

Response to the National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy

1. The principles that should underpin the strategy

The Government should be involved in managing the harmful effects of alcohol misuse for the following reasons:

- The harmful effects of alcohol misuse need to be publicised through public/national campaigns and it is the Government who are best equipped to manage and co-ordinate such campaigns. An example of this are Drink Drive campaigns.
- Education aimed at raising awareness is most effective when managed or co-ordinated at a national level. National media/public information adverts ensure everybody gets the same message, which can positively affect behaviour. The Department of Health already have excellent information and has run campaigns on the effects of Drug abuse. A similar approach would assist an Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy.
- Alcohol misuse causes much crime and disorder

When Government intervention is justified

- Government intervention is justified when the health or well being of individuals or the general public begin to suffer. For example, Drink Drive campaigns and the legislation that accompanies this are a response to the devastating effects that drink driving has had on thousands of people. Alcohol and drug misuse are a huge cost to society economically and socially, and it is only through Government intervention that this can be tackled effectively and in a consistent manner.

5. What principles should underpin a national alcohol harm reduction strategy?

- The basic principle has got to be education, focusing on the health implications of alcohol misuse.
- It is also important to focus on how anti-social behaviour is linked to alcohol misuse and the ramifications of such behaviour.
- The principle of the primacy of crime and disorder reduction

21. How, in your experience, can we minimise and prevent the injuries that are presented to A&E departments as a result of alcohol related assaults (often with glasses and bottles) or home and workplace alcohol-related accidents?

- Effective door keeping at licensed premises would go some way to reduce the number of alcohol related assaults. Training to a national standard for door supervisors would be part of the overall solution.

- Liasing with managers of problem premises and agreeing on good practice, such as toughened or plastic glasses and setting a maximum number for the premises, would also be part of the solution.
- Encourage night-clubs to provide transport for customers to rail links etc, to move drinkers away from town centres.
- Local authorities to make provision for larger Taxi Rank parking in the late evenings near town centre Public Houses, for ease of transport and to stop people congregating.

23. *What evidence is there about the links between alcohol and crime and the links between alcohol and anti-social behaviour? Are there any pieces of evidence you think we should be aware of? Where are there gaps in the evidence?*

- There is research, on the Home Office Crime Reduction toolkit website, which illustrate the links between alcohol and crime, and alcohol and anti social behaviour. In cases of Domestic Violence practitioners within Hertfordshire Constabulary suspect that alcohol could be a contributing factor in 50% of incidents. In a large percentage of these incidents, the alcohol is consumed in the home environment. Again, education and awareness raising could have an influence in this area.

www.alcoholism.about.com gives good information on the link between alcohol and crime/anti social behaviour.

24. *In your experience, is alcohol a factor in habitual re-offending? Does it lead to particular types of crime? How far does it lead to one-off offences?*

- Alcohol does appear to be a factor in habitual re-offending.
- Alcohol appears to be a major factor in offences of violence and criminal damage.
- One-off opportunistic offences can and do occur as a result of excessive alcohol consumption.

25. *To what extent can alcohol convincingly be demonstrated to be a factor in criminal and disorderly behaviour? How much is perception and how much is reality? What fuels the perceptions and are they accurate?*

- Figures identified by the Portman Group www.portman-group.org.uk suggest that the perception is higher than reality in relation to alcohol related crime.
- **Perceptions can be fuelled by local press reporting incidents of anti social behaviour, or through general rowdy behaviour in busy town centres in the late evening, and increased noise levels. 25. Alcohol is far from being the only factor in crime and disorder. Other factors are involved-for example town centre disorder can be influenced by lack of availability of transport or design of environment. What other factors might be involved? How easy are these to influence? Who is responsible for them?**

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- There are other factors involved in crime and disorder such as:
 - late night take-a-way restaurants which can attract groups of youths etc.
 - a lack of appropriate activity for young people in an area
 - Environmental and building design i.e. uncontrolled stairwells to flats can be a place for groups to 'hang out'.
- As long as there are resources available, these factors can be influenced relatively easily. Strict licensing also plays a significant part in reducing problems in this area. Longer licensing hours may actually assist as people consume alcohol at different times.
- Responsibility falls on many people here, for example members of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, shopkeepers and residents.

27. How does the impact of alcohol on urban environments differ from its impact on rural environments? What are the differences between urban and rural drinking patterns and how do they affect those communities and surroundings?

- There is a difference between the impact of alcohol on urban and rural environments. For example, when licensing laws were more restrictive, people who drank in rural areas felt safer drinking in licensed premises outside of licensing hours. The reason for this was rural areas had less policing and there was the belief there was less chance of being caught.
- Usually, in urban areas there is a wide choice of drinking establishments such as Public Houses, restaurants and bars, where people can move around to consume alcohol, often causing disorder in the process. However, in rural areas local inhabitants will have little choice other than the Public House and will stay in their local area.
- There are differences between rural and urban drinking patterns:
 - In urban areas there is more opportunity to drink through the day, whereas in rural areas in all probability, there would not be the demand for longer opening hours.
 - Because there are more establishments in urban areas, there is more opportunity to move around, whereas in rural areas people are confined to their 'local'.
 - Statistics show that Police tend to receive fewer complaints about country public houses.
 - In urban areas people often move from pub to pub. This can encourage town centre disorder, whereas in rural areas people tend to stay in the same place in the vicinity of their home.
 - In some small towns in Hertfordshire there is evidence of anti-social behaviour being linked to under aged drinking. It would appear that the alcohol is being obtained in most cases from local off licenses.
 - **Hertfordshire have entered into a joint protocol with Trading Standards to use "test purchases" to target premises in problem areas. A partnership approach is used and these problems are addressed through the Local Authority Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. Anti social behaviour contracts and in serious circumstances ASBO's can be applied for.**
 - **There is also evidence in the Youth Lifestyles Survey ("63% of 16 and 17 year olds whom had drunk in the last year said that they**

usually bought alcohol for themselves). The Licensing (Young Persons) Bill currently going through Parliament should impact on these problems.

28. To what extent can impacts on the environment (including crime, disorder, noise and waste) be designed out, for example by use of plastic drinking glasses? Are there examples of good practice it would be helpful for us to be aware of?

- Firstly, looking at established towns options could include:
 - Closing down premises that are badly run.
 - Enforcing legislation on the use of Identification to enter clubs and pubs etc.
- Planning is easier in new towns. Restaurants and other late night establishments can be built in one area and situated near good communication links and away from residential housing. Stevenage Leisure Park is a good example of this. Other Local authorities could be encouraged to look at ‘brown field’ sites that could be developed in a similar way.

29. There are some examples of good practice where a range of organisations responsible for dealing with different aspects of alcohol have successfully ‘combined efforts’ and shared information to tackle alcohol-related crime and disorder together. Should this approach be encouraged more widely? What inhibits organisations or communities from taking such an approach?

- It is essential that organisations combine efforts and share information; they all have different expertise which can help to tackle the problem of alcohol-related crime from different angles.
- Concerns about the legality of information sharing often inhibits organisations and communities from working together. Protocols for the exchange of information need to be in place. Education Departments receive will have information on pupils who consume alcohol regularly, but the issue remains “who owns the response to the problem?”
- Youth drinking issues need to be addressed in a partnership approach between Police, Local Authorities, and Education working together. When communities experience the benefits of partnership working, solutions will have more credibility and will be better co-ordinated through a holistic and joined up approach. We need to get rid of the lack of trust and suspicion between agencies and the community which sometimes exists, by sharing information and working together towards a common goal.

30. Is it right that anti-crime and anti-social behaviour initiatives need to be targeted on young people?

- Not necessarily. Initiatives aimed at tackling anti-social behaviour have to target a whole range of people. To simply target just one group is not addressing the

problem of anti-social behaviour. Nationally, ASBO's have been enforced on more adults than young people. It is not just young people who commit anti-social behaviour.

31. Should we be encouraging different drinking patterns-in terms of time spent drinking, location of drinking etc, in order to tackle alcohol-related crime and disorder?

Already covered above. However, it would be essential to assess and evaluate longer drinking hours after an appropriate period.

32. How can the law on, and policing approaches to public drunkenness and street drinking help to tackle these problems? Are existing controls and powers (such as those for local authorities to introduce drinking zones) effective. Are they sufficient?

- The following could help to tackle the problem of public drunkenness and street drinking:
 - The law needs to be clear and consistent and, most importantly, location specific.
 - Policing approaches need to be specific, consistent and again location specific.
- Existing controls and powers have a limited effect. Drinking zones have proved very difficult to “police”, one example is in St Albans town centre in Hertfordshire. Although the Local Authority applied and was granted the bylaw they have been reluctant to prosecute offenders identified by the Police. Local officers now seize the alcohol without attempting a prosecution. Other Local Authorities have resisted applying for the bylaw because of the cost of following through a prosecution.
- The laws on drunkenness are adequate. However, officers still have a problem when they stop a person under 18yrs in possession of alcohol. If the container is unopened and there is no evidence of purchase officers do not have power to confiscate. In some areas the alcohol is purchased by 18 year olds for siblings. Recent new laws may impact on this.

34. Drink –drive policies are generally acknowledged to have been successful. What can we learn from them?

- Policies have been instrumental in making drink driving socially unacceptable and have changed the culture of driving and drinking. This proves that awareness campaigns do work, but only over a long period. There is no quick fix!
- However, the numbers who drive under the influence of alcohol are still high. Young people are now as likely to drive under the influence of drugs and drug - driving testing needs to be developed to impact on this area.
- We have to learn from past drink-drive campaigns and promote initiatives such as free non-alcoholic drinks for designated drivers. Busy village licensed premises

could be targeted to provide these. Roadside notices in “hot spots” such as “Police breath tested 20 people here last Christmas” could also help.

35. Domestic violence is often associated with alcohol misuse – either by the perpetrator, or, on occasion, by the victim. What in your experience, is the nature of this link and what would you see as good practice in tackling the interrelationship between violence and alcohol misuse?

- The nature of the link between domestic violence and alcohol misuse is that alcohol could be the catalyst to the violence. As already identified, it is believed that alcohol is a factor in approximately 50% of domestic violence related incidents.
- The nature of the link is that alcohol changes behaviour. Education and awareness could assist here, as can effective support from domestic violence personnel. The victim has got to be encouraged to speak up and obtain the necessary help; the same can also be said of the perpetrator!
- However in low income groups home consumption leading to domestic violence appears to be a major problem. Highlighting this contributing factor through domestic violence campaigns could assist in reducing the instances of alcohol related violence.