures are not directly comparable.
- 25% are staying with friends, the most frequent type of current accommodation but many were not happy with their accommodation situation. 70% of this group said accommodation was a problem for them. Only rough sleepers (78%) were more likely to say that accommodation was a problem.
- 24% are currently staying in hostels and 18% have moved into their own home. 8% are in bed and breakfasts and 4% are staying in squats. These figures are very similar to last year.
- 26% of men were living in hostels compared to 8% of women.
- In Liverpool, only 5% of vendors were sleeping rough compared to 27% last year. In Manchester the figure was 15% and in Leeds 10%.
- Liverpool vendors were most likely to be living in hostels (36%). A relatively high proportion of Manchester vendors (15%) were in bed and breakfasts and a relatively low proportion in their own home (18%). Leeds vendors were most likely to have their own home (25%).

- 72% of vendors had slept rough during the last 12 months. This is similar to the 1996 figure but less than last year's figure of 81%. Manchester vendors were most likely to have slept rough (78%) and Leeds the least likely (66%).

- In 1997, those vendors who had slept rough during the last 12 months said they faced more problems but this pattern was not evident this year.

2.6. Problems facing vendors

- 39% of vendors described themselves as having a disability or long term illness, virtually the same as last year. Women (50%) were more likely to have a disability or long-term illness than men (38%).

- When vendors were asked to list the problems they faced, 53% mentioned accommodation, 51% said drugs and 50% said financial problems. These were similar to last year's figures although the proportion reporting financial problems rose by 9%.

- There appears to be, on the one hand, a drug-using younger group and, on the other, an older group whose substance misuse revolves around alcohol.

2.7. Selling The Big Issue

- 65% of vendors had a regular pitch from where to sell The Big Issue, the same as last year.

- 80% of Liverpool vendors had a regular pitch, compared to 61% of Manchester vendors and 60% of Leeds vendors. This pattern was evident last year.

- 78% of vendors considered themselves to have regular customers, again the same as last year.

- 85% of female vendors had regular customers, compared to 77% of male vendors, reversing the gender difference in last year's figures.

- 85% of vendors said selling The Big Issue had improved their self esteem and 86% believed it had improved their motivation to actually change things in their life. These figures were slightly higher than last year.

2.8. The Big Step

- 28% of vendors gave an accurate and detailed description of The Big Step and a further 42% gave a partially accurate description.

- 41% of Manchester vendors gave an accurate and detailed description of The Big Step compared to 19% in Leeds and Liverpool. This almost certainly reflects the extent to which facilities and services have been developed to a much greater extent in Manchester than in the other cities.

2.9. Vendors' perceptions

- Most vendors want to move away from a life on the streets and can foresee a time when they no longer need to sell The Big Issue in the North.

- The vast majority agreed with the statement *I want to be drug free*.

- This year we are planning to organise more group activities and the majority of vendors in each city support this.

- Just over 40% of vendors expressed an interest in having *more of a say in how The Big Issue is run*.

- The vast majority agreed that *The Big Issue is a good read*.

- Vendors in 1999 feel less optimistic and less confident about their futures than they did in 1996.

2.10. Regional differences

- Leeds vendors, as a group, have fewer problems than vendors in other cities but drugs seem to be a growing problem.

- In Liverpool, drug use and other problems are particularly prevalent. However, there has been a sharp decrease in the proportion who are rough sleepers and Liverpool vendors were most likely to want to become drug free.

- Manchester vendors were most likely to have been in care, to be rough sleepers and to have been very long-term homeless (over five years). On a more positive note, there are now fewer who have drug and alcohol problems.

3. Who are our vendors?

3.1. Introduction

This section describes the main characteristics of our vendors, particularly in relation to gender, ethnicity, age and length of homelessness.

3.2. How many vendors are there?

The audit provides a snapshot of the number of vendors at that time. We badged up 300 vendors during the audit period compared to 295 in October 1997.

There are 116 vendors in Leeds, 65 in Liverpool and 119 in Manchester. Not all these vendors actually sell The Big Issue in the North in these cities so it is not true to say, for example, that there are 119 vendors selling in the city of Manchester. Vendors are recorded at the office from which they buy their magazines. The magazine is sold on the streets of towns and cities across the North West, Yorkshire and Humberside.

Between October 1997 and February 1999, we badged up 1,370 vendors: 564 in Leeds, 241 in Liverpool and 565 in Manchester.

3.3. Gender

The vast majority of vendors are male (271 or 91%). The proportion who are female grew from 5% in 1996 to 13% in 1997 but has fallen again this year to 9% (27 vendors).

There are small regional differences, as the table below shows. The decline in the number of female vendors has been greatest in Leeds where 15% of vendors were female in 1997.

Table 3.1. Gender by office

Gender	Leeds	Liverpool	Manchester	1999 Total	1997 Total
Female	7%	12%	9%	9%	13%
Male	93%	88%	91%	91%	87%
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

3.4. Ethnicity

Virtually all vendors, 97%, describe their ethnicity as 'white'. This is similar to last year's figure of 96%. There were no significant regional differences or differences based on gender.

Table 3.2. Ethnicity by office

Ethnicity	Leeds	Liverpool	Manchester	1999 Total	1997 Total
White	98%	99%	96%	97%	96%
Black Caribbean	-	-	1%	-	-
Other	2%	2%	3%	2%	3%
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

3.5. Age of vendors

Comparisons between this year's survey and last year's show that the age profile of our vendors is similar. Once again, 29% are aged under-26. Overall our vendors are relatively young with 77% aged 35 or under. This is slightly lower than the figure of 83% in this age group last year, so the age profile has got a little older.

In terms of gender, female vendors as a whole were again slightly younger than their male counterparts, with 33% of them being aged 25 or under compared to 28% of males. This was a much smaller difference than last year when the figures were 46% for women and 27% for men. The figure for men has stayed the same but there are now more older female vendors. 44% of women are over-30 compared to 21% in 1997. The difference is due to there being different vendors rather than the same people having got older and moved into different age categories.

In 1997 there were no significant differences between the three different offices in this respect. This year, Liverpool has the oldest age profile with more vendors in the 31-35 age bracket than other offices and only 18% aged under-26. Leeds has the youngest age profile with 41% of vendors aged under-26. Manchester figures were close to the overall average.

Table 3.3. Age of vendors, by gender

Age	Female	Male	1999 Total	1997 Total
16-20	11%	6%	7%	6%
21-25	22%	22%	22%	23%
26-30	22%	25%	22%	34%
31-35	26%	22%	23%	20%
36-40	7%	12%	12%	6%
41-45	7%	7%	7%	5%
46-50	-	3%	2%	3%
Over 50	4%	3%	3%	2%
TOTAL	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

3.6. Local authority care

A slightly lower proportion of vendors this year had spent time in care than in previous years. This year's figure was 27% compared to 31% in 1997 and 34% in 1996.

78 of the 80 vendors who have been in care were men, 29% of whom had been in care. Among women, 7% had spent time in care.

Leeds and Liverpool had lower proportions of vendors who had been in care (23% and 25% respectively) compared to Manchester (33%).

Previous audits have highlighted the association between spending time in care and problems later in life. This year's study again showed that vendors who had been in care were more likely to:

- have a disability or long term illness (48% compared to 35% of those who had not been in care);
- have been homeless for a longer period (43% compared to 22%);
- have become homeless at a young age (23% of care leavers became homeless before they were 16 and 60% before they were 21);
- have slept rough during the last 12 months (79% compared to 69%).

Section 6 contains more information on the problems facing vendors.

4. Becoming homeless

4.1. Introduction

People become homeless for many different reasons. This section describes, in broad terms, how vendors became homeless and the age at which they became homeless.

4.2. Age becoming homeless

This year's study shows, as did last years, that our vendors first become homeless at an early age. 65% of vendors became homeless before they were 25 years old, exactly the same as last year, but fewer than the 78% in 1996.

Men were more likely to have become homeless at a younger age, with 67% becoming homeless before they were 25 years old, compared to 44% of women. This reverses the findings from 1997 when women were more likely to have become homeless at an early age.

Differences between offices were also identified. As last year, vendors in Liverpool became homeless at an older age than those in Manchester and Leeds. However, vendors in Leeds are more likely to have become homeless when aged under-26.

Table 4.1. Age vendors became homeless by office

Age	Leeds	Liverpool	Manchester	1999 Total	1997 Total
<16	13%	8%	16%	13%	8%
16-20	35%	25%	27%	30%	36%
21-25	29%	20%	18%	22%	21%
26-30	9%	29%	15%	16%	16%
31-35	6%	9%	10%	9%	10%
36-40	3%	5%	9%	6%	3%
41-45	5%	2%	1%	2%	3%
46-50	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%
Over 50	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

4.3. How vendors become homeless

Vendors were asked to describe in broad terms how they became homeless.

As last year, two routes into homelessness stood out. The most frequent way that vendors became homeless was because they split up with their partner. The other important cause of homelessness was vendors leaving the family home because of problems. This largely reflects the experience of young people who find it impossible to continue living with their parents.

For women, there was a slightly different pattern as 'left home due to problems' stood out as particularly significant. 30% of women gave this response. 'Split with partner' was the next most frequent response (17%).

In last year's survey 23% of vendors in Liverpool became homeless due to leaving prison, compared to just 7% in Manchester and 2% in Leeds. This year the figures were much more even. 8% of all vendors became homeless for this reason. The proportion who were 'kicked out by family' has almost doubled between the last two audits.

Table 4.2. How vendors became homeless, by office

	Leeds	Liverpool	Manchester	1999 Total	1997 Total
Leaving care	3%	9%	9%	6%	8%
Leaving prison	7%	9%	8%	8%	8%
Kicked out by family	19%	9%	14%	15%	8%
Split up with partner	25%	31%	27%	27%	24%
Evicted	5%	3%	4%	4%	6%
Left home due to problems	24%	28%	25%	25%	24%
Repossession of home	1%	3%	-	1%	2%
Other	17%	9%	13%	13%	19%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

4.4. Length of homelessness

Vendors were asked how long they had been homeless or experienced unsettled housing. The surveys carried out in the last two years both showed that around 50% of vendors had been homeless for at least three years. The length of homelessness has declined as this year's figure is 39%.

Unlike previous years, there is a significant gender difference in terms of length of homelessness with women much more likely to be have been homeless for a shorter time. 22% of women had been homeless for less than 6 months compared to 13% of men. No women had been homeless for more than 10 years compared to 12% of men.

Table 4.3. Length of homelessness by office

	Leeds	Liverpool	Manchester	1999 Total	1997 Total
<3 months	5%	8%	7%	6%	2%
3-6 months	10%	5%	6%	7%	7%
6-12 months	13%	5%	8%	9%	1%
1-2 years	25%	25%	17%	22%	17%
2-3 years	17%	17%	15%	16%	13%
3-5 years	6%	19%	15%	13%	17%
5-10 years	15%	12%	20%	15%	17%
10+ years	8%	11%	13%	11%	13%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

There were also differences between offices. Last year, Liverpool vendors were more likely to have been homeless for a shorter period of time. This year, the picture was a little different with Leeds vendors the least likely to have been homeless for more than 3 years. Manchester vendors were the most likely to have been very long-term homeless (over 5 years). In all three cities, the proportion who are very recently homeless (less than six months) is very similar.

5. Vendors' housing situation

5.1. Introduction

Homelessness does not always mean that someone is sleeping on the streets and by no means are all vendors rough sleepers (by sleeping rough we mean sleeping on the streets, in car parks, in cars or in other unconventional settings). However, those who do have accommodation are mostly in temporary or unstable accommodation. This section examines vendors' housing in more depth.

5.2. Current accommodation

In previous years, vendors were asked to name their current, or usual, accommodation. The often unstable lives led by many vendors means that they may not have just one type of accommodation and may move frequently between rough sleeping, hostels, staying with friends and so on. For this reason, this year, vendors were asked a more precise question: *what type of accommodation did you stay in last night?* This means that the figures are not directly comparable with previous years.

11% of vendors had slept rough the previous night. In previous years, the figure was higher (17% in 1997 and 13% in 1996).

The types of housing that vendors are living in is similar to previous years. 25% are staying with friends, the most frequent type of accommodation, but the majority were not happy with their accommodation situation. 70% of this group said accommodation was a problem for them. Only rough sleepers were more likely to say that accommodation was a problem (78% of that group said this). This would seem to imply that staying with friends is not a long-term solution to most vendors' homelessness.

There are few differences between men and women's accommodation although 26% of men were living in hostels compared to only 8% of women.

Table 5.1. Last night's accommodation by office, 1997-1999

	Leeds	Liverpool	Manchester	1999 Total	1997 Total
Sleeping rough	9%	5%	15%	11%	17%
Squatting	3%	2%	7%	4%	6%
Bed & Breakfast	4%	2%	15%	8%	10%
Hostel	20%	36%	23%	24%	21%
Friend's home	31%	28%	18%	25%	18%
Own home	25%	13%	18%	18%	22%
Other	9%	15%	5%	11%	6%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

There were differences between the cities as Table 5.1 shows. Manchester vendors were the most likely to have slept rough the previous night. A relatively high proportion of Manchester vendors were also in bed and breakfasts and a relatively low proportion in their own home. Leeds vendors were most likely to have their own home. Liverpool vendors were most likely to be living in hostels.

In Liverpool, there has been a significant decrease in the proportion of vendors sleeping rough. Only 5% of vendors were sleeping rough this year compared to 27% last year. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the reduction is partly a reflection of the change in the wording of the question but also reflects a real reduction in the incidence of rough sleeping amongst Liverpool vendors. This is due to a combination of previous rough sleepers having moved into accommodation and also the arrival of new vendors who are not rough sleepers.

5.3. Rough sleeping in the last 12 months

Vendors were asked whether they had slept rough during the last 12 months. The majority of vendors, even if they are not currently sleeping rough, do sleep rough from time to time. 72% of vendors had slept rough during the last 12 months. This is similar to the 1996 figure but less than last year's figure of 81%. Manchester vendors were most likely to have slept rough (78%) and Leeds the least likely (66%). In Liverpool, although only 5% had slept rough the previous night, 69% had done so in the past 12 months.

Men were much more likely to have slept rough than women (73% compared to 59%). There was no clear relationship between the length of time vendors have been homeless and the likelihood that they had slept rough in the last year.

Last year's audit showed that vendors who had slept rough during the last 12 months were more likely to say they had problems with accommodation and drugs or alcohol. This relationship was not apparent this year.

6. Problems facing vendors

6.1. Introduction

This section examines in more detail the problems that our vendors face, and provides information about the number of vendors who perceive themselves to have a disability or long term illness.

6.2. Disability and long term illness

39% of vendors described themselves as having a disability or long term illness, virtually the same figure as last year. This compares to a figure of just 6% for the general population of the same age group (1991 Census, 16-54 year-olds).

Not all people with a disability are in poor health but 72% of those vendors with a disability or long-term illness said that their health was a problem for them. This compares to 22% of other vendors.

Last year, there were no significant differences between the three offices or between men and women in the prevalence of disability. This year, 50% of women said they had a disability compared to 38% of men. In addition, Leeds vendors were much less likely to report having a disability than those in other cities. The figures are 25% in Leeds, 45% in Liverpool and 48% in Manchester.

Those who had been in local authority care were more likely to have a disability or long term illness (48%). Rough sleepers (47%) and those in hostels (45%) were also more likely to define themselves in this way.

6.3. Problems in life

Vendors were asked whether they were currently experiencing problems in a range of areas. The results show that, overall, the most problematic areas of life for vendors are:

- accommodation;
- drugs;
- financial problems.

These were problems in each of the cities and this mirrors exactly the findings from the last audit, although the proportion citing financial problems rose by 9% this year.

There were some differences in the type of problems mentioned by vendors in the different offices. Overall, Liverpool vendors appeared to be facing more problems than those in other cities. Every Liverpool vendor mentioned at least one area of life that was a problem for them. Liverpool differs from the other offices in that employment was the problem mentioned most frequently.

Leeds vendors were the least likely to mention health problems. The prevalence of disability and long-term illness was also low in Leeds. This can be explained by the relatively young age profile of the Leeds vendors. Poor health and disability are more likely to affect older people.

In last year's audit, problems with alcohol and drugs were combined into a single variable. Similar analysis this year shows that the proportion of vendors reporting such a problem rose from 57% to 63%. In Leeds, there was a large rise from 37% to 63%. In Liverpool, there was also a significant increase, from 63% to 77%. However, in Manchester the picture improved with a fall from 71% last year to 56% this year. In Manchester, our Health Project has been helping people with their substance misuse.

This year, drugs and alcohol were broken down into separate categories to provide more detail. Drugs were mentioned more than alcohol as a problem. Vendors in Leeds and particularly Liverpool were more likely to identify drugs problems. Alcohol was mentioned more in Manchester, although vendors there still referred to drugs more frequently.

There was a clear relationship between age and substance misuse although it should be borne in mind that problem drug use, in particular, was mentioned relatively frequently by all age groups. The youngest age group (16-20 year-olds) did not perceive themselves as having problems with either drugs or alcohol. In fact, none of this group said that alcohol was a problem for them. Even though they may have been using both, their use was not viewed as problematic.

Those aged 21-30 were much more likely to have mentioned drug use as a problem than older vendors. 65% of this group said that drug use was a problem compared to 40% of the over-30s.

Table 6.1. Vendors problems by office

	Leeds	Liverpool	Manchester	1999 Total	1997 Total
Accommodation	55%	57%	50%	53%	59%
Drugs	55%	63%	40%	51%	*
Alcohol	17%	20%	28%	22%	*
Employment	42%	66%	38%	45%	39%
Financial	48%	55%	50%	50%	41%
Education or training	19%	17%	17%	18%	16%
Offending	11%	11%	13%	12%	16%
Health	28%	54%	48%	41%	37%
No problems	12%	-	8%	8%	10%

Note: percentages total more than 100% as more than one response could be given.
** Drugs and alcohol were combined in 1997. 57% said it was a problem then. This year the combined figure was 63%.*

This finding could be a result of older vendors using drugs in a more stable and controlled manner but probably also reflects anecdotal evidence of distinct groups within the vendor population. Simplifying what is likely to be a more complex situation, there appears to be, on the one hand, a drug-using younger group and, on the other, an older group whose substance misuse revolves around alcohol. Indeed, 40% of the over-35s mentioned alcohol as a problem compared to 17% of under-35s.

Health problems were also related to age. 20% of the 16-20 year-olds mentioned it as a problem compared to 56% of the over-35s.

There are some differences in the responses given by men and women. Women were more likely to mention alcohol as a problem (30% compared to 21% of men) and to say that education and training were problems (26% compared to 17% of men). Men mentioned employment as a problem more frequently than women (46% compared to 37%).

Analysis was also conducted to identify any relationship between current housing situation and problems faced by vendors as, last year, rough sleepers were more likely to identify problems. On the whole, there were few clear trends. However, those currently sleeping rough (78%) were much more likely to have problems with accommodation and their health than other vendors (49%).

7. Selling The Big Issue in the North

7.1. Introduction

A number of questions were asked about selling The Big Issue in the North, including whether vendors have a regular pitch from which they sell, whether they have regular customers and what effect selling the magazine has had on their self-confidence and motivation to change things in their life.

Not all vendors sell from the same pitch all the time. Those who do must use it regularly or they can lose the pitch. Therefore, vendors who have regular pitches are often those with more stable circumstances and lifestyles.

7.2. Regular pitches and regular customers

Just under two-thirds, 65%, of vendors have a regular pitch from where to sell The Big Issue in the North, the same figure as last year. 78% of vendors considered themselves to have regular customers, again the same as last year.

Last year, Liverpool had the highest proportion of vendors with a regular pitch. This pattern was again evident. 80% of Liverpool vendors had a regular pitch, compared to 61% of Manchester vendors and 60% of Leeds vendors. There were few differences between the offices in terms of the proportion who have regular customers although Liverpool's figure was slightly higher (83%) which is to be expected since a higher proportion have a regular pitch. Overall, 95% of those vendors with a regular pitch have regular customers compared to 48% of other vendors.

Last year, women were less likely to have regular customers than men. This year, 85% of female vendors had regular customers, compared to 77% of male vendors, reversing the gender difference in last year's figures. There were no significant differences between male and female vendors, when it came to having a regular pitch.

7.3. Improving self esteem and motivation

Vendors were asked whether selling the magazine had improved their self-confidence and motivation to change things in their life. Even allowing for the fact that some vendors may have felt obliged to answer "yes", since it was Big Issue in the North staff who conducted interviews, the results are encouraging.

Table 7.1. Impact of selling The Big in the North on vendors, by office

More...	Leeds	Liverpool	Manchester	1999 Total	1997 Total
Self-confidence	82%	93%	83%	85%	78%
Motivation	82%	90%	86%	86%	83%

85% of vendors said selling The Big Issue in the North had improved their self-confidence and 86% believed it had improved their motivation to change things in their life. These figures were slightly higher than last year.

There were no differences between women and men in this respect. However, there were slight differences between offices. Last year, Liverpool vendors were the least confident and motivated but this year's findings show a great improvement to the extent that vendors there are now the most self-confident and motivated.

8. The Big Step

8.1. Introduction

The Big Step has now changed its name to The Big Issue in the North Trust. It is the charitable arm of The Big Issue in the North and provides a customised resettlement service to vendors. In previous audits, vendors' were asked about their awareness of The Big Step but this year we asked them to describe what they thought The Big Step was all about in order to test the extent of their knowledge. Vendors' responses were then assessed by interviewers for their accuracy.

8.2. Understanding of The Big Step

Overall, 70% of the vendors had some understanding of The Big Step, though there were different degrees of understanding amongst vendors from each office. As expected, Manchester vendors were more likely to give a completely accurate description of The Big Step. The programme is longer established in Manchester than in the other cities and the Manchester office contains a wider range of facilities.

It is encouraging that, despite fewer facilities, 74% of Leeds vendors were able to describe The Big Step with a degree of accuracy. Even in Liverpool, the city with the lowest awareness, over half of the vendors had some understanding of The Big Step.

Table 8.1. Understanding of The Big Step by office

Description	Leeds	Liverpool	Manchester	Total
Completely accurate	19%	19%	41%	28%
Partially accurate	55%	39%	31%	42%
Inaccurate	1%	8%	3%	3%
Don't know	26%	34%	25%	27%
TOTAL	100%	100%	100%	100%

Men were more able to describe The Big Step than women. 70% of men gave an accurate or partially accurate description compared to 62% of women. 39% of women said they did not know what The Big Step was compared to 26% of men.

9. Vendors' perceptions

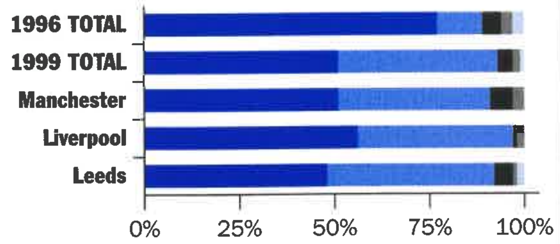
9.1 Introduction

Vendors were asked a series of questions about their attitudes to themselves, their future and The Big Issue in the North more generally. Some of these questions were asked to vendors in 1996 so we can make comparisons with these previous findings. Vendors were read a series of statements and asked to say how strongly they agreed or disagreed with them.

9.2 Vendors' self-perceptions

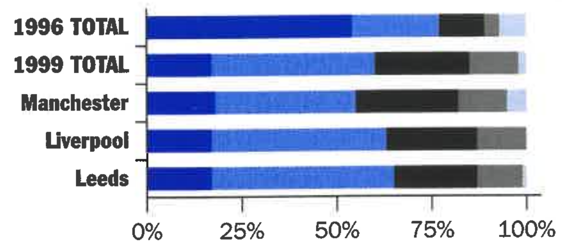
One set of questions was related to vendors' perceptions of their own future. These showed that most vendors want to move away from a life on the streets and can foresee a time when they no longer need to sell The Big Issue in the North. This year a similar proportion agreed that *I want more from life than selling The Big Issue* as had done so in 1996 (Table 9.1). However, in 1996, a much greater proportion had "strongly agreed". There were no significant differences between cities.

Table 9.1 "I want more from life than selling The Big Issue".



Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Disagree | Strongly disagree

Table 9.2 "I feel I have a good future ahead of me".



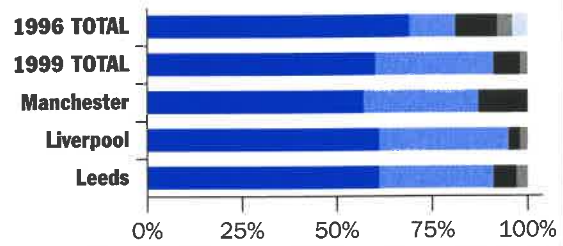
Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Disagree | Strongly disagree

Vendors were more cautious in their perception of what the future held and were less optimistic than they had been in 1996 (Table 9.2). This year, 17% "strongly agreed" that *I feel I have a good future ahead of me* compared to 54% in 1996. There were only minor differences between cities.

For the most part we have a different group of vendors now than in 1996 so the statistic does not mean that the same individuals have become more disenchanted over the last three years. There have been some changes in the vendor population but this survey revealed no clear associations between factors such as age, length of homelessness and drug use and positive feelings about the future.

As Section 6.3 shows, just over half of our vendors say they have a problem with drugs. Those vendors who reported having a problem with drugs were asked how they felt about the statement *I want to be drug free*. As Table 9.3 shows, the vast majority (91%) agreed with this statement. It is particularly encouraging that Liverpool, where problematic drug use is most frequent, has the highest proportion who want to be drug free. In 1996, the figures were similar but a smaller proportion agreed that *I want to be drug free* (81%).

Table 9.3 "I want to be drug free".

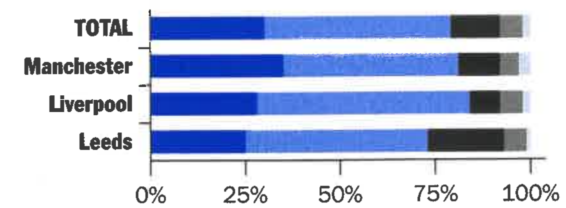


Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Disagree | Strongly disagree

Note: only those who said they had a problem with drugs were asked this question.

Finally in this set of questions, there was a more general statement: *Homeless people should do more for themselves*. Over three-quarters agreed with this and very few disagreed. Manchester vendors were more likely to "strongly agree" although the differences between cities were not large.

Table 9.4 "Homeless people should do more for themselves".



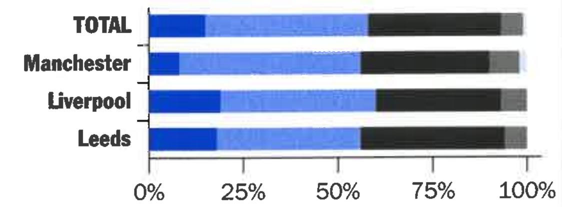
Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Disagree | Strongly disagree

The responses to this set of questions seem to indicate that the majority of vendors do envisage a more positive future for themselves, both in general terms and in moving away from drugs. However, there were also signs that vendors were slightly less optimistic about the future than they had been in 1996.

9.3 Vendors' perceptions of The Big Issue in the North

Vendors were also asked for their reactions to another set of statements about The Big Issue in the North. This year we are planning to organise more group activities and the results in Table 9.5 would seem to indicate that the majority of vendors in each city support this. Vendors in Leeds and Liverpool were more likely to "strongly agree" that there should be more group activities. This may be be a reflection of the fact that a greater number of group activities have been organised in Manchester than in the other cities so the demand for additional activities is likely to be lower there.

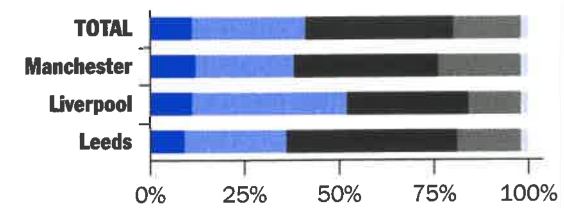
Table 9.5 "The Big Issue should organise more group activities".



Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Disagree | Strongly disagree

Just over 40% of vendors expressed an interest in having more of a say in how The Big Issue is run. Liverpool vendors, in particular, agreed with this. Only a relatively small proportion felt very strongly about this, however, so it is unlikely that 41% would actually wish to be actively involved.

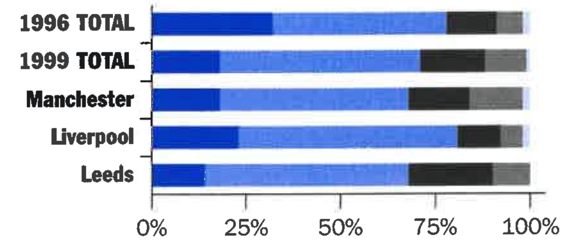
Table 9.6 "I want more of a say in how The Big Issue in the North is run".



Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Disagree | Strongly disagree

Vendors were asked how strongly they agreed with the statement *The public are generally supportive of The Big Issue*. The majority agreed that this was the case but, this year, vendors seemed to be less confident of public support than they had been in 1996. Liverpool vendors were more likely to feel that they had public support.

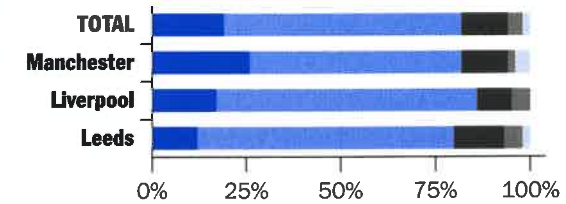
Table 9.7 "The public are generally supportive of the Big Issue".



Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Disagree | Strongly disagree

Finally we asked vendors for their view of the magazine that they sell. Overall, the vast majority agreed that *The Big Issue is a good read* and only 6% disagreed. The figures were similar across the three cities but Manchester vendors were most likely to "strongly agree".

Table 9.8 "The Big Issue is a good read".



Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Disagree | Strongly disagree

This set of questions reveals that most vendors are relatively happy with our plans to develop more group activities and are happy with the magazine that they sell.

The fact that around 40% wished to have more of a say in how The Big Issue is run might be interpreted as dissatisfaction with the organisation. However, we regard it as a positive sign whenever vendors wish to take more control of their own lives so this is an encouraging finding.

While most vendors feel that the public generally support The Big Issue in the North, this view was less strongly felt than in 1996. Added to the findings in Section 9.2, this seems to imply that vendors in 1999 feel less optimistic and less confident about their futures than they did in 1996.

10. Regional differences

10.1. Introduction

One of the interesting aspects of this and previous year's audits are the differences between the three offices in Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester. This section provides a summary of the position in each city and how this has changed.

It is also important to remember that there are a lot of similarities between the three cities as the other sections in this report make clear. Furthermore, when the prevalence of a particular problem is referred to as *relatively low* amongst vendors, it will generally still be much higher than in the general population. For example, Leeds vendors have a *relatively low* rate of disability, but the figure is 25%, four times higher than the general population.

10.2. Leeds

Anecdotally, Leeds vendors are sometimes thought of as the most stable group of vendors who have, as a group, fewer problems than vendors in other cities.

In many respects, this year's audit findings back this up although drugs seem to be a growing problem. Leeds vendors are a relatively young group, with over three-quarters under-26. This helps to explain why the rates of disability and health problems are relatively low. Leeds vendors are most likely to have their own home and least likely to be long-term homeless (for more than three years).

In last year's audit, Leeds vendors had the lowest rate of problem drug and alcohol use of the three cities. This year, there has been a significant increase, so that drug problems among Leeds vendors are now more common than in Manchester slightly behind those in Liverpool.

10.3. Liverpool

Previous research has shown drug use and other problems to be particularly prevalent among Liverpool vendors. This is still the case but there are some more positive signs as well.

This audit shows a continuing high and rising rate of problematic drug use and Liverpool vendors were also least likely to say they had no problems in their life. However, positive developments include a sharp decrease in the proportion who are rough sleepers. They were most likely to want to become drug free. Liverpool vendors continue to be more likely to have a regular pitch than vendors in other cities and were most likely to feel that they have public support. There has also been a significant increase in the proportion of Liverpool vendors who feel that selling The Big Issue in the North has increased their self-confidence and motivation. Liverpool vendors this year score higher in these respects than vendors in the other cities whereas last year, they were much worse. Finally, there was a high level of demand for group activities in Liverpool.

10.4. Manchester

There is a more mixed picture in Manchester although vendors here emerge as worse off on some key indicators. On the down side, Manchester vendors are most likely to have been in care, to be rough sleepers and to be very long-term homeless (over five years).

On a more positive note, there has been an improvement in the proportion who have drug and alcohol problems. Last year, Manchester had the highest proportion of vendors with these problems but this year it has the lowest figure. This could be an indication of the success of the on-site health project.

As might be expected, since facilities are much more established in Manchester than the other cities, Manchester vendors are the most knowledgeable about The Big Step (now called The Big Issue in the North Trust). However, it is still encouraging that over 40% can give an accurate and detailed description of what is on offer.

11. Methodology

11.1. Introduction

This section describes how the audit was conducted.

11.2. Process

This year's audit built on the experience of previous years.

The survey was conducted as part of the re-badging process, whereby all vendors must prove that they are eligible to sell the magazine in order to receive a new badge which enables them to continue selling. This took place during February 1999. Vendors were given three weeks notice that they needed to provide evidence of their homelessness, validated by another organisation.

Those vendors who had moved into permanent accommodation were advised that, in order to continue as a vendor, they need to use the services that the Trust provides that are relevant to them. This could be in the fields of health, drugs, alcohol, education, training or personal development. This is an attempt to ensure that their move away from homelessness is a sustained one and that they do not fall back into homelessness once again.

This year, the audit was used as an opportunity for vendors to register to vote and Electoral Registration forms were made available during the interview.

11.3. Sample

The aim of the study was to interview all current vendors. In order to achieve this, vendors were only given a new badge if they completed a questionnaire. No incentives were paid to vendors. In practice, virtually all regular vendors were badged up and completed a questionnaire.

11.4. Questionnaire design

The questionnaire was based on last year's to enable year-on-year comparisons to be made although a small number of questions were changed following consultation with staff who had conducted interviews last year. The questionnaire is included in Appendix A.

11.5. Fieldwork

A briefing paper giving advice on how to use the questionnaire was produced and circulated to the three offices, along with copies of the questionnaire. Interviewers were also briefed in person. A range of staff and volunteers conducted interviews.

The confidential nature of the survey was stressed and all interviews took place in a separate office, in a private space.

All interviews were completed during February 1999.

11.6. Data preparation and analysis

All completed questionnaires were input into SPSS (a statistical computer software package). Direct entry of questionnaires minimised any possible inaccuracies and ensured confidentiality within the organisation.

11.7. Report writing

A draft report was produced and circulated amongst staff. Following this consultation a final report was produced. The report deliberately follows last year's format for ease of comparison.

APPENDIX A
Annual Audit Questionnaire

DATE ______________ INTERVIEWER SIGNATURE ______________________________

1. What is your name?

____

2. What is your date of birth?

____

3. Age

____

4. Age category

☐ 16-20 ☐ 21-25 ☐ 26-30 ☐ 31-35 ☐ 36-40 ☐ 41-45 ☐ 46-50 ☐ 50+

5. Old Badge Number

____

6. New Badge Number

____

7. Office

☐ Leeds ☐ Liverpool ☐ Manchester

8. Gender

☐ Male ☐ Female

9. What is your address?

____

____

____

____

10. Contact phone number

____

11. Name/address of next of kin (optional)

____

____

____

____

12. How would describe your ethnic origin?

☐ White ☐ Black Car/bean ☐ Black African ☐ Black other ☐ Indian
☐ Pakistani ☐ Bangladeshi ☐ Chinese ☐ Asian other
☐ Other (please state)

____

13. How long have you been homeless or experienced unsettled housing?

☐ Less than 3 months ☐ 3 to 6 months ☐ 6 to 12 months ☐ 12 months to 2 years
☐ 2 to 3 years ☐ 3 to 5 years ☐ 5 to 10 years ☐ Over 10 years

14. How old were you when you first became homeless?

☐ Under 16 ☐ 16-20 ☐ 21-25 ☐ 26-30 ☐ 31-35
☐ 36-40 ☐ 41-45 ☐ 46-50 ☐ 50+

15. What first caused you to become homeless? (tick one)

☐ Leaving care ☐ Split up with partner ☐ Left home due to problems
☐ Leaving prison ☐ Evicted ☐ Repossession of home
☐ Kicked out by family ☐ Left Armed Forces ☐ Other, please state

____

16. Have you slept rough at any time in the last year?

☐ Yes ☐ No

17. Where did you sleep last night?

☐ Sleeping rough ☐ B&B ☐ Own home ☐ Squatting
☐ Hostel ☐ Night shelter ☐ Friends floor ☐ Other

18. Have you ever been in care?

☐ Yes ☐ No

19. Do you have a disability or long term illness that limits your daily activity?

☐ Yes ☐ No

20. Are you experiencing problems in your life with any of the following (read out each in turn):

- [ ] Accommodation
- [ ] Health problems
- [ ] Money
- [ ] Other (Please describe)
- [ ] Employment
- [ ] Drugs
- [ ] Committing crime
- [ ] Education/training
- [ ] Alcohol
- [ ] None

---

21. Do you have a regular pitch for selling The Big Issue?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

22. Do you have regular customers who buy The Big Issue from you?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

23. Has selling The Big Issue given you more confidence?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

24. Has selling The Big Issue improved your motivation to change things in your life?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

25.What do you think The Big Step is all about?

- [ ] Completely accurate and detailed
- [ ] Completely inaccurate
- [ ] Partially accurate
- [ ] Don't know

26. Do you want to make an appointment to talk to a Big Step caseworker?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

27. Do you want to register to vote?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

I AM NOW GOING TO READ YOU SOME STATEMENTS AND I WANT YOU TO SAY HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT THEM. CHOOSE YOUR ANSWER FROM THE LIST.

28. I want to be drug free

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Neither
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree

29. I want more from life than selling The Big Issue

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Neither
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree

30. I feel I have a good future ahead of me

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Neither
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree

31. The Big Issue should organise more group activities

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Neither
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree

32. The public are generally supportive of The Big Issue

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Neither
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree

33. I want more of a say in how The Big Issue is run

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Neither
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree

34. The Big Issue is a good read

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Neither
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree

35. Homeless people should do more for themselves

- [ ] Strongly agree
- [ ] Agree
- [ ] Neither
- [ ] Disagree
- [ ] Strongly disagree

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS FORM