

At a meeting of the COMMUNITY AND SAFER CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on TUESDAY, 7TH DECEMBER, 2010 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Heron in the Chair

Councillors Ball, Copeland, Ellis, Emerson, Maddison and J. Walton.

Also in Attendance:-

Councillor Tate

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors O'Connor, Scaplehorn and Timmins.

Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 9th November, 2010

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 9th November, 2010 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Declarations of Interest (including Whipping Declarations)

There were no declarations of interest.

Balance – The Impact of Alcohol in Sunderland

The Office of the Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide the Committee with evidence from Balance, the North East of England's Alcohol Office. This would contribute to the Committee's policy review on Alcohol, Violence and the Night Time Economy.

(For copy report and powerpoint presentation – see original minutes).

Sue Taylor, Partnership Manager and Sue Robinson from Balance, presented the report and were on hand to answer Members' queries.

Councillor Copeland enquired as to the prices of alcohol today in comparison to 1960.

Ms. Taylor advised that she could not give exact figures but commented that there was evidence to show that there had been a huge shift in affordability.

Councillor Copeland commented that it would be interesting to see how much of a loss the supermarkets were making on alcohol and if these costs were being passed on to other products such as food.

Ms. Taylor advised that a review was being commissioned and that they would also be looking at the Christmas deals that were being offered.

Councillor Copeland expressed concern that there would be an increase in hospital admissions of younger people with such ailments as sclerosis of the liver and that she would like to see legislation in place for minimum pricing.

Councillor Copeland also commented that she believed those people admitted into hospital with drink related injuries should have to pay for the costs of their care.

Ms. Taylor advised that there was a huge financial cost to the hospital in treating such admissions.

Councillor Emerson enquired if consideration had been given to the affect introducing a minimum price on alcohol would have on local businesses such as the corner shops.

Ms. Taylor advised that off-licences were coming under increasing pressure to compete with the supermarkets and the introduction of minimum pricing could be more beneficial to such establishments.

Nonnie Crawford, Sunderland PCT wished to inform the Committee that there was the issue of establishments obtaining alcohol illegally which needed to be addressed also and was a major problem.

Councillor Ball commented that she would love to see the minimum pricing introduced in supermarkets as there would be major problems in the future if action was not taken.

Councillor Ellis enquired if there was any way to tackle the supermarkets selling huge slabs of alcoholic drinks and could they not sell them individually.

Ms. Taylor advised that the suggestion was certainly something she would take back for consideration and that they were also looking to address the availability, pricing and timing of advertising to ensure it was after the watershed, when children should not be able to see.

Councillor Copeland commented that there were problems due to local garages selling alcohol and that she would like to see drinking in designated areas only, which might solve such problems.

Ms. Robinson advised that would be a local decision but in general, banning drinking in public and introducing designated drinking areas could give a very poor image of the City. Ms. Robinson also commented on the Licensing Bill, and that unfortunately some things had not been included but there were still a number of things they could work with.

Ms. Crawford commented that there were real opportunities provided in the legislation but would require the Local Authority to take a risk. Ms. Crawford believed Sunderland should work with such bodies as ANEC in establishing a North East approach to support each other in using the legislation.

Ms. Crawford also commented on the need for the whole Council to work together in establishing a different approach to the issues.

In response to the Chairman's query, Ms. Davis advised that the Total Place initiative had not gone completely, with a commitment across three areas to push some issues at local area such as Alcohol and Drinking.

The Chairman commented that Total Place had also been addressing legislation on tax evasion and such like with a lot of good work being carried out, in the North East, work which he hoped would still continue.

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Commissioning Alcohol Interventions in Sunderland

NHS South of Tyne and Wear submitted a report and powerpoint presentation (copy circulated) to provide the Committee with a context of the investment made by NHS South of Tyne and Wear and an overview of the current services which were provided across the City and detail next steps in alcohol treatment across Sunderland.

(For copy report and presentation – see original minutes).

Ms. Crawford presented the report and advised that it was not just concerning the night time economy, but older age groups which were suffering from alcohol related issues, this was not only costing the NHS, but the Police and Local Authorities also.

Ms. Crawford advised that they were trying to reduce the number of alcohol related hospital admissions but so far had been unsuccessful, however the rate of increase was slowing down.

Ms. Crawford commented on the early data from the Cardiff Model and that she believed Sunderland's figures looked better than what they actually were, as not all instances of alcohol related injuries had gone through the justice system.

Ms. Crawford also commented on the need for the Local Authority to be brave in the use of the current and refreshed Licensing Act.

In response to the Chairman's query, Ms. Davis advised that they were seeing a large number of people being picked up from homes or streets by the Ambulance Service and the general age range was 40+, so it was not just the City Centre, but a City-wide issue.

In response to Councillor Maddison's query, Ms. Crawford advised they did not have exact figures of binge drinking in the home as people still did not give true reflections when questioned by their GP. Ms. Crawford also commented that Members would be taken aback at the amount of self reported binge drinkers.

Councillor Copeland raised concerns over the length of time it took for alcoholics to be referred into rehabilitation programmes.

Nicola Grainger, Alcohol Commissioning Officer advised that £80,000 had been put into establishing programmes as it was seen as a huge area that they were looking to strengthen in.

Ms. Crawford commented that GP's and colleagues had not appreciated how much improvement had been made in the Services, therefore had not referred patients to access the improved pathway.

In response to Councillor Copeland's query, Ms. Grainger advised that there was a dual diagnosis officer within the PCT with specialist workers to liaise with when a patient had multiple issues such as being homeless, mental health and alcohol problems.

Ms. Davis also advised that the PCT had funded a Housing Worker who is dedicated to pick up on such people that are homeless with alcohol problems. Ms. Davis informed the Committee that there were difficulties in providing accommodation for people with such needs but they were working with the Housing Section on the matter.

The Chairman commented on HM Revenue and Customs and that the previous Government had been pushing to work in partnership with many organisations and it was sad the Government departments did not get involved with Local Authorities, Police and Licensing when they identified problems.

Ms. Crawford commented that an improved ability for lobbying was needed by the Local Authority in conjunction with such bodies as ANEC and Balance to voice the concerns they have to the Government.

Ms. Robinson commented on the need for a stronger relationship on the opportunity to target off licences, if evidence could be provided to force reviews. In relation to the lobbying side, Ms. Robinson commented that she was surprised by the amount of trade representation around Government tables and had grave concerns over the amount of power the supermarkets had.

Ms. Robinson also commented on the need for regulation as trade representatives making the decisions was not the way forward.

The Chairman commented that he had come to the conclusion that it was the big business versus the "little people" and as an Authority, we were depending on the Government to implement the legislation to allow us to deal with the issues appropriately. The Chairman agreed on the need to lobby Government on the issue.

Councillor Ellis also agreed on the need to lobby Government and emphasise the issue as she believed self regulation did not work.

Councillor Copeland enquired if the Police could visit off licences and check for selling of illegal alcohol.

Mr. Terrett advised that this would be a duty of Revenues and Customs.

Ms. Robinson commented that unfortunately HMRC did not have sufficient staff to carry out such inspections in relation to individual premises, but there would be a real willingness to do so if it was possible.

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Performance Report Quarter 2 (April – September 2010)

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide the Committee with a performance update relating to the period April to September 2010. The quarter report included:-

- Progress in relation to the LAA targets and other national indicators.
- Progress in relation to the Fear of Crime Policy Review and Anti-Social Behaviour Policy Review Recommendations.
- Results of the annual MORI residents survey which took place during May to July 2010.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Copeland commented that she believed making areas more visibly attractive with the planting of trees and such like had made an affect on the fear of crime and that the introduction of the XL Youth Villages had reduced the youth crime.

Councillor Copeland also commented that she found the perpetrators of anti-social behaviour was generally in the age range of 20 onwards.

Gillian Robinson, Corporate Performance Monitoring Manager advised that she had statistics on resident satisfaction in specific areas and could provide a breakdown if required.

Ms. Davis commented that there were 20 screens across the City which gave the public information, and that it may be beneficial if Officers liaised with Councillor Copeland, so that details of the green areas were incorporated in the broadcasts.

The Chairman thanked Ms. Robinson for the report and commented on the importance of keeping on top of the figures.

The Chairman also commented that there was a great deal of publicity when something bad occurred but not enough when good things were achieved. The Chairman believed this had improved but there was a long way to go to suppress this fear.

4. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 December 2010 – 31 March 2011

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1 December 2010 – 31 March 2011 which relate to the Community and Safer City Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

5. RESOLVED that the Committee had considered the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1 December 2010 – 31 March 2011.

Work Programme 2010-11

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) providing for Members information the current Work Programme for the Committee's work during the 2010-11 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) R. HERON,
Chairman.