

**SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF ALCOHOL ABUSE
(Report of the Working Group)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 At its meeting held on 9th September 2008, the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) considered a briefing paper prepared by the Head of Administration on the night time economy in Huntingdonshire in the context of the Licensing Act 2003. The issue had been raised at a previous meeting as a possible area for the Panel to undertake a detailed investigation and the paper provided details of the provisions of the Act, together with information on its impact at both a national and local level.
- 1.2 From the information provided, the Panel concluded that the majority of establishments within the District in the main appeared to be well managed and there was little that could be achieved in undertaking a review of the implications of the Act and its practical application by the Council. However Members felt that there were sufficient issues in relation to the social consequences of alcohol abuse to merit an investigation. In particular, the Panel was aware of concerns in some quarters over the number of people congregating in St Ives town centre on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings. With this in mind Councillors J T Bell, P M D Godfrey and Ms S L Kemp were appointed to a working group to address the situation.
- 1.3 At the request of Councillor L W McGuire, the Working Group was also asked to explore the Council's position with regard to the adoption and implementation of the Countywide Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy 2008 -2011.

2. METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 At the outset of the review, the Working Group agreed that the specific purpose of their study should be to investigate the impact of excessive alcohol consumption on levels of anti-social behaviour and alcohol related crime within the District. Councillor Ms S L Kemp was appointed as the Group's rapporteur and to assist Members in their review, the following background information was obtained:-

- Cambridgeshire Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy 2008 – 11;

- Details of a presentation to all Members on 21st October 2008 by the Cambridgeshire Drug and Alcohol Advisory Team Co-ordinator;
- Huntingdonshire Community Safety Plan 2008 – 2011;
- Bassetlaw District Council: Review of Alcohol Related Anti Social Behaviour;
- Hospital admissions for alcohol related harm;
- the Local Authority Profile of Alcohol Related Harm; and
- the Alcohol Harm Reduction Newsletter – East of England

- 2.2 As part of its investigations, the Working Group met the District Council's Community Safety Team Leader and received information on several ongoing initiatives being undertaken by the Community Safety Partnership to address the negative impact that behaviour related to alcohol consumption can have on the community. Details are attached at Appendix A.
- 2.3 In doing so, the Working Group has noted the inclusion of targets within the Community Safety Plan 2008 – 11 to address alcohol related anti-social behaviour and that the Partnership's contribution towards the Countywide Alcohol Strategy will enable actions to be put in place to address the consequences of alcohol misuse. The Working Group has particularly commended the work which the Partnership is undertaking with young people and has welcomed the introduction of a "Nightwatch" initiative in St Ives which is designed to tackle the issues of crime and disorder associated with the district based night time economy in the town centre to ensure a co-ordinated response is taken when dealing with the problem individuals.
- 2.4 Members also heard evidence from representatives of Cambridgeshire Constabulary and received detailed statistical information on alcohol related anti-social behaviour and crime in Huntingdonshire during 2007/08. Details of the way in which the Constabulary seeks to deal with these problems in both the town centres and villages was also provided. These included the use of additional patrols, changes in shift patterns, meetings with appropriate agencies and the use of Designated Public Place Orders to prevent the congregation of young people drinking alcohol. The Working Group has noted the Police's opinion that there is no particular problem in Huntingdonshire which is not reflected elsewhere in the country.
- 2.5 The Group was advised of the extensive range of powers available to enforcement agencies, which included the District Council's Licensing Section and the County Council's Trading Standards Service as well as the Police, to deal with alcohol related crime and disorder. Recent legislation also provides a new power for a police constable to direct a person aged 16 or above to leave a locality for up to 48 hours which

should provide an additional measure for the Constabulary to tackle the problems on the ground.

3. DELIBERATIONS

3.1 The Working Group received information on the number of instances of alcohol-related anti- social behaviour in Huntingdonshire which had been obtained from the County Council's Research Group. These are reproduced below:-

	St Ives		Huntingdon		St Neots		Huntingdonshire	
	No. of incidents	% of all ASB incs	No.of incidents	% of all ASB incs	No.of incidents	% of all ASB incs	No.of incidents	% of all ASB incs
Q1 (April – June 2007/8	122	19.5%	153	14.9%	103	14.7%	378	16.1%
Q2 (July – Sept 2007/08	156	21.1%	183	16.3%	129	14.1%	468	16.8%
Q3 (Oct – Dec 2007/08	135	22.4%	115	13.4%	94	12.8%	344	15.7%
Q4 (Jan – Mar 2007/08	92	16.5%	169	19.2%	82	12.2%	343	16.3%
Q1 (Apr – June 2008/09	139	18.6%	201	17.2%	106	15.3%	446	17.1%

3.2 It was clear to the Group that there are problems being experienced within the District in terms of alcohol related crime and anti-social behaviour and that these are primarily concentrated in the 3 main town centres of Huntingdon, St Ives and St Neots. What is less clear however is the extent to which this is a national phenomenon and how Huntingdonshire compares with the picture nationally.

3.3 The information supplied by the Police suggests that, while there are particular problem areas in Huntingdonshire, the situation is better than elsewhere in the country. This is further demonstrated by health statistics relating to hospital admissions:-

2002-2004, Deaths and Months of Life Lost from Alcohol Related Conditions

Male:	UK Average 9.55	Hunts 6.85
Female:	UK Average 5.14	Hunts 4.90

2004 – 05 Hospital Admissions for Alcohol Specific Conditions, per 100,000

Male: Uk Average 305.81 Hunts 169.25

Female: UK Average 144.62 Hunts 78.07

Hospital Admissions for alcohol specific conditions (aged under 18) 2002 -2005 per 100,000

Male: UK Average 48.97 Hunts 37.02

Female: UK Average:58.51 Hunts 41.5

- 3.4 No information is available for emergency admissions as Hinchbrook Hospital does not currently record alcohol related Accident and Emergency treatment but the hospital is hoping to start a recording scheme similar to that adopted by Addenbrookes Hospital where a lead officer has been identified for this purpose.
- 3.5 While each of the market towns has its own characteristics in terms of the night time economy, St Ives is currently the busiest in terms of the number of people attracted to the town. Although this has meant that there are flourishing pub and club based entertainments in the town, it is apparent that this has also presented some adverse effects. The Police are sufficiently concerned to seek to obtain additional funding to direct two additional officers specifically to deal with the town centre at weekends and both the Community Safety Team and the Police objected to a planning application for a night club expansion earlier in the year on the grounds of the impact on crime and disorder and the capacity of the town centre to cope with additional late night outlets. Moreover the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) has recommended Cabinet to review the street cleansing regimes to overcome the problems of litter on Sundays caused by Saturday evening entertainment.
- 3.6 Notwithstanding those concerns, the Group has been informed that the Council has not been asked to review its Statement of Licensing Policy which states that there is no problems in terms of the cumulative impact of licensed premises in the District, nor has any responsible authorities or interested persons in the form of residents and businesses asked the Council to review an existing premises licence on the grounds of crime and disorder or public nuisance in the town centres, or indeed elsewhere in the District.
- 3.7 The Working Group noted that the other primary aspect of concern in relation to anti-social behaviour is under-age drinking in public places which is not restricted to the towns and is an unfortunate practice in many of Huntingdonshire's villages. Clearly this is not restricted to the

District alone and is common throughout the country. The Trading Standards service has recently completed an exercise to target sales to under 18s in St Neots and the District Council's own Licensing Section issues guidance and advice, especially to small retailers concerning alcohol sales to the under 18s.

3.8 To address these issues, the Working Group has been informed that a Countywide Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy was approved by Cambridgeshire Together in September 2008. The Strategy is designed to bring together relevant organisations in a multi-agency approach to reduce the harm caused by alcohol to individuals, families and communities. Supporting action plans set out a number of key tasks for the next three years to tackle the problems which include community safety, crime and anti-social behaviour and children and young people. The details of which are set out in Appendix B with several specifically targeting the control of violence and anti-social behaviour, i.e

- the implementation and support of neighbourhood policing and neighbourhood level working;
- appropriate use of enforcement measures such as Dispersal Orders and Designated Public Place Orders;
- Effectively dealing with alcohol related anti-social behaviour; and
- Developing and implementing targeted local action plans.

There are also proposals for diversionary and educational work with young people.

3.9 The Group welcomed the preparation of the Strategy as a way of reducing the harm that alcohol currently causes across Cambridgeshire. There is a plethora of organisations currently engaged in this field and Members acknowledged the potential problems of effective co-ordination. The actions are wide ranging and the Working Group was unable to suggest any proposals that had not already been identified and included. The action plans do contain performance indicators and milestones and the Working Group felt that it would be helpful for information on achievements against the targets to be made available more widely as they develop.

3.10 The Group considered the District Council's position with regard to the adoption and implementation of the Countywide Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy in the light of the remarks in paragraph 1.3 above. In doing so, the Group has noted that both the District Council and the Local Strategic Partnership are supportive of the Strategy. However the latter decided not to support funding of the strategy implementations as an investment proposal for reward monies from the Local Public

Service Agreement given the high demand for this funding and concerns as to whether this would produce any added value in Huntingdonshire over and above the practical initiatives clearly being implemented by the Police, District Council and other partners.

- 3.11 The Group has received information on the wide range of enforcement powers available to the Police and other responsible authorities to deal with crime, disorder and public nuisance associated with alcohol consumption. Details are available at <http://drugs.homeoffice.gov.uk/publication-search/drug-strategy/alcoholguide?view=Binary>. Parliament has added to those powers recently in further legislation in a reaction to the perception that longer opening hours have led to greater violence and anti-social behaviour in town centres and other communities. This has included the designation of alcohol disorder zones, the use of which has been considered recently by the Licensing Committee and Cabinet and discounted.
- 3.12 One of the more helpful powers available to the Council is the use of Designated Public Place Orders which prevents alcohol consumption in a public place. Only one Order has been made to date by the Council which has designated an area in St Ives where problems were occurring but it is open to local communities to ask for other areas to be designated if documentary evidence of problems can be provided. The Police also can seize alcohol from a person under 18 years of age under the Confiscation of Alcohol (Young Persons) Act 1997. It appeared to the Group that there were adequate powers available to the Police and other agencies but there was some doubt as to whether a sufficiently proactive approach was being taken by enforcement agencies, possibly as a result of limited resources.
- 3.13 With regard to the impact of licensed premises in town centres and elsewhere, the Group has noted that the Licensing Act 2003 provides an opportunity for members of the public and responsible authorities to initiate a review of a premises licence or club premises certificate if they have concerns that one or more of the licensing objectives such as the prevention of crime and disorder and public nuisance are not being met. Unless a review is triggered a licence or certificate will continue in perpetuity unless amended or surrendered by the licence or certificate holder and the Licensing Authority has no discretion to act itself under the legislation other than to enforce the provisions of the Act and ensure compliance with licence conditions. However since implementation of the Licensing Act 2003 in November 2005, only 2 applications for reviews have been received, both of which were made

by the Police because of the evidence of drug dealing in licensed premises.

- 3.14 As no reviews have been initiated by the public, the Group has emphasised a need to ensure that members of the public are aware of their ability to challenge existing licences and the mechanism by which they can do so. Huntingdonshire is not unique in this respect as research has shown that the freedoms introduced by the Act are being well used but that the powers to tackle problems are not sufficiently well known and taken advantage of.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Working Group has acknowledged that problems with alcohol related anti-social behaviour and criminal activity are evident within the District. However from the evidence available, the Group is satisfied that the situation in Huntingdonshire is less problematic than in many parts of the country.

- 4.2 The powers available to the Police and other enforcement agencies are wider ranging and there is a plethora of organisations involved in tackling the impact and implications of excessive alcohol consumption. The Group has commended the initiatives which are being undertaken by the Community Safety Partnership and is interested in the results of the "Nightwatch" initiative in St Ives if the Police can obtain the funding for the additional resources. The Group has also welcomed the development of the Countywide Alcohol Strategy and the associated action plan for tackling a host of specific issues. However the sheer scale of the action plan with its multitude of actions and targets is ambitious and the Working Group is concerned that there is sufficient co-ordination among the various enforcement and voluntary agencies. To that extent the Working Group shared the reservations of the Huntingdonshire Local Strategic Partnership about the use of LPSA reward grant in implementation of the Strategy.

- 4.3 The Group recognise that there is little in the way of additional initiatives that they can identify to add to those that are already in place. Nevertheless there is some concern as to whether effective use is being made of the full extent of the enforcement available and whether enforcement agencies should adopt a more proactive approach by using those powers to tackle the effects of alcohol misuse and public disorder. This is coupled with a need to ensure that members of the public are aware of their ability to initiate a review of an existing licence if they have concerns that the licensing objectives are not being met.

- 4.4 It is therefore

RECOMMENDED

- a) that the actions being taken by the various agencies in an attempt to reduce the impact of excessive alcohol consumption on levels of anti-social behaviour and alcohol related crime within the District be welcomed and encouraged;**
- b) that the Cambridgeshire Alcohol Strategy 2008 – 2011 be endorsed and Cambridgeshire Together requested be to commission regular reports on progress towards achievements of the action plan;**
- c) that enforcement agencies be encouraged to take a proactive approach by using the powers available to them to tackle the effects of alcohol misuse and resultant public disorder; and**
- d) that the District Council's Licensing Section be requested to ensure that local residents are aware of the opportunities available to them under the Licensing Act 2003 to initiate reviews of premises licences and club premises certificates where they are experiencing problems caused by public disorder emanating from these premises.**

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Minutes of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) on 9th September 2008.

Notes of the meetings of the Working Group held on 14th October, 3rd November and 24th November 2008.

Cambridgeshire Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy 2008-11
Presentation to Council Members by Cambridgeshire DAAT Co-ordinator

Alcohol Related Anti-Social Behaviour and Crime in Huntingdonshire
January 2007 to January 2008.

Briefing Paper by the Community Safety Team Leader
Huntingdonshire Community Safety Plan 2008 -2011

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