

ALCOHOL REVIEW GROUP

7 July 2014

PRESENT – Councillors Crichlow, Donoghue, Macnab, Newall (in the chair), Nutt, EA Richmond, S Richmond and Taylor

APOLOGIES – M. Davidson, Director of Public Health.

OFFICERS – Pam Ross, Licensing, Parking and Trading Standards Manager Nigel Green, Principal Trading Standards Officer, Kate Jeffels, DAAT Joint Commissioning Unit Manager and Karen Graves, Democratic Officer.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE –

Purpose of the Meeting – To give consideration to tackling alcohol related harm and the impact on Darlington including: impact on policing the Night Time Economy; counterfeit alcohol; test purchasing; Disruption Panels/Organised Crime; Saturation Policy; Licensing of Premises/Reviews; and Licensing of Petrol Stations/Cinemas.

Points Discussed and Considered –

Under Age Drinking

- The Committee was advised that test purchases using young volunteers are undertaken and are joint operations led by the Police. A reason was needed to undertake a test purchase at a licensed premise with several actions being completed prior to the test purchase;
- Proprietors are spoken to regarding their policies and procedures to ascertain whether or not it is a certain staff member consistently selling to underage customers. Premises operate a Challenge 21 scheme in the Borough and staff should ask for I D if they have concerns about the age of a customer. Premises are encouraged to keep a 'refusal book' which indicates which staff member has requested ID and when it has been refused. A refusal book also indicates how many staff have made refusals and highlights any training requirements;
- The Police provide a training course to the licensed trade which is free of charge. The Police have indicated they would prefer to provide training as opposed to issuing a fine. Training covers legal restrictions on alcohol, cigarettes and fireworks;
- Large supermarkets have tight policies with staff training every three months;
- The Committee was also advised of Operation ARIES, a multi-agency crackdown on under-age drinking and anti-social behaviour due to be launched on 8 July at Durham County Council offices. Action would include Officers and partner organisations monitoring repeat offenders who would be subject to a 'three-strike' rule and if an offender is stopped in possession of alcohol three times in twelve months and failed to accept support they could be required to attend court;

- A first offence results in the alcohol being confiscated. A leaflet regarding intervention is given and a warning is issued. A second offence would result in the offender being required to attend Central House to chat with the Police or the Anti Social Behaviour Team. A third Offence would result in the involvement of the Youth Offending Team;
- The maximum fine for selling alcohol to under age drinkers is £20,000. Also if there is a persistent problem the Police can, as a responsible authority, can ask for a review of the license;
- There was discussion on the information contained in the Healthy Behaviours Survey and Members were pleased to note the trend over the last five years in the reduction of the numbers of youngsters who use alcohol.

Disruption Panel/Counterfeit Alcohol

- There was discussion on smuggling alcohol which is a big problem and is difficult to control. There is illicit alcohol in the North East whereby no tax has been paid. Kate Jeffels advised the Committee that a County wide Disruption Panel is held regularly with membership including HMRC and Environmental Health. If smuggling is suspected through a business on an organised basis that business could be targeted through Public Sector channels;
- Concerns were also expressed that fake alcohol had infiltrated branded alcohol. Counterfeit alcohol is very cheap and can be dangerous but instances of fatalities are isolated.

Saturation Policy

- Darlington does not have a Saturation Policy for licensed premises. Regular meetings are held with the Fire Authority, Safeguarding, Legal representatives, Environmental Health, Public Health and Police regarding strategies and policies and the Police could ask for a Saturation Policy to be considered. However, any request would have to be supported by evidence and statistics.

Petrol Stations and Cinemas

- Members expressed concerns about the sale of alcohol in petrol stations. In Darlington some applications from petrol stations to sell alcohol had not been successful as the prime use of the premises is to sell petrol. There had been no further applications in Darlington. However, nationally successful applications had increased. In relation to Cinemas, the Committee was advised that advertising of alcohol in front of children could not be investigated until an application is made.

Minimum Unit Price

- There was a discussion on minimum unit price and concern that this policy has stalled;
- Evidence in Canada and Sweden proved that mortality-related conditions were reduced where minimum unit pricing existed and Balance was now campaigning to retain it. This Committee responded to the consultation on MUP in favour of it;
- Group were pleased to note that Darlington was no longer the worst in the Country for alcohol-related admissions;
- Kate Jeffels invited the Committee to visit the Recovery Centre on Victoria Road where people are keen to share their experiences.

IT WAS AGREED – (a) That a visit be arranged for Members of this Review Group to the Community Abstinence in Recovery Unit on Victoria Road for early August.

(b) That the Minutes of this Review Group be circulated to the next meeting of Licensing Committee.

(c) That information be requested on Operation ARIES for circulation to members of this Review Group.