

Safer Communities Partnership
'Working together across North East Lincolnshire'

Response to National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy consultation

1. About Safer Communities Partnership

Safer Communities Partnership is the statutory community safety (crime and disorder reduction) partnership covering North East Lincolnshire. As is recognised in the document, alcohol plays a part in many of the problems being dealt with by the current Community Safety Strategy for North East Lincolnshire. The Safer Communities Partnership therefore welcomes the moves towards this strategy – indeed has been keenly awaiting its measures. This response addresses those questions that Safer Communities Partnership feels to be within its remit

2. Safer Communities Partnership response

2.1 The principles that should underpin the strategy – questions 1-5

The harmful effects of alcohol misuse are costing communities both in financial and quality of life terms. Whilst individual responsibility obviously has a role to play the victims of alcohol misuse are not only those drinking to excess. The principles outlined in the consultation document's Introduction sum up the reasons for the Government being involved, but the range of organisations listed in question 4 also need to be involved in any action. In some instances that action may need to be brought about by legislation. There is a strong feeling in the community safety field that voluntary codes of practice/conduct have not made a considerable difference and legislation is the only way to ensure some commercial interests act with a wider responsibility.

2.2 Cultural and behavioural issues around alcohol use and misuse – questions 6-13

Research undertaken in this area has shown young people drinking more heavily over the last few years and drinking with the express intention of becoming insensible. The same research has shown that many obtain alcohol from their parents. In some cases the parents preferred their children to drink alcohol rather than use cannabis, even providing alcohol daily. Parents have complained of receiving mixed messages – on the one hand feeling encouraged to allow young people to drink (the continental approach) on the other being blamed for providing alcohol. Parents (and grandparents) would welcome clear guidelines/advice on how to help young people develop a sensible approach to using alcohol.

2.3 Health – questions 14-22

As a member of our local DAT, Safer Communities Partnership would welcome a strategy that tied into current work on Tackling Drugs Together. The big fear among our partnership is that Alcohol Action Teams will be required. An opportunity exists to extend the remit of DATs to cover alcohol, streamlining work on the issues that are similar and drawing on expertise where issues differ.

2.4 Crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour – questions 23 – 35

This is obviously the section with the greatest relevance to our core work. We would agree that alcohol related disorder can be alleviated by a holistic approach to town centre design, transport infrastructure and joint efforts from a range of agencies. Once again, encouraging private sector organisations to co-operate is often the sticking point in implementing initiatives. As a tourist area with strategies to encourage vibrant night life we are obviously aware of the balance between alcohol venues and their role in leisure activities and the effect on the residents and amenity of the area. Utilising the skills of marketing to encourage social responsibility, not just among young people but older age groups would be one lesson from the drink-drive issue.

2.5 Vulnerable groups – questions 36-40

Our experience highlights that children and young people from across the social spectrum. In some affluent areas young people have financial means to access alcohol more readily, whereas

the tolerance level of disorder is lower. With regards to those who are homeless and suffering from alcohol related problems issues identified locally include day provision and wet-facilities. When it comes to joining up services, the experiences of drugs related work would seem to indicate the need to join up at strategic, policy and practice level.

2.6 Education and communication – questions 41 – 50

Given the budgets spent by commercial interests on marketing alcohol the level of funding for promoting educational messages needs to be realistic. If it is accepted that alcohol misuse and the relating disorder, damage etc is a problem the outcome desired has to be changed behaviour. People continuing to misuse alcohol whilst fully aware of the risks/implications is not a satisfactory outcome.

Parents and grandparents have a key role as do other role models. As mentioned earlier parents have been receiving mixed messages and need clear advice on the effects of alcohol on young people together with advice and support on communicating these in an effective way to young people at a difficult stage in any parenting relationship (i.e. early teens).

2.7 Market-based solutions – questions 51-55

We would agree with the comments that understanding how this market works is the key to producing effective strategies. We would also comment on the cynicism that exists around voluntary codes of conduct and industry initiatives that are seen as tokens when compared with the spend on promoting sales.

2.8 The economic costs and benefits of alcohol – questions 56-61

The clear picture of costs and benefits will be welcomed by most of us working in any area affected by alcohol misuse. With regard to the responsibility for costs the clearer cost benefit picture will identify who benefits and it would seem fair that those who benefit financially the most should contribute the most to reducing the costs to society.

With regard to workplace-based initiatives, the stance in this area with regard to drugs and alcohol in the workplace policies has always been that the onus should be on supporting employees with problems wherever practicable rather than outright dismissal policies.

3. Further involvement in consultation

Safer Communities Partnership would welcome the opportunity to be involved in further consultation on this issue, which is a factor in many of the problems we are trying to address.