

# **DEVON AND CORNWALL POLICE AUTHORITY**

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**Reported by Chief Constable**

## **ALCOHOL HARM REDUCTION STRATEGY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This report sets out the Government's strategy for tackling the harms and costs of alcohol misuse in England. The aim of this strategy is to prevent any further increase in alcohol-related harms in England. It will become a key feature of the public health policy, which the Government is at present consulting on, and will publish later in the year.

### **BACKGROUND**

For many years the Government has indicated the need for a National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy.

It has been requested that members be provided with a briefing of this document and informed of issues of local significance.

### **SUMMARY**

The strategy is 98 pages long and is divided into eight chapters: -

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Alcohol and its harms
- 3 The future strategy framework
- 4 Education and commitment
- 5 Identification and treatment
- 6 Alcohol-related crime and disorder
- 7 Supply and industry responsibility
- 8 Delivery and implementation

A summary as follows:

The vast majority of people enjoy alcohol without causing harm to themselves or to others. But for others, alcohol misuse is a very real problem and the Strategy Unit's interim analysis estimated that alcohol misuse is now costing around £20bn a year.

This is made up of alcohol-related health disorders and disease, crime and anti-social behaviour, loss of productivity in the workplace, problems for those who misuse alcohol and their families, including domestic violence.

The annual cost of alcohol misuse includes:

- 1.2 million violent incidents (around half of all violent crimes);
- 360,000 incidents of domestic violence (around a third) which are linked to alcohol misuse;
- increased anti social behaviour and fear of crime – 61% of the population perceive alcohol-related violence as worsening;
- expenditure of £95m on specialist alcohol treatment.
- over 30,000 hospital admissions for alcohol dependence syndrome;
- up to 22,000 premature deaths per annum;
- at peak times, up to 70% of all admissions to accident and emergency departments
- up to 1,000 suicides;
- up to 17m working days lost through alcohol related absence;
- between 780,000 and 1.3m children affected by parental alcohol problems; and
- increased divorce – marriages where there are alcohol problems are twice as likely to end in divorce.

Some patterns of drinking are particularly likely to raise the risk of harm:

- **Binge-drinkers:** Binge drinkers are those who drink to get drunk and are likely to be aged under 25. They are more likely to be men, although women’s drinking has been rising fast over the last ten year. Binge drinkers are at increased risk of accidents and alcohol poisoning. Men in particular are more likely both to be a victim of violence and to commit violent offences. There can also be a greater risk of sexual assault. The impacts on society are visible in, for example, high levels of attendance at A&E related to alcohol.
- **Chronic drinkers:** These drinkers are more likely to be aged over 30 and around two-thirds are men. They are at increased risk of a variety of health harms such as cirrhosis (which has nearly doubled in the last 10 years), cancer, haemorrhagic stroke, premature death and suicide. They are also more likely to commit the offences of domestic violence and drink-driving.

The strategy sets out a new cross-government approach that relies on creating a partnership at both national and local levels between government, the drinks industry, health and police services, and individuals and communities to tackle alcohol misuse. Such as: -

### **Better Education and Communication**

The strategy includes a series of measures aimed at achieving a long-term change in attitudes to irresponsible drinking and behaviour, including:

- making the “sensible drinking” message easier to understand and apply;
- targeting messages at those most at risk, including binge and chronic drinkers;
- providing better information for consumers, both on products and at the point of sale;
- providing alcohol education in schools that can change attitudes and behaviour;
- providing more support and advice for employers; and
- reviewing the code of practice for TV advertising to ensure that it does not target young drinkers or glamorise irresponsible behaviour.

## **Improving Health and Treatment Services**

The strategy proposes a number of measures to improve early identification and treatment of alcohol problems. These measures include:

- improved training of staff to increase awareness of likely signs of alcohol misuse;
- piloting schemes to find out whether earlier identification and treatment of those with alcohol problems can improve health and lead to longer-term savings;
- carrying out a national audit of the demand for and provision of alcohol treatment services to identify any gaps between demand and provision; and
- better help for the most vulnerable – such as homeless people, drug addicts, the mentally ill and young people. They often have multiple problems and need clear pathways for treatment from a variety of sources.

## **Combating Alcohol-Related Crime and Disorder**

The strategy proposes a series of measures to address the problems of those town and city centres that are blighted by alcohol misuse at weekends. These include:

- greater use of exclusion orders to ban those causing trouble from pubs and clubs or entire town centres;
- greater use of the new fixed-penalty fines for anti-social behaviour;
- working with licensees to ensure better enforcement of existing rules on under-age drinking and serving people who are already drunk. Working in partnership with the industry to reduce anti-social behaviour, some issues to be addressed may include layout of pubs and availability of seating, managing crime and disorder in city centres and improved information on safe drinking in pubs; and
- in addition to local initiatives, the Security Industry Authority (SIA) will begin the licensing of door supervisors with effect from March 2004 (23 August 2004 in Devon and Cornwall).

## **Working with the Alcohol Industry**

The strategy will build on the good practice of some existing initiatives (such as the Manchester Citysafe Scheme) and involve the alcohol industry in new initiatives at both national level (drinks producers) and at local level (retailers, pubs and clubs).

- At national level a social responsibility charter for drinks producers will strongly encourage drinks companies to:
  - pledge not to manufacture products irresponsibly – for example no products that appeal to under-age drinkers or that encourage people to drink well over recommended limits;
  - ensure that advertising does not promote or condone irresponsible or excessive drinking;
  - put the sensible drinking message clearly on bottles alongside information about unit content;
  - move to packaging products in safer materials – for example alternatives to glass bottles; and
  - make a financial contribution to a fund that pays for new schemes to address alcohol misuse at national and local levels, such as providing information and alternative facilities for young people.

- At local level there will be new “code of good conduct” schemes for retailers, pubs and clubs run locally by a partnership of the industry, police and licensing panels and led by the local authority. These will ensure that industry works alongside local communities on issues which really matter such as under-age drinking and making town centres safer and more welcoming at night.

Participation in these schemes will be voluntary. The success of the voluntary approach will be reviewed early in the next Parliament. If industry actions are not beginning to make an impact in reducing harms, Government will assess the case for additional steps including legislation.

### **Making it all happen**

Making it happen will be a shared responsibility across Government. Ministers at the Home Office and the Department of Health will take the lead. The progress will be regularly measured against clearly defined indicators and the Government will take stock in 2007.

### **CURRENT POSITION FOR THE FORCE**

In the consultation period Devon and Cornwall police provided a detailed response to the Home Office including a copy of this Force’s own existing Licensing Strategy document. Many of our current practices have been included in the national strategy, for example:

#### **Exclusion Orders**

Exclusion Orders are widely used throughout the Force and we also encourage the use of block exclusions. This enables members of a licensing association to ban individuals from all premises belonging to the association. Block exclusions are only used in more serious cases involving licensed premises but, in Torbay for example, there are 170 premises belonging to the Association and a list of these premises are presented to the Magistrates when applying for Exclusion Orders. This action is well supported by the local courts.

#### **Door Supervisors**

At present the use of properly trained door staff for licensed premises can only be made compulsory by imposing a condition on the Public Entertainment Licence. The PEL’s are administered by Local Authorities and the police have encouraged the majority of Local Authorities in this Force area to subscribe to compulsory schemes. In the past the police have also assisted with the training of door staff.

The Government has now set up a national training scheme and database for door supervisors under the authority of the Security Industry Authority. From 23 August 2004 all door supervisors in this Force will have to be trained and registered with the SIA. The police are working with this new agency to maximise the potential to reduce violent crime in the night time economy by improving the quality of door staff

#### **Underage drinking**

This will always be an issue and this Force regularly targets underage drinkers and suppliers (eg Operation KRAKE). More recently the police have also been accompanying Trading

Standards officers conducting operations involving juvenile test purchases in a good example of multi-agency co-operation.

### **Binge drinkers**

Sections of the licensing trade advertise drinks promotions, such as two for the price of one, £1 a pint, pay an admission fee and have “free” drinks all night. None of these promotions in themselves are illegal but it can encourage binge drinking. Nightclubs are allowed to sell alcohol outside normal permitted hours by the use of a Special Hours Certificate, a condition of which states that alcohol must be ancillary to music, dancing and food. One area of this Force secured agreement from local nightclubs regarding a minimal pricing level. This initiative attracted criticism from the Office of Fair Trading as the initiative was deemed to constitute illegal price fixing.

In the Guidance notes to the new Licensing Act 2003, the Government is now encouraging voluntary codes of practice to stop these cheap drinks promotions.

### **Closure Orders**

The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 2001 gave the police powers to close licensed premises for up to 24 hours if there is, or likely to be, disorder in the premises or vicinity or excessive noise emanating from the premises. The use of such Orders are a last resort after every other avenue has been explored including liaison and voluntary agreement with the licensee. This Force to date has never resorted to use a Closure Order although the threat of it has been used. The majority of licensees will voluntarily close their premises if requested by the police.

The new Licensing Act 2003 when implemented will give increased powers to the police to close licensed premises. The Government wish the police to more vigorously use these powers for poorly run premises and the Force aims to enhance the robust use of these powers where violent crime is a problem.

### **Policing Costs**

Some areas of the country such as Manchester have met with licensees of nightclubs who have voluntarily agreed to assist with policing costs for extra police in the vicinity of their premises. Similar schemes have been tried elsewhere in the Country but the licensed trade has not been receptive and schemes have faded. One national brewery has written to all Chief Constables informing them that they will not support such schemes. Devon and Cornwall have no such schemes in operation.

## **IMPACT UPON THE FORCE**

In this force the emphasis for the control of alcohol through the licensing act has always been with the aim of reducing the violence and disorder associated with alcohol misuse.

The latest Force Strategic Assessment notes the 32.4% increase in violent crime over the same period last year. The assessment shows that 74% of this increase is attributable to alcohol related violent crime. Although 45.7% of all violent crime within the two counties is detected, the force falls slightly below the national average for its Most Similar Forces under PPAF in relation to “sanction detections”.

In light of these figures the Force has now prioritised violent crime as part of its control strategy. The emphasis in relation to alcohol related crime will change from one of “control by administration” through the old licensing act to “proactive enforcement” under the new licensing act. The new act is not due to go live until October 2005 and the Force will not wait for this legislative change to take effect before acting firmly in response to the rise in violence crime.

Licensing officers are examining ways in which existing powers can be put to best effect to tackle the premises that are identified through the National Intelligence Model as causing violence through the sale of alcohol. We are working with partners in local authorities, the courts and the fire service to take action to close problem premises. We are also continuing to expand on the use of innovative reduction measures as outlined in the national strategy to prevent crime and disorder in the night time economy.

As a response to the control strategy status of violent crime the ACC (TP) has formed a VIOLENT CRIME GOLD GROUP which will examine reduction of violence in public places and improving offenders brought to justice together with the underlying cause of many of these – the misuse of alcohol. The Strategic Development Department will use existing data to carry out a “process management” of violent crime and detections to ensure that the Force is being credited for the level of resources committed to the issue. Through Territorial Policing and Partnership Unit the group will make use of national resources such as the Policing Standards Unit and the Alcohol Strategy to identify the latest initiatives for tackling the increase in all forms of violence. Some examples of this work include

- Harnessing existing CCTV in the fight against violence through the use of better intelligence and targeting.
- Working with local authorities on implementing strategies to improve the night-time economy by joining up transport plans, policing plans and local business and tourism needs.
- Redesigning town centres to reduce crime in the built environment.
- Using a problem-solving ethos when considering the robust use of police powers to close premises and seeking revocation of licenses where necessary for the maintenance of good order.

To conclude, the Force is entering a new era in relation to the correct identification of violent crime analysis and the use of reduction and enforcement interventions to enhance performance by tackling alcohol related violence.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Submitted for information purposes only.

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