



Overview & Scrutiny

**TACKLING ALCOHOL-RELATED
CRIME AND DISORDER IN LUTON**

Report by Luton Borough Council's
Task and Finish Group

APPENDIX A

Chair's Foreword

Our study was launched by Luton Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Board as part of a programme to examine those issues which local residents have identified as being most important to them. In a survey carried out over the Summer, over half of all respondents gave as their first or second priority the issue of drug and/or alcohol-related crime and disorder in Luton. Since the question of drugs and crime is such a complex one, deserving a more detailed study of its own, the Board agreed to concentrate in the short term on the specific topic of alcohol fuelled crime and disorder in Luton. This report is the outcome of the study.

The statistics are not ones which Luton can be proud of. The town has more recorded alcohol-related crimes than other areas in the East of England, and higher levels than the national average; and although the levels of crime fuelled by alcohol have decreased over the past few years, it remains a disturbing fact that, in a recent 12-month period, almost 60% of all alcohol-related crimes in the town centre were classified as violence against the person.

This is, of course, not a problem suffered by Luton alone. The so-called "café culture" that the Licensing Act 2003 was supposed to deliver failed to materialise, and instead town centres and neighbourhoods up and down the country have become blighted by crime and anti-social behaviour driven by irresponsible drinking. In response to a recent national public consultation, the Coalition Government, through the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill, has confirmed its intention to give local communities a greater role in local licensing, so that they can have a stronger voice in the establishment and management of town centres.

We welcome this commitment, although we recognise that any significant changes to the way in which licensing is managed are unlikely in the very near future. In the meantime, and while the Bill is progressing through Parliament, we offer for early acceptance and implementation by Luton Borough Council's Executive and its partners the conclusions and recommendations in this report. We believe that early local action can and should be taken to ensure that the irresponsible use of alcohol is no longer the driver of crime and disorder in Luton that it is today, making our streets and public spaces unsafe for our residents. We also believe that such action is necessary to deal with a problem which is damaging to the image and reputation of our town (bearing in mind Luton's forthcoming bid for city status); which jeopardises the prospects for the town's growth and regeneration; and which is costly in terms of scarce public resources.

Finally, I wish to record my thanks to my elected colleagues on the Task and Finish Group, to all those who have given evidence to the Group, and to the members of Luton Borough Council's overview and scrutiny team, in particular Angela Fraser, who supported us so effectively in our work.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barry Neale". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Councillor Barry Neale JP, Chair of the Task and Finish Group

Task and Finish Group's Recommendations

- R. 1 The Council's Executive and Community Safety Executive should provide their full support to Luton's bid for Purple Flag status and set up without delay a strategic group of high level officers and stakeholders from the commercial sector and elsewhere in the community to develop a vision for Luton's town centre night-time economy. (Page 7)**
- R. 2 The Council's Executive should reinstate the post of the Town Centre Manager, whose duties should include the development of a strategic plan for the regeneration of the town centre economy, with particular emphasis on the development and management of the night-time economy, and the coordination of policing and council enforcement resources. (Page 7)**
- R. 3 The Council's Executive should instruct the Children and Learning Department to carefully examine the proposed design and operation of the new 'TOKKO' youth centre in Gordon Street, with a view to ensuring full consideration is given to the safe management of the facility and the welfare of users and staff. (Page 8)**
- R. 4 The Overview and Scrutiny Board should acknowledge the financial contribution that the Community Safety Executive has made towards the setting up and maintenance of the SOS Bus. However, as key beneficiaries the NHS (namely; the East of England Ambulance Service and the Accident and Emergency Department at Luton and Dunstable Hospital) should be encouraged to make an ongoing financial contribution towards the maintenance of the SOS Bus. (Page 10)**
- R. 5 The Council's Executive should consider, pending the introduction of any new legislation, the feasibility of encouraging, in collaboration with licensed premises, shops, supermarkets and other retail outlets, the setting of a minimum unit price for alcohol in an effort to tackle and reduce alcohol related crime and disorder and health problems that are associated with irresponsible drinking; and should invite Luton's Members of Parliament to lobby the Government to bring in a national legal framework for the minimum unit pricing of alcohol. (Page 13)**
- R. 6 The Council's Executive and NHS Luton should prioritise resources towards alcohol education, prevention and treatment programmes, and should lobby Government to provide resources to at least the same level as funding available for drug treatment programmes. (Page 14)**
- R. 7 The Council's Executive should review licensing and planning policies in order to ensure that licensing and planning policy is joined up, and in order to diversify Luton's town centre economy. (Page 16)**
- R. 8 The Council's Executive should ensure that all available licensing and planning powers are used, in order to prevent the town centre being overloaded with the same type of businesses, such as licensed fast food outlets, which damage the nature and appearance of the area and contribute to anti social behaviour. (Page 16)**

R. 9 The Community Safety Executive and the Council's Executive should ensure that there is more visible policing and enforcement in the town centre during the day, in order to deter nuisance street drinkers. (Page 18)

R.10 The Overview and Scrutiny Board should acknowledge that there are limited public resources available to fund these recommendations and to request that the Council's Executive and the Community Safety Executive should:

- **Accept that tackling alcohol-related crime and disorder is a priority and target existing resources towards it;**
- **Explore the feasibility of developing proposals to utilise funding opportunities, including for the creation of Business Improvement Districts and the new night time economy business levy;**
- **Seek support from businesses to support and fund the development and management of the town centre night time economy. (Page 20)**

Tackling Alcohol Related Crime and Disorder Task and Finish Group

A recent survey carried out by Luton Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Board, over half of all respondents gave as their first or second priority the issue of drug and/or alcohol-related crime and disorder in Luton. The question of drugs and crime is wide and complex, deserving a more detailed study of its own, and the Overview and Scrutiny Board agreed the review should concentrate in the short term on the specific topic of alcohol fuelled crime and disorder in Luton.

Furthermore, the 2008 Place Survey found over forty-five per cent of all respondents (1,247) feared being a victim of crime in the town centre after dark. This concern amongst Luton residents is further supported in the Overview and Scrutiny study on the Fear of Crime in Luton that took place last year, which found many residents avoided the town centre and surrounding areas at night due to a fear of being a victim of alcohol-related crime, disorder and violence.

Finally, Luton has a higher than average incidence of alcohol-related crime and disorder and although the numbers of this type of crime have decreased over the past few years, it remains a fact that, in a recent 12-month period, almost 60% of all alcohol-related crimes in the town centre were classified as violence against the person.

The following outcomes and objectives determined for the Task and Finish Group, and approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Manager, in conjunction with the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Board, are:

- To help reduce levels of alcohol-related crime and disorder in Luton
- To examine the effectiveness of best practice reduction initiatives to combat alcohol-related crime and disorder in Luton
- To provide a Luton response to the White Paper 'Rebalancing the Licensing Act'
- To acknowledge alcohol-related crime has a damaging effect on Luton's image and reputation, and acts as a barrier to improving its regeneration and economic growth.
- To provide a clear vision for Luton in the conclusion and recommendations to place Luton on a similar level to other towns regarded as successful in achieving a safer

night-time economy environment, which encourages a wider clientele into town centres.

The Task and Finish Group Approach

The 'tackling alcohol-related crime and disorder' Task and Finish Group was established by the Overview and Scrutiny Board in July 2010. The first meeting was held on 20th September 2010, at which Councillor Barry Neale was elected as Chair of the Group. The other Members of the Group were Councillor Mike Garrett (Cons), Councillor Lakhbir Singh (Lab), Councillor Khtija Malik (Lab) and Councillor Desline Stewart MBE (Lab), together with project and support officers from Luton Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny and Democratic Services Teams.

The Task and Finish Group held five meetings in total taking evidence from a wide range of expert witnesses, including the Council's Community Safety Partnership Manager, Licensing Services Manager, Head of Planning, and Head of Regeneration. External evidence was taken from the Luton Drugs and Alcohol Strategic Partnership Manager, the Alcohol Services for the Community Manager and Bedfordshire Police, as well as from members of the licensed trade. The Task and Finish Group published a press release in the local papers and on the Council's website to raise awareness of the review and to encourage community involvement and town centre businesses and licensees to participate in the review.

Other Research Undertaken

An analysis of best practice initiatives was provided to the Task and Finish Group, and the Chair of the Task and Finish Group and Group's overview and scrutiny coordinator attended conferences on the topic.

A town centre visit was made on 20th November 2010 by the Chair of the Task and Finish Group, the Group's overview and scrutiny coordinator and a elected Member who is not part of the Task and Finish Group, with officers from Bedfordshire Police, to view the various initiatives that help tackle and reduce alcohol-related crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour in the town centre.

The Task and Finish Group also considered the Government's developing proposals on the management of the night-time economy and the licensing regime.

The Task and Finish Group invited evidence from the East of England Ambulance Service, the Accident & Emergency Department at Luton and Dunstable Hospital and the Association of Convenience Stores, but these organisations were unable to attend due to prior arrangements.

Exclusions

The Task and Finish Group agreed not to include in their study on alcohol-related crime and disorder areas such as domestic violence and drink driving, which both are regarded as major issues in their own right. It is suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny Board should consider these issues in their future work programme.

The Evidence

Review and Analysis of the National Context

The 2009/10 British Crime Survey (BCS) found nearly half of all violent crime is fuelled by alcohol, and 50% of victims of violent crime believed the offender to be under the influence of alcohol. A fifth of all violent incidents take place in and around pubs and clubs, and 64% of all violent crime occurs in the evening or at night, peaking on Fridays and Saturdays. The BCS found a majority of these offences occur in the early hours of the morning, and a quarter of respondents said people being drunk and rowdy in a public place is a very or fairly big problem in their local area.

The 2009/10 Crime in England and Wales report published by the Home Office found that one million violent crimes are alcohol-related, and over one million hospital admissions were also alcohol-related. Alcohol is estimated to account for 40% of accident and emergency attendances, and the total cost to society is estimated to be between eight and thirteen billion pounds, which includes costs resulting from crime, direct physical and emotional costs to victims, costs to the health service and the criminal justice system. The report further states policing the night-time economy is resource intensive, where 22 out of 48 Police authorities (46%) reported the night-time economy is the main reason for overtime payments.

Initiatives to Reduce Alcohol-Related Crime and Disorder

The Task and Finish Group looked at a number of initiatives that successfully reduced alcohol-related crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour in towns and city centres in England and Wales, including those which provide a safe environment for socialising and which encourage developing economic growth.

Purple Flag

The Purple Flag scheme is a new 'gold standard' for entertainment and hospitality zones at night and is considered an effective tool that helps reduce crime and disorder, which is achieved through the effective management of the night-time economy. Purple Flag brings added benefits to help reduce negative perceptions that may exist, as well as providing an opportunity for successful town centres to promote the diverse range of activities to the public/visitors, town centre users, operators, residents, and tourists, which leads to increased investment. It also helps create a more diverse night-time economy clientele. The Task and Finish Group is therefore of the view that such a bid, if successful, will bring great benefit to the town.

Achieving Purple Flag status requires the Council and its partners to ensure there is coordination of Luton's night-time economy, and that there are effective and efficient links to transport and parking into and out of the town centre. In the evidence to the Task and Finish Group it was found that although a lot of work and initiatives were in place there seems to be no overall coordination or strategic direction for the night-time economy. Desktop research of comparable authorities that have achieved Purple Flag status found a town centre manager in place to coordinate and manage the night time economy, bringing together stakeholders from the commercial sector and the community to develop a strategic vision for the town centre. Such a position is regarded as necessary for regenerating a town's growth and creating an environment which helps to reduce crime and disorder.

“In order for Purple Flag to work you need to create a partnership ethos; where everyone should work together for the mutual benefit”.

Cathie Smith, British Institute of InnKeeping, speaking at the Alcohol Services for the Community Conference on 10 December 2010

“.... there is a clear distinction between shops closing and the evening economy, and businesses such as restaurants and cafes need to be encouraged to stay open longer to attract customers to the town centre, which would attract a more affluent user group”.

Head of Regeneration giving evidence to the Task and Finish Group on 23 November 2010

Recommendations:

- 1. The Council’s Executive and Community Safety Executive should provide their full support to Luton’s bid for Purple Flag status and set up without delay a strategic group of high level officers and stakeholders from the commercial sector and elsewhere in the community to develop a vision for Luton’s town centre night-time economy.**
- 2. The Council’s Executive should reinstate the post of Town Centre Manager, whose duties should include the development of a strategic plan to regenerate the town centre economy, with particular emphasis on the development and management of the night-time economy, and the coordination of policing and council enforcement resources.**

Review and Analysis of the Luton Context

The recorded crime figures for Luton found a 17% reduction in crime since 2008/09 and a further 26% reduction in overall crime, with evidence from the Police showing that 45% of violent crimes taking place in and around the town centre in the main are linked to the night-time economy. Luton’s night-time economy only contributes 10% of employment opportunities, which equates to 6% of its turnover. In the evidence from the Police and the Licensing Manager to the Task and Finish Group it was found the main clientele in the town centre at night are students, the unemployed and those on a low income. The poor image of Luton coupled with the fear of visiting the town centre at night due to perceptions of disorderly drunken behaviour act as a deterrent for other users to the town centre, which is supported in the Community Safety (2009) Survey that found Luton residents are more likely to feel safe during the day than at night in the town centre.

Luton has over 40 licensed premises in the town centre. Many of them are concentrated in four main streets with a combined capacity for 12,000 people to drink at any one time. Since June 2010 the Licensing Committee has issued 542 pub and club certificates.

Prevalence of Alcohol-Related Crime and Disorder in Luton

The evidence from the Police found a 9% increase in the number of offences of violence against the person in the town during the twelve months from November 2008 to October 2009 when compared to the previous twelve months.

The table below shows that the time period in which the highest proportion of offences of violence against the person occur at the weekend, during the night-time economy hours. The percentages relate to the number of violence against the person offences occurring within the stated time scales against the total figure for that year:

Non Dwelling VAP	Nov 06 – Oct 07	Oct 07 – Oct 08	Nov 08 – Oct 09
Friday 8pm to Saturday 4am	12.5%	11.2%	8.6%
Saturday 8pm to Sunday 4am	14.0%	12.0%	11.5%

The Police evidence further suggests Gordon Street as the main hotspot for alcohol-related violence and disorderly behaviour, due to the number of night clubs, fast food outlets and off-licences that are in the immediate vicinity. The Police also regard Park Street and High Town as similar hotspots.

Discussions with Bedfordshire Police during the Group's visit to the night-time economy on 20th November 2010, raised serious concerns about the implications of the establishment of the new 'TOKKO' youth centre in Gordon Street, and the possibility that such a facility in such a location could exacerbate an already problematic area for anti-social behaviour and disorder. The Task and Finish Group share these concerns, and consider that care should be exercised when planning the operation and management of the new facility.

Recommendation

- 3. The Council's Executive should instruct the Children and Learning Department to examine carefully the proposed design and operation of the new 'TOKKO' youth centre in Gordon Street, with a view to ensuring full consideration is given to the safe management of the facility and the welfare of users and staff.**

Over the last year (mid 2009 to mid 2010) there were 3029 violence against the person offences reported in Luton, with one in five of those incidents happening in the town centre during night-time economy hours.

Reports of recent consultations on perceptions of alcohol-related offences found most respondents believed such offences are increasing; however in reality, and according to a Strategic Assessment Partnership report, incidences of alcohol-related crime and disorder has fallen consistently in Luton over a three year time period. The decrease is due to the Community Safety Partnership and the Council prioritising the night-time economy and putting in place initiatives that tackle and reduce alcohol-related crime and disorder in the town centre.

SOS Bus

Luton's SOS Bus was launched on 17th March 2010 by the Safer Luton Partnership and is positioned in St George's Square on Friday and Saturday nights from 9pm to 4pm. The SOS Bus offers help, advice and medical assistance to vulnerable people in the night-time economy, helping to reduce unnecessary call-outs to the Ambulance Service. The evidence from the Safer Luton Partnership Manager shows that this initiative has so far saved the NHS £40,000 through the treatment of 237 people. The SOS Bus has also saved the Police 480 hours in officer time by supporting vulnerable people left alone who are either victims of crime or injured, and is also used as a place of safety for the homeless.

"I just want to say what a great service the SOS Bus is proving to be. My friend was assaulted on Friday night and the volunteers did a great job including getting her to hospital. The man who assaulted her was arrested and, as you can imagine, it was not the way we wanted our night out to end. However, we were very grateful for the SOS Bus".

Member of the public who visited the SOS bus on 20th November 2010

In 2009/10 the SOS Bus received £83,000 of capital funding from the Council to furnish the Bus that was donated by Arriva and some of this money went towards purchasing an extra support vehicle, the local Criminal Justice Board donated £30,000 for uniforms and publicity for the Bus, and the Police secured £10,000 of TKAP (tackling knives action programme) funding from the Home Office that went towards training volunteers and the coordinator post. In 2010/11 the Council also contributed £5,000 towards maintenance costs. The SOS Bus is self financed with no funding received from the NHS (East of England Ambulance Service and Accident and Emergency Department at Luton and Dunstable Hospital), which means the it is reliant upon voluntary donations and the hiring of the bus during the day to sustain the service. All the money raised goes towards fuel, equipment, supplies, volunteers' uniforms', training, cleaning equipment and insurance. There are currently 70 volunteers trained as drivers or in specialist areas such as sexual health, who are all CRB (criminal record bureau) checked and trained in First Aid level 3. The SOS Bus works closely with the other initiatives based in the town i.e. Street Pastors, the Police and ambulance service, and is connected to the Nite Net radio system, which is controlled by the CCTV control centre.

The Task and Finish Group acknowledge the excellent work and contributions made by the SOS Bus in helping to tackle and reduce alcohol-related crime and disorder in the town centre, and are of the view that the NHS should be encouraged to contribute to the ongoing costs of the SOS Bus.

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Recommendation

- 4 The Overview and Scrutiny Board should acknowledge the financial contribution that the Community Safety Executive has made towards the setting up and maintenance of the SOS Bus. However, as key beneficiaries the NHS (namely; the East of England Ambulance Service and the Accident and Emergency Department at Luton and Dunstable Hospital) should be encouraged to make an ongoing financial contribution towards the maintenance of the SOS Bus.**

Street Pastors

The Street Pastors scheme is an initiative launched by local churches to provide support and a befriending service for young and vulnerable people in the town centre on Friday and Saturday nights from 10pm to 4am. The scheme is self funded; with each volunteer contributing £300 towards uniform and any other equipment deemed necessary. All Street Pastors receive a 12 week intensive training course in sociology, knowing your community, drug and alcohol awareness and youth culture, delivered by practitioners in probation, the Police, children services and mental health. Desktop research of similar schemes elsewhere found they act as a calming influence to the young and vulnerable users of the night-time economy, and the Task and Finish Group acknowledge the very valuable role they play in helping to keeping the vulnerable safe.

Taxi Marshalling

The Taxi Marshalling scheme was first introduced in Luton in December 2007, and a review of the scheme and its positive impact in reducing incidents of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour led to it being extended. It now operates on Friday and Saturday nights from 11pm to 4am.

Prior to the introduction of the taxi marshalling scheme, Gordon Street was continually congested with both licensed and private hire vehicles making it virtually impossible for emergency vehicles to respond to incidents in this area, and causing conflict between vehicles and pedestrian traffic, which posed a significant risk to public safety.

Gordon Street attracts a significant number of visitors to the town, which is where Luton's largest nightclubs are situated. Since the scheme was introduced it has had a significant impact on reducing incidents in the area and helped reduce conflicts between vehicles and the public. Currently two private hire operators (GO and 722222) run businesses located at the bottom of Gordon Street that use a ticketing system for booked passengers, with vehicles reserved for the journey. The ticketing system allows marshals and taxi drivers to check that passengers get into the correct private hire vehicle, thus ensuring a safe journey.

Desktop research of similar schemes elsewhere such as Kingston on Thames found taxi marshalling schemes had produced a 10% reduction in violence against the person offences. Kingston up Thames has also achieved Purple Flag status for its night-time economy, and their taxi marshalling scheme is funded by town centre businesses.

Luton's marshalling scheme is currently funded by the Community Safety Partnership until March 2011, after which there is uncertainty as to whether the scheme will continue.

"I regard it as a crucial aspect of our approach to reducing incidents of crime and disorder in Luton Town centre. When it was introduced the number of incidents of disorder (and therefore crime) dropped significantly. This step change in performance was recently used to secure further funding for the taxi marshalling scheme.

I would strongly oppose any attempt to remove the scheme and regard it as a fundamental aspect of our measures to reduce violent crime and disorder. I am also well aware that the marshals are performing their role in an impartial manner".

Chief Inspector Bob Johnston, Bedfordshire Police, giving evidence to the Task and Finish Group on 25th October 2010

The Task and Finish Group is of the view that the taxi marshalling service positively contributes to the safety in the town centre, and has a positive influence on public perception.

Best Bar None

The Best Bar None (BBN) scheme is a nationally accredited scheme supported by the Home Office and is aimed at promoting responsible management and operation of licensed premises. The scheme was first piloted in Manchester in 2003 and was found to improve standards in the night-time economy, with premises competing to participate. Best Bar None has now been adopted in 100 towns and cities across the UK. The aim of the BBN scheme is to reduce alcohol-related crime and disorder in town centres by building positive relationships between the licensed trade, the Police and local authorities. Success is measured in the reduction in the harmful effects of binge drinking, as well as improvements in knowledge and skills of enforcement and regulation agencies, licensees and bar staff to help responsibly manage licensed premises.

To be part of BBN, licensed premises have to meet minimum standards set by assessors, and responsible operators are encouraged to share good practice with others. Research of BBN schemes found them to be co-ordinated with partner agencies such as the Police, Local Authorities, NHS and Town Centre Managers, and a local scheme was due to be launched in Luton from January 2011.

The Task and Finish Group welcomes the BBN initiative being launched in Luton, and hopes it will have a positive impact in promoting responsible drinking and in encouraging licensed traders in the town centre to prevent and deter alcohol-related anti-social behaviour.

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Underage Sales

One of the negative impacts of the Licensing Act 2003 has been a huge increase in the number and range of outlets in which young people can purchase alcohol. This has led to concern about the level of underage drinking and how much easier it has made the off-sale trade to sell to under age drinkers. Evidence from the Trading Standards Team Leader suggests that the level of under age drinking from off-sale venues, such as newsagents and off licences, is not a major issue in Luton, however, it was reported that the extent of the problem was not completely understood, because of a lack of resources to check and monitor the problem. The Trading Standards Team Leader confirmed that with more resources, more under-age test purchasing could be carried out. Trading Standards currently run a number of 'secret-shopper' exercises during the year that specifically target the off-sale trade. The problem with this is that these can only be carried out during school holidays due to the age of the young people enlisted to participate to buy tobacco and alcohol. Such restrictions mean under-age sales testing is unable to take place during the night time economy hours, due to lack of resources.

A scheme called Challenge 25 is underway in Luton. This is a retailing strategy that targets anyone under the age of 18 who needs to carry ID when buying alcohol; and it also encourages retailers to request proof of age before a purchase is made. The scheme builds on the successes of the Challenge 21 scheme developed by the Retail Alcohol Standards Group in 2005 and is regarded as an effective tool to tackle underage purchases - it has, the Group was told, directly led to fewer underage purchases.

Minimum Pricing of Alcohol

Increasing the cost of alcohol is believed to be the most effective way of reducing alcohol-related crime and disorder. This view is supported by the Prime Minister, who recently stated that there should be a local approach, supported by the Government, to address the problem. He said in August 2010:

"I think if what you're trying to do is stop supermarkets from selling 20 tins of Stella for a fiver that's what we've got to go after. Where I want to try and help is ending the deep discounting on alcohol. People going and 'pre-loading', having bought from a supermarket where they were attracted by a price designed to bring them into the store". (Manchester Evening News, August 2010).

The Government has recently introduced a Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill, which includes a package of measures aimed at Rebalancing the Licensing Act in favour of local communities, and which seeks to give local communities the tools they need to establish and manage the types of night-time economies they want. Although this draft legislation does not contain proposals to introduce minimum unit pricing, the Government have confirmed that:

"We are committed to taking forward proposals to implement the ban on sales below cost without delay; however they will not form part of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill". (Manchester Evening News, August 2010)

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Oldham and Manchester councils have set a voluntary minimum price of 50p per unit of alcohol. This is yet to be implemented by these councils. However, in other countries, such as Sweden, where minimum pricing has been made mandatory, it is found to work effectively in ending the cheap deals that are considered to fuel violence, disorder and health related problems.

Recent research carried out by the Government shows that alcohol-related crime costs the UK an estimated £7 billion pounds a year and that the cheap availability of alcohol causes problems, with young people 'pre-loading' with cheap supermarket alcohol. This has led to the House of Commons Health Select Committee and the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (Nice) to voice strong support for minimum unit pricing.

In light of all this information, the Task and Finish Group strongly supports the introduction of minimum unit pricing, and has therefore concluded that local Members of Parliament should be asked to lobby Government to ensure that legislation is forthcoming that gives local authorities the power to introduce minimum unit pricing.

Recommendation

- 5. The Council's Executive should consider, pending the introduction of new legislation, the feasibility of encouraging, in collaboration with licensed premises, shops, supermarket and other retail outlets, the setting of a minimum unit price for alcohol in an effort to tackle and reduce alcohol-related crime and disorder and health problems that are associated with irresponsible drinking; and should invite Luton's Members of Parliament to lobby the Government to bring in a national framework for the minimum unit pricing of alcohol.**

Prevention and Rehabilitation

In evidence from Luton's Drugs and Alcohol Partnership Strategic Manager to the Task and Finish Group, it was found that the original focus of the partnership was on drugs, and that this was reflected in higher levels of NHS funding being directed towards prevention and rehabilitation programmes for drug treatment, with less priority given towards alcohol prevention and treatment programmes.

The Partnership's focus has now changed and now includes a stronger focus on alcohol prevention and rehabilitation. Their current four main strategic objectives are:

- protect young people from the harmful effects of alcohol;
- create services for prevention;
- provide early intervention and treatment programmes;
- use enforcement and legislation to reduce alcohol-related harm
- work with the drinks industry to reduce alcohol-related harm.

In recent years, the Partnership's attention has gradually moved towards addressing the impact of night time economy issues and specifically drinking in the town centre.

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Young People - Prevention and Rehabilitation

National data show that there is increasingly a higher number of young people admitted to hospital for drink related problems; last year the figure was 92,220. Drink related deaths accounted for 8% of young people under the age of eighteen.

Luton's Drugs and Alcohol Partnership and Alcohol Services for the Community provide free advice to schools on alcohol related issues. Currently, 9% of primary and secondary schools provide drug education, to level three, that includes tobacco and alcohol assessed by the Healthy Schools Standards. In addition, 10% of schools are engaged in the Enhancement Model for Healthy Schools. This is designed to promote health and well-being for children and young people. It has also been designed to help schools to strive for lasting health and well-being behaviour changes in children and young people, with particular focus on providing targeted support for those who are most at risk.

During the last year, 126 young people between the ages of 18 and 25 accessed support provided by Alcohol Services for the Community.

Alcohol Services for the Community provide a service called PUKE (prevention, understanding, knowledge and education) which is aimed at young people up to the age of twenty four. PUKE advisors are based at the Luton and Dunstable Hospital on Friday and Saturday nights to support young people and their parents on issues arising from alcohol-related harm admissions. Providing this support has resulted in fewer young people readmitted for alcohol-related problems.

Adult- Prevention and Rehabilitation

Over the last year Luton's alcohol and drug drop-in services were used by over 1,000 people. Clients are supported through a range of different approaches, which aid their recovery and help minimise the harm to themselves and others. The service gives support to find jobs, offers tips on self care, and provides opportunities for people to make constructive use of their time and make friends to improve their health and well being.

Nationally, hospital admissions related to alcohol are increasing. In 2009/10 there were over 1 million alcohol-related hospital admissions, and this figure is rising by around 78,000 each year. In addition alcohol accounts for an estimated 40% of A&E attendances. However, locally the Council and its partners have a Local Area Agreement performance target to reduce the number of hospital admissions for alcohol related harm. Last year they met and exceeded this target, with 2009/10 NHS data showing that there were 2019 admissions against a target of 2165.

There is ongoing work to reduce admissions levels even further, with GP surgeries, hospital wards and Accident and Emergency identifying individuals experiencing problems with alcohol who would benefit from harm reduction advice, information and interventions.

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In evidence to the Task and Finish Group, it was found that Government funding is still mainly aimed at drugs prevention and rehabilitation, and this has resulted in a lack of funding for alcohol prevention and rehabilitation programmes. The group therefore concluded that, in order to reduce levels of alcohol-related harm and alcohol related crime and disorder, the government should be lobbied to reprioritise funding towards this.

Recommendation

- 6. The Council's Executive and NHS Luton should prioritise resources towards alcohol education, prevention and treatment programmes, and should lobby Government to provide resources at least to the same level as funding available for drug treatment programmes.**

Licensing and Enforcement

Licensing Act 2003

This legislation, which was enacted in England and Wales in November 2005, introduced a more relaxed approach to licensing. The Licensing Act 2003 saw an end to traditional drinking hours, providing the option of 24 hour opening to encourage a more diverse late night-economy. The removal of the traditional closing time was aimed at removing peer pressure to drink as much as possible before 11pm. It was thought it would facilitate a reduction in the density of drinkers on the street at peak times that contributed to crime, disorder and nuisance behaviour. According to Tessa Jowell, the then Minister for Culture, Media and Sport, the new licensing regime was designed to:

"...encourage a more civilised culture in pubs, bars and restaurants with tougher powers for the courts and Police, to help bring peace of mind to both those that do and do not choose to take part in our nation's rich nightlife".

The legislation was also designed to give greater freedom and flexibility to licensed premises and businesses to meet the needs of customers, as well greater choice for consumers, including tourists, in terms of where, when and how they spend their leisure time.

The evidence to the Task and Finish Group suggests the move away from fixed closing times towards a more staggered approach encourages acts of violence, crime and disorder, and puts significantly more pressure on Police resources in terms of managing night time economies. This view is supported by the Bedfordshire Police Authority, whose views were summarised in a report to Luton Borough Council's Full Council meeting on 14th September 2010, as follows:

"... Members particularly acknowledged that alcohol was often a factor in violent crime. Members were keen to understand the resource implications should the current licensing laws be changed. Members felt that if the plans to banish the late night opening hours and reinstate traditional pub and club opening hours are introduced valuable Police resources could effectively be redeployed in other areas dependent on need....."

APPENDIX A

The 2003 Legislation Revisited

The Coalition Government has conducted a review of the Licensing Act 2003 and published a consultation paper called 'Rebalancing the Licensing Act'. They stated through the consultation paper that the 2003 Act had created increased levels of violence and disorder and binge drinking due to the array of outlets that offer alcohol on a 24 hour basis. Following the consultation the Coalition Government have recently published proposals to change the current licensing regime, through the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill, which sets out the following five government commitments:

- Overhauling the Licensing Act to give local authorities and the Police much stronger powers to remove licences from, or refuse to grant licences to, any premises that are causing problems.
- Allowing councils and the Police to shut down permanently any shop or bar found to be persistently selling alcohol to children.
- Doubling the maximum fine for underage alcohol sales to £20,000.
- Permitting local councils to charge more for late-night licences to pay for additional policing.
- Banning the sale of alcohol below cost price.

This Bill gives more powers to the Police and local authorities, and allows local communities to have more say, enabling them to review and revoke licensed premises that cause problems. Such moves are welcomed by the Council's Licensing Manager and the Police and Council's partners, who support the proposed changes. However, the Council's Licensing Manager has told the Group that, in his opinion, there has not been an increase in alcohol-related crime since the Licensing Act 2003 was introduced, but the Act created a more dispersed effect over a longer period of time, due to the type of premises in the town centre changing to accommodate the economic down turn that brings different challenges and a different clientele.

"A move towards a more restricted regime is needed"

Kelvin Hopkins MP, speaking at an Alcohol Services to the Community Conference on 10 December 2010

The Government's proposals, if implemented, will also see five new conditions introduced that will give more local powers to refuse and revoke licenses, dealing with problems of late night drinking, temporary events notices and protecting children from harm of alcohol. Some of the proposals are already included in the Licensing Act 2003 but are rarely enforced, such as the ban on irresponsible promotions

"On my recent late-late shift, my section suffered with numerous people from London coming out from a night club situated in Gordon Street". They were aggressive and baiting officers in their conduct. They were also lifting their jumpers up to each other and motioning that they were going to shoot each other.

Is it possible to persuade the management of the club to refrain from inviting trouble to Luton as we are trying to make it a better place to be, to make it safer for all concerned, but it feels like we are swimming against the tide".

Extract from an email dated 19th November 2010 from Police Inspector, B Section, Luton Police Station

“Almost without exception every large scale disorder that takes place in the town at night is as a result of ‘acts’ being booked from London and bringing people to the town who present serious policing/public order difficulties. The DJ’s are often closely affiliated to the student population and we have strong evidence that many London gang members are among these groups.

A promotional event on 5th November resulted in commercial fireworks set off in the street, thrown at the Police and into the crowds. These are the sort of instances that the Police are not staffed to deal with and further reinforce the negative reputation the town has now gained.

In my view if we are to turn Luton around then one of the first things we have to deal with is the economic temptation of businesses to hold events that bring disorder and fear of crime to the streets of Luton”.

Chief Inspector Bob Johnston, Bedfordshire Police, giving evidence to the Task and Finish Group on 18th November 2010

Planning for Improvement

Evidence from the Council’s Heads of Planning and Regeneration has led the Task and Finish Group to conclude that much more can be done to alleviate the problem of alcohol-related disorder in the town centre, as well as contributing to the regeneration of the town, through effective planning and development control measures. Witnesses highlighted the need to change the image of a failing, empty town centre by attracting new homes, new businesses and new customers to the area. ‘Zoning’ could be utilised, i.e. encouraging different types of business to be located in different locations in the town in order to avoid over-capacity, or saturation, as is currently found with many off-licences and fast food outlets clustered in locations too close to bars and clubs. The aim of regeneration, the Group was told, is to make the town centre ‘look right and feel right’ other towns such as Watford, Milton Keynes and Peterborough were cited as places where this was achieved.

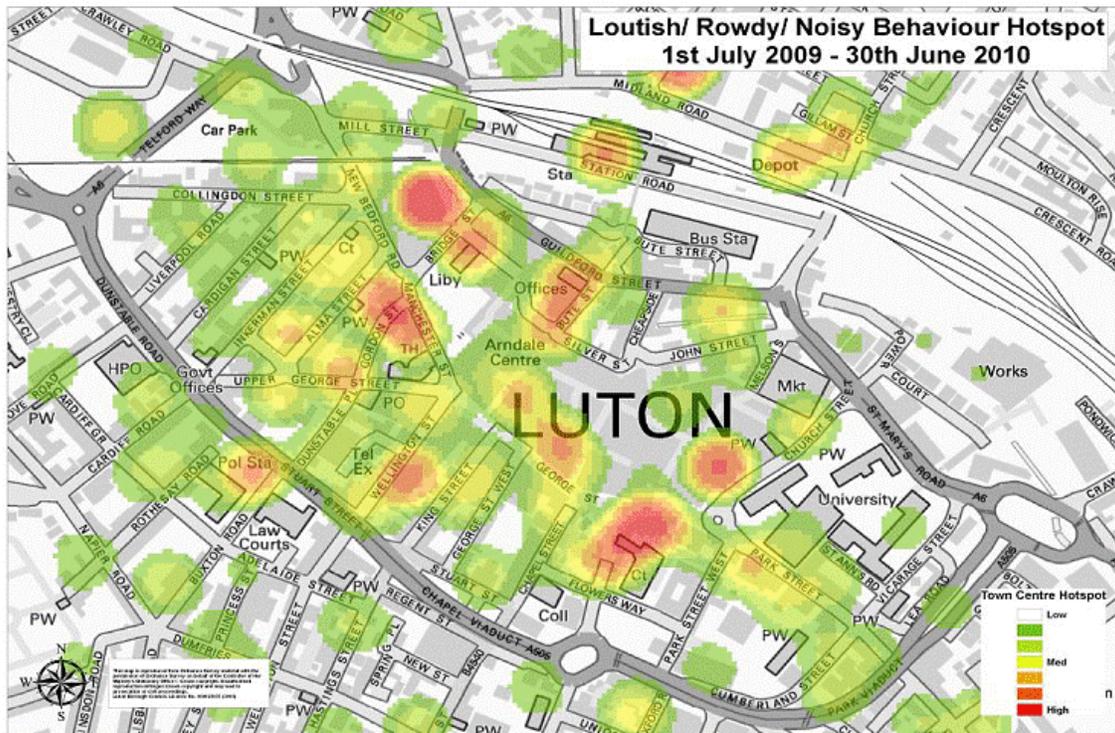
Witnesses were generally in agreement that coordinated action was necessary at a strategic level, linking the functions of licensing, housing, planning, transport, parking and retail. The local planning framework, the Group was told, was largely silent on the requirements of and opportunities for the night-time economy.

Recommendation

- 7. The Council’s Executive should review licensing and planning policies in order to ensure that licensing and planning policy is joined up, and in order to diversify Luton’s town centre economy.**
- 8. The Council’s Executive should ensure that all available licensing and planning powers are used, in order to prevent the town centre being overloaded with the same type of businesses, such as licensed fast food outlets, which damage the nature and appearance of the area and contribute to anti social behaviour.**

Nuisance Drinking

Anti-social behaviour has been linked to alcohol; 9% of all recorded cases in Luton relate to alcohol with the greatest proportion of these incidents taking place in the town centre relating to drunken behaviour (45%) and loutish/rowdy/noisy behaviour (42%). Thirty-six of these incidents took place in the Galaxy Centre, followed by the Accident and Emergency Department at Luton and Dunstable Hospital (25 incidents) and Luton Airport (21 incidents).



Other concerns around alcohol-related anti-social behaviour have been reported in the local press following the behaviour of street drinkers in the town centre.

"I am amazed at how little attention the drunks sitting around in Luton town centre receive from the Police and council. Every day I walk into The Mall by the entrance between Maplins and Debenhams and there are a number of drunks sitting in the square outside Maplins.

"No wonder Luton has such a poor image when drunks are allowed to hang around our town centre. It is time something was done about them. There should be no street drinking allowed and any alcohol should be confiscated and poured down the nearest drain. It seems the Police can't be bothered to do anything about them. I hope something is done soon as enough is enough."

(Your letters page in the Luton News on 3rd November, 2010)

Street drinking during the day is considered to be a relatively minor, low level offence by the Council and the Police, and is therefore given a low priority. The day time clientele is said to be different from the night time clientele, which warrants more priority action. The town centre has in place a Designated Public Place Order (DPPO), which means the Council and the Police have powers to confiscate alcohol and ban a person from the town centre. DPPOs are regarded as adequate for dealing with street drinking offences, and are regularly enforced. The Bedfordshire Police witnesses have suggested that a solution is to place more signage in the town centre; but many of the street drinkers are identified as Eastern European, and therefore it could be a cultural problem that needs to be addressed.

Desktop research into best practice adopted elsewhere to manage and enforce street drinking found alcohol exclusion zones can be used as a way of reducing alcohol-related anti-social behaviour, and these have been introduced by some local authorities and found to be successful.

Recommendations

- 9. The Community Safety Executive and the Council's Executive should ensure that there is more visible policing and enforcement in the town centre during the day in order to deter nuisance street drinkers.**

Conclusion

The rapid expansion in recent years of the night-time economy (NTE) – now an increasingly important part of the leisure, tourism and service industries – has raised serious crime and public order concerns in Luton. According to the evidence, many violent offences are fuelled by alcohol, and Luton's NTE is a key driver for many incidents of crime and disorder in the town. Luton's town centre at night is now mainly identified for its youth-orientation, its plentiful supply of cheap alcohol and fast-food outlets, and its focus on alcohol consumption as the key social activity and cultural motif.

Several aggravating features have been highlighted during the work of the Task and Finish Group, including the increasing tendency of young people to drink to excess ("binge drinking"), and their intention to do so when they go out with friends; the increasing practice of "pre-loading" (ie. drinking at home or in a public place before visiting licensed pubs, bars and clubs); and the easy availability and accessibility of cheap alcohol at a multitude of licensed retail outlets.

Whatever the causes of the problem, there is strong evidence to suggest that the nature and management of Luton's NTE, with its disproportionately high level of crime and disorder, is damaging to the town's image and reputation, and is creating an economic disadvantage to the town in terms of its market share of commercial opportunities. While the current situation persists, and while Luton's night-time businesses are heavily slanted towards gaining the custom of its many younger and low-income residents, the town's families, visitors and older customers (ie. those with more disposable income) are more likely to choose neighbouring towns such as Milton Keynes, Watford and Stevenage when planning their leisure and entertainment. Luton must decide what sort of business it wants to attract to improve its prospects of regeneration, and must then plan, at a strategic level, how this is to be achieved. At present, Luton is losing out.

Solving the problem cannot be left solely to the Police and their soLUTiONs partners, whose efforts to tackle the issue the Task and Finish Group acknowledge and applaud. We also pay tribute to the many excellent initiatives carried out in the town – by professionals and volunteers alike – such as the SOS bus scheme, the street pastors and those working in organisations such as Alcohol Services for the Community (ASC), whose education, prevention and treatment programmes deserve greater recognition within the wider community. But immensely worthwhile as they are, these initiatives can only be regarded as a relatively small contribution.

Luton's NTE should be seen as a key focus for urban public policy, and deserves high-level attention across a wide range of interlocking fields – including planning, development control, licensing and enforcement, public and private transport, parking, road safety and retail management. Proactive, integrated and interventionist action is necessary. A more joined-up approach is needed: a clear vision for Luton's future is required, with political buy-in from the town's civic and commercial leaders and chief officers and all those with a stake in the town's future success. There needs to be a strategic plan created, with the delivery of that plan's objectives professionally managed, within agreed timescales, by a single "town centre manager" responsible for coordinating the actions of all partners and agencies, and accountable to the Chief Executive of Luton Borough Council, acting on behalf of those agencies and partners.

Luton needs the benefits of a more successful planned mixed-use economy, which will help to bring about a more diverse customer footfall and greater spending in the town, as well as an enhanced public image and reputation, which will in turn help to develop new business. Less crime and anti-social behaviour would certainly be welcomed by residents and visitors as a consequence of these improvements; but a far greater prize would be the regeneration of the town, and the transformation of Luton into a place where people choose to live, work and play.

Recommendation

- 10. That the Overview and Scrutiny Board acknowledges that there are limited public resources available to fund these recommendations and therefore requests that the Council's Executive and Community Safety Executive should:**
 - a. Accept that tackling alcohol-related crime and disorder is a priority and target existing resources towards it;**
 - b. Explore the feasibility of developing proposals to utilise funding opportunities-including for the creation of Business Improvement Districts and the new night-time economy business levy;**
 - c. Seek support from businesses to support and fund the development and management of the town centre night-time economy.**