

The principles that should underpin the strategy

Our starting point is one of principle. Before considering how best to tackle the problems associated with alcohol misuse we need a clear understanding of why Government should play a role at all.

1. Why should the Government get involved in managing the harmful effects of alcohol misuse? At what point does Government intervention become justified?

In 1998 the Government produced the National Drugs Strategy which made a commitment to the public in four key areas. Young People, Treatment, Communities and Availability. Over the last five years literally hundreds of millions of pounds have been invested in the delivery of this strategy but incredibly alcohol was not included and officially has remained excluded from this strategy. It is hard to understand why a distinction was made between alcohol and all other drugs in the first place, indeed across all four areas of the strategy alcohol presents far more of a problem and in reality the distinction between alcohol and drugs is harder to make.

For Young People alcohol has much more influence on their lives than illegal drugs.

A recent article in Community Care magazine gives us a snapshot of this issue;

"The substance that caused the most harm to children - and appeared to cause the most professional difficulties - was undoubtedly alcohol' the same article goes to describe the dichotomy between service provision for young people with drugs issues when compared to those presenting with alcohol related problems.

For Treatment services, certainly here in Surrey at least half of those who present for treatment have alcohol associated problems and many will drink and use illegal drugs, the boundary is blurred were as the available funding streams are not.

In the work of Communities and Availability, alcohol is far and away a bigger problem for community safety than illegal drug, but once again when working in this area in great detail the distinctions become blurred. Suffice to say that in Surrey all eleven of the community safety strategies highlight alcohol related crime and disorder as a priority for action and although different police divisions in Surrey are committed to this end a disparate licensing strategy makes things harder than they should be. A simple example of where government directives could make a difference is by insisting police forces follow a basic licensing strategy. Government intervention is not only justified in all these areas it is overdue. Key strategic and detailed direction is required in all the areas very briefly mentioned. The examples of how to go about this have already been developed by Drug and Alcohol Action Teams and Community Safety Partnerships. Croydon DAAT and the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham would be a good starting point.

2. How far is alcohol misuse a matter of individual responsibility and when does Government have a responsibility to intervene, whether through services, legislation or persuasion?

Of course individual responsibility and self determination and control are important things to remember but a national strategy is not for those who are able to exercise personal responsibility and control. If we again use the example of the national drugs strategy, it's problems have, by and large have, stemmed from is advocates, the drug action teams, not

having statutory responsibility. Persuasion or partnership work is not always enough where as too much legislation can also be counter-productive. Using the example of the community safety agenda, legislation already exists that enables the police, councils and health authorities to control drinking, drunks and drink related violence and with many residents of Surrey Towns like Guildford reporting to be afraid of using their town centre at night because of alcohol related disorder a need for co-ordinated action to address the issue, stop alcohol related disorder using the existing legislation more thoroughly.

3. How can we strike a balance between individual and community rights and choices?

The two are the same.

4. What are the respective roles and responsibilities of consumers, voluntary groups, commercial interests and others?

Consumers have the right to drink alcohol without that causing a problem for other consumers. The community from which the consumers are a part of has a right to safety. Commercial interests are also a part of the community but it is for the government to define the boundries between commercial concerns and community safety.

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

An equality between drugs and alcohol in treatment services and funding
Community Safety and an end to alcohol related violence and disorder

The cultural and behavioural issues around alcohol use and misuse

Alcohol misuse and its impacts play out against a wider canvas of behaviour and attitudes related to alcohol: we need to understand this wider picture in order to understand how to influence and reduce harmful effects.

Questions

6. How do you define alcohol misuse? What factors do you take into account?

Drinking to excess on a regular occasion, whether this be weekly binge drinking or daily dependence drinking.
Drinking to excess and then using this as an excuse to commit a crime of damage or violence

7. What drinking patterns should an alcohol harm reduction strategy seek to affect?
How susceptible are such patterns to change? Where should Government concentrate its efforts in prevention?

As above.

8. Is there a relationship between trends in drinking and wider social changes – e.g. the spread of higher education, changes in workplace culture, later marriage and/or family formation? Where does this suggest we need to focus attention in influencing behaviour?

Britain has historically had a tag of a drinking nation. Our culture is one that strongly relates to the consumption of alcohol for social interaction and in social occasions. In many recent seminars about alcohol, this strategy and alcohol related disorder many speakers have called for a cultural change with defining what the current culture is or what the change in this culture must be. The government must have a vision, and aspirational direction that drives the detail in the strategy. In influencing behaviour we may argue that the government must seek to address the issue in the long term and concentrate resources in the education of young people from an early age whilst challenging drinkers attitudes to alcohol and in a wider context challenging peoples attitudes to leisure. Such a focus would undoubtedly lead to a confrontation with aspects of the licensing trade, this is not to be avoided.

9. One group we need to focus on specifically is young people, where the evidence suggests a rise in consumption, particularly by young women. Are there other groups we should be focusing on? For example are there specific issues around minority ethnic attitudes to, and use of alcohol which we should bring into our analysis?

Young People in general should be a concern. In tackling alcohol consumption by young people, one important element is the control on the sale of alcohol to young people. Research from Alcohol Concern and others have identified a dramatic rise in alcohol consumption, especially binge drinking, by young people in recent years.

Recent changes to the law have enabled local authority trading standards services to take action to prevent illegal sales for the first time.

However, the new duty on the trading standards service has not been accompanied by any additional resources. If the government is serious in considering the need to combat illegal sales to be a priority, then the additional powers and duties need to be accompanied by additional resources. Without additional resources the ability to intervene to make a real difference to the level of illegal sales is extremely limited.

In young people over 18 certainly young womens consumption is alarming and should be the priority. However the licensing trade target the under 30's and create establishments and products to serve this market. Of course there are issues of consumer choice and market led forces involved in this but it is not necessarily true that the trade in general acts appropriately placing to high an emphasis on personal responsibility. This is an area where direction from the government is essential. In some areas CDRP's have attempted to set prices with licensing representatives, avoiding happy hours, cheap drink promotions etc, this approach has been deemed un-lawful.

10. It is easy to focus on the negative aspects of alcohol use and misuse. But what are the positive cultural and behavioural (as opposed to economic) aspects? What parts of our culture would change for the worse if we did not have alcohol?

Nobody is proposing we shouldn't have alcohol. Sensible drinking is a pleasure and the pub and bar is something many people enjoy. Socialising, relaxation etc are all well documented positives for the continued use of alcohol.

11. Is there such a thing as a recognisably English drinking culture and if so what does it look like? What are the factors which influence it – for example are there sharp regional differences? Does it look different for different ages groups?

English drinking culture is very complex the public house is the focal point for many communities, especially in rural areas. However the variety of pubs and licensed establishments is in itself an indicator of the huge variety in the nations preferences. Drinking and eating, restaurants, cafes and bars are growing in popularity most town centres reflect this growth, but it would be dangerous to assume that this is an indicator of continental european habits being adopted here. Trying to compare one cultures use of alcohol with another is fraught with difficulties and any anthropological research in this area must of course be wary of cross-cultural analysis.

Sources that can point to regional differences give trends and provide information include. National Treatment Drug Monitoring Service, Health Development Agency statistics, NHS statistics, British Crime Survey and information gathered by Alcohol Concern.

12. What factors influence behaviour – fashion and marketing, family background, education and information, financial, legal and regulatory, scientific, environmental? Which are the most influential in your view? How easy is it to exert influence through those factors?

13. How do attitudes to risk affect use of alcohol?

Health: prevention, treatment and the impact on the NHS

The effects of alcohol misuse cost the NHS money. There are direct costs both to the NHS and in social care in treating those with alcohol dependence. And there are a host of indirect costs through alcohol-related illnesses and accidents; through violence fuelled by alcohol; and through mental illness and depression associated with alcohol misuse; and through the mixing of alcohol with illicit drugs. But there is also some evidence that moderate alcohol use for some groups can be beneficial to health.

Questions

14. How do you define harmful drinking? What factors do you take into account in deciding whether heavy drinking has become problematic drinking

15. How clear is the evidence both for the health costs and the health benefits of alcohol? Are there key pieces of research of which we should be aware? Where are the gaps in the evidence?

16. What are the costs for the NHS both directly and indirectly due to alcohol? We will be examining evidence on this but would welcome your views and any evidence you think we should be aware of.

17. What, in your experience, are the most appropriate means of prevention of alcohol dependence and serious alcohol misuse? What forms of training are most appropriate for professionals in health and social care, as well as other fields, who play a role in prevention.

18. “Brief interventions” can be offered to patients who have been identified as at risk from alcohol misuse. They may consist of a short session with a doctor or nurse to discuss a patient’s drinking and to offer help and support to cut down on alcohol intake, if the patient wishes to do this. How effectively do you think those at risk are identified? How well have you found brief interventions to work and how might they work better?

19. Do current treatments for alcohol dependence and hazardous drinking work? Are they sufficiently tailored to meet differing individual needs? Are there other forms of treatment we should be aware of? Is there a need for guidance for the commissioners of local treatment services? How should individuals best access treatment services?

20. What can we learn from drugs prevention and treatment?

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?

22. What are the links between alcohol misuse and mental health problems, including depression and suicide? How are services – both those aimed at prevention and treatment – best co-ordinated?

Crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour: the effects on our surroundings and community

The most visible effect many of us see from alcohol misuse is in our town and city centres: pavements littered with broken bottles and streets too intimidating to pass through. Links between alcohol and disorder are as much a matter for concern as are links between alcohol and crime.

Questions

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

The British Crime Survey - Home Office <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/bcs1.html>
Taking Stock - Ann Deehan - <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/prgpubs/crrs3.pdf>
State of the Nation <http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/Publications/stateofnation2002.pdf>
Britains Ruin
<http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk/Publications/Britain's%20Ruin%20text.pdf>
Alcohol & Violence - Social Issues Research Centre
http://www.sirc.org/publik/alcohol_and_violence_7.html
Drink and Public Disorder - Social Issues Research Centre
<http://www.sirc.org/publik/ddbook5g.html>

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?

Violence and disorder is largest problem associated with alcohol in terms of crime and disorder this includes re-offending and one off offences. Drink driving offences will show a considerable amount of re-offending

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?

See studies above

26. 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 factors to influence? Who is responsible for them?

See attached paper - Alcohol and Crime and Disorder In Surrey

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?

Essentially and this is a simplified approach but rural drinking will tend to be more about

community and of course rural licensed premises will very rarely offer the high capacity and high volume drinking that is available in more urban areas. Having said this all 11 of Surrey Community Safety Strategies highlight alcohol related crime and disorder as a priority for action. Certainly in the small market towns alcohol related disorder is the major issue for the police both operationally and logistically. The police in a large rural area of Surrey may have 3 market towns and a number of villages to cover with nlt a limited number of officers and therefore remedies like high visibility policing are not viable. More emphasis is placed on the partnership to help but until now this has not been tackled effectively. This is mainly due to the following;

Lack of strategy

lack of resources

dysfunctional partnerships arrangements

ineffective relationships with licensing trade.

In some areas pubwatch schemes have been effective in more rural areas. Mid-Devon is very good.

Dispersion is a major issue for rural area towns as public transport is non-existent and taxi services are very limited. I would also stress that any police force should operate a single licensing strategy with at least one dedicated licensing officer for each division. Ideally this should extend to a team.

In very rural areas, villages tend to complain about young people and underage drinking. Surrey Special Constabulary and Trading Standards have attempted to address this. See attached paper. There is also undoubtedly issues with drink driving in rural communities that cannot be addressed by policing but through education and engaging with rural communities and the publicans there in.

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?

Toughened Glass in licensed establishments should be made a condition of license.
Capacity in all venues should be restricted

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?

Yes, this approach should be encouraged. There is no good reason why all partnerships should not adopt information sharing in this respect.

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

It is not so much a question of targeting young people but targeting the group that are responsible for and victims of the most alcohol related crime.

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?

Yes, but education and encouraging different drinking patterns is a generational aim. Any attempt at changing cultural drinking habits is a massive undertaking that the licensing trade must be an integral part of.

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 no drinking zones) effective? Are they sufficient?

There are enough powers for controlling street drinking. The problem arises when the deterrent (sentencing) is insufficient to deter the individual from committing violence. There are not enough powers for controlling the licensing trade. Section 4 of the new licensing bill should help this.

33. One person's good evening out can be another person's sleepless night. Are there principles to guide the balance of individual rights and responsibilities?

Individuals have the right to go to a licensed premises without fear of violence or intimidation. Individuals do not have the right to drink too much lose control and commit offenses against another person or another person's property.

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

Drink drive policies have been successful in that the message that 'drinking and driving is unacceptable' has been accepted by the general public over time. A cultural shift has and continues to occur.

A simple example, every year the public will see an anti-drink driving campaign on the television. This massive campaign reaches many people and shows them the possible outcome of drinking and driving. In many cases this is shocking. The message, over time is getting through.

If the same tactics were adopted for anti-drink related violence were adopted it would be successful, over time. Show somebody, drinking having fun then ramming a broken glass into somebody's face and showing the consequences. This is shocking but it happens every weekend.

There is already footage of people being violent in town centres shown on TV as entertainment without mentioning that the people involved were probably drunk.

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 domestic violence and alcohol misuse?

The implications for vulnerable groups

Some people may be more vulnerable to the harmful consequences of using alcohol. Certain groups of young people in particular are at higher risk of developing a range of difficulties that include alcohol-related problems (for example children in social care, those excluded from school and youth offenders). Families and carers can play an important role in protecting young people from problems but it is important to recognise that living with a parent or carer with an alcohol problem can itself become a source of vulnerability.

Questions

36. Which children and young people do you see as being most vulnerable to the consequences of alcohol misuse?

37. What other groups would you identify as particularly at risk and vulnerable to the harmful effects of alcohol?

38. Those who are vulnerable to the consequences of alcohol misuse often have complex problems (for example they may be homeless and may have additional mental health or drugs problems) and such factors may be inter-related. What key factors need to be understood in addition to alcohol use that contribute to maintaining the problems facing such groups? Which of these factors should interventions be aimed at?

39. How can the services provided by the state and others to vulnerable groups with complex problems be joined-up most effectively? Are there examples of joined-up delivery it would be helpful for us to be aware of? What gets in the way of joining-up services?

40. How realistically can these vulnerable groups be dealt with by mainstream services and how far do they need services which are tailored to individual groups and indeed to individuals on a case-by-case basis? What is your experience?

Education and communication

All of us receive messages about alcohol to some extent. We see advertising for alcohol and respond in various ways depending on our preferences. Information on sensible levels of drinking is also available. And messages on the consequences of getting it wrong can be clear – most obviously for drinkdriving. These are powerful tools for giving information and shaping perception. Do they alter behaviour?

Questions

41. What should be the objectives in this area? Is the aim to raise levels of awareness? Is it to inform more specifically? Is it to change behaviour? Are there any particularly successful or unsuccessful examples we should be aware of?

42. Given clear objectives, what is the evidence on the effectiveness of these approaches? What do they actually achieve? How can their effectiveness be measured?

43. How well is the sensible drinking message reaching its audience? Is it sufficiently clear? What is the evidence on its penetration and its effect on behaviour?

44. How well is scientific research feeding into alcohol education? Is the message based on sound, unbiased and uncontroversial research and are new findings effectively incorporated?

45. Should particular groups be targeted for information and communication? Is there a need to provide more intensive alcohol education to groups other than young people (e.g. elderly drinkers)?

46. What is the role of schools, colleges, universities and other educational institutions in providing alcohol education as well as support for alcohol-related problems? How can we best establish and preserve a healthy learning environment?

47. What role is there for families/parents as role models or in educating their children on sensible levels of alcohol drinking and the risks of alcohol misuse? How can they best be informed and engaged in this effort?

48. What does experience show on the most effective means of getting messages across? Are there circumstances in which the Government is particularly well placed to do so, or conversely might be particularly unsuccessful?

49. What can we learn from educational initiatives in the field of illegal drugs?

50. Do you have views on the existing regulation of advertising on alcohol?

The shape of the market and market-based solutions

The drinks industry is a major part of the national economy. It provides large numbers of jobs both in supply and distribution; it influences trends and fashion through its advertising; and it provides a substantial portion of tax revenues. Understanding how that market works, what drives it and how it responds to demand is essential to producing an effective strategy.

Questions

51. Do you have any thoughts on the likely evolution of the alcohol industry over the next decade?

52. What is the relationship between the creation of trends and fashions in alcohol consumption by the market and consumers responding to trends and fashions? Are there discernible patterns which the Government might use in responding to the effects of alcohol misuse? Is there useful evidence we might draw on?

53. How far do you foresee research and development creating innovative market-led solutions to the problems of alcohol misuse?

54. How best can Government work with the alcohol industry to reach consumers? What approaches have been shown to be effective in England, the devolved administrations and further afield?

55. Are there other commercial interests which can influence drinking behaviour?

The economic costs and benefits of alcohol

Alcohol has significant costs for the economy. It costs the NHS and the police. It costs business money because of lost productivity and in some cases the need to repair alcohol-related damage. And it can be expensive for individuals who drink heavily and may find themselves unable to hold down a job. But it also has benefits. It brings in tax revenue and contributes to GDP. And it contributes to personal and social wellbeing for many. Part of the work on the project will be to form a clear picture of these costs and benefits.

Questions

56. How clear is the evidence both for the wider economic costs and benefits of alcohol? Are there key pieces of research of which we should be aware?

57. Where are the gaps in the available data on the economic costs and benefits of alcohol? Are there any obvious limitations we should be aware of? Are there any particularly helpful methods for assessing costs and benefits we should be aware of?

58. What principles could guide us in deciding who is responsible for costs? How far should they fall to individuals, how far to business and how far to Government?

59. What are the economic benefits of having an alcohol industry? Can we easily quantify them?

60. Alcohol misuse can increase absenteeism and decrease productivity, whilst moderate consumption of alcohol may be beneficial in terms of reducing stress and tension and facilitating networking in the workplace. What in your view are the links between alcohol use and educational and occupational attainment?

61. Are there particularly effective workplace-based initiatives designed to tackle alcohol misuse that we should be aware of?