

# CHILDREN'S SERVICES REVIEW COMMITTEE

## ALCOHOL AND YOUNG PEOPLE

### FINAL REPORT

	Page No.
Background to Review	2
Scope of the Review	2
Recommendations	3
Findings	
Introduction	4
Part 1. Who is drinking?	4
Part 2. What do young people drink?	6
Part 3. Why do young people drink?	6
Part 4. Controlling, Preventing and Tackling Alcohol Misuse	8
Controlling Access to Alcohol	8
Enforcing Licensing Laws	8
Education and Prevention	9
Conclusion	11
<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1   Membership of and Operation of Review	14
Appendix 2   Background Papers	15

## **Background to Review**

The Review Committee considered the issue of young people and the influence of alcohol in 2007 while investigating multi-agency approaches to youth disorder. During that review it became evident that access to alcohol was a major contributing factor and a challenge for support agencies to tackle. Such is the importance of the issue that members decided to return to the issue, and launch a Working Group. .

## **Scope of the Review**

At the first meeting of the Working Group, the objectives were agreed as:

- To assess young people's use, misuse and access to alcohol
- To investigate how misuse of alcohol by young people is tackled, controlled and prevented
- To consider the positive support for young people to make sensible decisions about alcohol

## Recommendations

### 1. STRENGTHEN THE EVIDENCE BASE :

- A RECORDING** - All agencies and services involved with the Every Child Matters agenda to develop systematic recording mechanisms to record the incidence of alcohol use among young people.
- B ANALYSING** – The evidence recorded should be analysed to assess changing patterns of drinking habits and the extent of alcohol misuse in order to help inform the Safer Sunderland Partnership's Alcohol Strategy.
- C EVALUATING CURRENT STRATEGIES** – To ensure that what is measured makes a difference, there should be assessment of the impact of neighbourhood interventions such as diversionary activities and youth work.

### 2. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF ALCOHOL EDUCATION :

- D TRAINING** – Work with head teachers to prioritise local training for teachers in alcohol misuse issues and also for this to be prioritized as part of the curriculum.
- E EQUAL ACCESS** - All children and young people should receive a common core of information and practical skills about alcohol through PSHE lessons.
- F STRUCTURED AND INTERACTIVE LESSONS** - Delivery of PSHE should be structured to influence and reduce alcohol use and should include external agencies, parents, use of multimedia, and children and young people's perspectives. This could include 'myth-busting' activities in schools.

### 3. SUPPORT FOR PARENTS :

- G INFORMATION** – Giving parents clearer information about how they can best support messages about alcohol including alerting parents to the dangers in purchasing or providing alcohol for young people
- H INVOLVEMENT** – There should be a clear expectation that parents are informed about the timing and content of alcohol education.

## **Findings**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The issue of young people using and misusing alcohol is of huge importance in Sunderland, as it is in the rest of the country. It is usually associated with anti-social behaviour, teenagers hanging around on the streets, and fear of crime. Tackling underage drinking and public drunkenness is one of the top priorities in Sunderland's Fear of Crime Survey. Alcohol-related crime and disorder has also been identified as a top 3 issue by each of Sunderland's Local Multi-Agency Problem Solving Groups (LMAPs).
- 1.2 These important factors however should not detract from other issues arising from alcohol misuse such as the consequences for young people's health and well-being, impairment of educational achievement and reduced employment prospects.
- 1.3 The use of alcohol is not simply widespread, it is endemic. Virtually everyone drinks (90% of adults use alcohol). The position in Sunderland is to an extent influenced by the history of heavy industry which has helped to foster a 'drinking culture'.
- 1.4 The Local Alcohol Profiles for England in 2007 lists Sunderland as having one of the worst records for binge drinking in the country rating the city 4<sup>th</sup> worst. Alcohol related hospital admissions are also worse than the country average and alcohol related violent offences ranked Sunderland 242nd out of 354.
- 1.5 The Council's Risk and Resilience Board formed in November 2007 uses an integrated approach to children's welfare including substance misuse and related problems. Yet, despite all the measures in place to block access to alcohol, underage drinking continues to be issue for the combined efforts of multi-agencies to tackle.

### **2. Who is drinking?**

- 2.1 The Working Group received statistical information about the use and misuse of alcohol among young people across the country. We know that the local picture reflects a national trend for the numbers of young people who have tried alcohol

and who drink regularly which is falling, however the units consumed by those who do drink has increased considerably.

- 2.2 From occasional surveys we know that children and young people in Sunderland have reported drinking more frequently than the national average for the same age groups. 60% of aged 15's in Sunderland had drunk within the last week and 12% of girls at that age in Sunderland drank more than 14 units of alcohol a week, this compared with 6 percent nationally. 19% had been drunk at some time and 10% stated they had been drunk three or more times in the last four weeks.
- 2.3 The numbers of young people in Sunderland presenting with early signs of dependency is also of concern. There were 321 referrals to Sunderland's Youth Drug & Alcohol Project (YDAP) from September 2007 to September 2008 and the average age of those referred was 16. These are young people with issues that make them vulnerable and more likely to misuse substances. Groups include looked after children, young offenders, truants and excluded pupils, and those who had been affected by parental substance misuse.
- 2.4 A few years ago a range of separate services for young people with substance misuse problems was integrated into a single team called the Youth Drug and Alcohol Project (YDAP). Before integration, access to services was complicated and referral routes obscure. The new single team is making it easier for professionals, families, friends and young people to access substance misuse
- 2.5 Although we can assess this broad picture of young people's drinking habits, it is more difficult to define the exact extent of young peoples' drinking in Sunderland in terms of the numbers and frequency and any trends and drinking patterns.
- 2.6 If agencies do not record alcohol as an influencing factor, or separately record alcohol from drugs then the pattern of use by young people will not be accurately recorded. The most comprehensive data presented to the Working Group related to those young people who are severely disaffected and presented with multiple issues. These young people are the tip of the iceberg. A large proportion of young people use and misuse alcohol and never come into contact with relevant agencies.

- 2.7 The Working Group concluded that overall, it is currently problematic to develop a clear picture of the alcohol misuse among young people in Sunderland. The Working Group recommends that all agencies and services involved with the Every Child Matters agenda develop systematic recording mechanisms to record the incidence of alcohol use among young people, (including A&E admissions and school exclusions). This data along with the results of the annual pupil survey, which includes data on a range of attitudes and behaviours in relation to alcohol, should be used to inform policy and direct action.

### **3. What do young people drink?**

- 3.1 One stereotype of underage drinking is that it usually involves “alcopops” and other similar drinks. In practice, these drinks are often beyond the price range of underage drinkers, being more heavily used by over 18s. The Working Group heard that underage drinkers typically drink vodka, lager and cider.

- 3.2 It is of concern that some of the alcohol available to young people is 40% proof. The Working Group heard that young people tended to opt for quantity, and would try to get as much alcohol as possible for their money. Young people in Sunderland self-reported that following substances use:-

- Alcohol	59%
- Cannabis	37%
- Cocaine	1%
- Solvents	1%
- Valium	1%
- Volatile Substances	1%

- 3.3 Young people in Sunderland, when asked, said they wanted education on drugs and alcohol to be delivered from an earlier age and wanted it to be relevant to the drugs they were most likely to encounter especially alcohol, tobacco and cannabis. Older children wanted outside contributors to deliver education and wanted more engaging lessons.

### **4. Why do young people drink?**

- 4.1 When asked why they drink, young people give the same reasons as adults – to relax, to have fun, to let them enjoy themselves. To some degree, it may be that

young people are so surrounded by images of drinking and the language of alcohol use is so widespread that they are simply aping adults or copying their friends. There is also a misconception among young people thinking that more people their age are engaged in this behaviour than the reality. Younger pupils (year 7 and 8) have greater misconceptions about older pupils; which might result in younger pupils expecting to engage in that behaviour by Year 10. The consequences of not challenging these perceived norms are that risky behaviour increases because it is thought to be the norm.

- 4.2 One key factor in why young people drink that can be identified and tackled is connected with the comments about wanting to have fun. Evidence suggests that young people drink because they can enjoy themselves relatively cheaply. Young people do have disposable income, but not large amounts, and, considering the costs involved, it is not difficult to understand why many feel that an evening getting drunk in the park with their friends is a good alternative to simply hanging around with nothing to do.
- 4.3 This links to evidence the Working Group heard from all witnesses that underage drinking was less of a problem during the week than at weekends. Also, it is more of a problem during the summer months, when young people are out more often and for longer into the evening. In other words, there is a link between young people having “nothing to do” and underage drinking.
- 4.4 There have been fewer diversionary activities available at weekends for young people. When evening and weekend activities are provided they have demonstrated a positive impact. The Working Group was aware of some excellent examples of youth activities being provided at weekends, such as the XL village piloted in Sunderland for 12 weeks on Friday and Saturday evenings with a zero-tolerance alcohol policy. This initiative resulted in a marked decrease in anti-social behaviour in the area over the pilot period. However, there are simply not enough of these types of events to give all young people an alternative activity. All of the activities face difficulties in securing sustainable funding.
- 4.5 It is recognised that the provision of diversionary activities on Friday and Saturday evenings is very much a funding issue however, the positive outcomes are

unquestionable. The working group has not made a specific recommendation at this stage as it was aware that the Youth Development Group of Children's Services are currently undertaking a needs assessment and will present its own recommendations for consideration.

## **5. Controlling, Preventing and Tackling Alcohol Misuse**

### Controlling Access to Alcohol

- 5.1 The Working Group received evidence that young people get their alcohol from their own homes or use their pocket money to buy alcohol or get an older person to purchase it for them. Out of the young people who had drunk alcohol, 10% said they had bought the alcohol themselves from an off licence. These young people are more likely to drink on the streets and to drink large quantities.
- 5.2 Underage young people caught drinking on the streets will be tackled by Community Support Officers (CSOs) who have the power to confiscate alcohol from underage drinkers. Home Office funding to Sunderland Area Command has allowed for more patrols by police officers and CSOs during the school holiday periods and to visit disorder hotspots and visit off-licences. One recent campaign in Sunderland resulted in the confiscation of 68 litres of beer, 18 litres of cider, 17 litres of wine, and five litres of spirits during a month long crackdown.
- 5.3 Although it is largely true that young people are more likely to be buying alcohol from smaller independent traders, supermarkets have in recent years come in for criticism, particularly because of the cheap cost of alcohol. The Working Group heard that while supermarket pricing may be a factor in the quantities drunk by adults, this is not as much of a factor in young people's drinking habits as might be supposed as young people will source alcohol from other outlets, including the black market.

### Enforcing Licensing Laws

- 5.4 Underage young people who try to buy alcohol for themselves are tackled by Sunderland's Trading Standards and the Police through a combination of educational programmes and enforcement activity.



- 5.5 Traders can play a fundamental role in reducing alcohol misuse amongst young people. Efforts have been taken to engage and train traders. A Responsible Retailers Conference in Sunderland in October 2008 helped retailers with advice on how to crack down on under-age sales with the message *Just Say No*.
- 5.6 Sunderland Council carries out test purchases at local off-licences, often in response to complaints or suspicions about illegal sales. There were 7 successful prosecutions for underage sales in 2007 although it was noted that test purchasing was difficult to carry out effectively.
- 5.7 Sunderland has over 700 licensed premises and, despite the prevention and control mechanisms in place, it is clear that young people are still able to buy their own alcohol from some of these traders. Traders persistently selling to underage drinkers face a licence review from the Council's Licensing Committee and a number of reviews of licensed premises have taken place.
- 5.8 The Working Group was briefed about controls under the Licensing Act 2003 which includes the protection of children from harm. The Act provides a significant level of control and is an important tool if used to full effect. The Working Group was informed that the controls should be used to fuller and consistently applied. In that way the licensing powers introduced to protect young people can be used widely and effectively. Enforcement alone however will not provide the solution and education and a culture of change over the long term is necessary.

#### Education & Prevention

- 5.9 Prevention initiatives are about keeping young people safe. Educational establishments are key settings for providing children and young people with information and guidance on alcohol and other drug issues.
- 5.10 The Working Group heard that one vital element in education is that it is not just targeted at young people and involves parents in order to provide more comprehensive alcohol education.

- 5.11 Parental influence plays a major part in young people's drinking. Parents need to be encouraged to set a good example, as young people are unlikely to accept advice about drinking sensibly if parents do not do so themselves. Parents should be informed when schools are planning to provide alcohol education and be encouraged to support the messages that are being provided.
- 5.12 The only statutory requirement for alcohol education exists within the science elements of the National Curriculum, which prescribes that young people should have an understanding of how alcohol affects the body. However, in addition to this there is some alcohol education delivered through Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and through citizenship. Whereas the content of alcohol education in Science is based on developing knowledge and understanding, alcohol education in PSHE is about exploration and development of skills, attitudes and values. As there is only a statutory obligation to teach a minimum amount of alcohol education, the amount of time and effort devoted to this subject can vary widely from school to school. It is difficult to monitor and quality control what is provided in schools because PSHE is not compulsory.
- 5.13 In Sunderland's schools Ofsted judged that drug and alcohol education was good in 80% of lessons at Key Stage 2; 50% at Key Stage 3 and 75% at Key Stage 4. The opportunities at Key Stages 3 and 4 for young people to explore attitudes and share opinions were weak in 16% of lessons.
- 5.14 The Government White Paper *Choosing Health* sets out the aims of the National Healthy Schools Programme to develop effective PSHE across all schools and develop the ethos and environment to support it through a whole school approach. This ensures consistency of messages and provides the best infrastructure for effective alcohol education.
- 5.15 The Working Group felt that the curriculum needs to provide the opportunity for teachers to cover issues regarding health in more detail than they can do at present. A greater emphasis should be put on education of alcohol misuse in primary and secondary schools. Young people should have access to quality drug and alcohol education delivered on a regular basis in all schools. PSHE should be delivered by trained, competent and confident teachers, with support from expertise

beyond the school. A greater number of teaching staff therefore should have access to relevant training in raising awareness amongst young people.

- 5.16 The Review Committee has previously recommended that youth workers should be attached to schools, as part of the school staff but as an 'independent' contact for young people to listen and talk to them.
- 5.17 School nurses are also being used as a resource to educate young people about alcohol in some schools. However, the content of the education and advice delivered is governed by the schools. For example, in some instances school nurses only become involved with schools when a young persons drinking behaviour has become problematic, for example resulting in an Accident and Emergency admission. This is an example of the need for consistency and a commonly agreed standard so that all young people are receiving the same guidance.
- 5.18 The Working Group believes that all schools in Sunderland should be encouraged to provide comprehensive alcohol education that covers the whole range of consequences of alcohol misuse (including sexual health, teenage pregnancy and personal safety) and is not just limited to the minimum level prescribed in the National Curriculum. The Council should consider writing to all schools to encourage the inclusion of alcohol education in PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) lessons.

## **6. Conclusion**

- 6.1 It is recognised that drug and alcohol use by young people cannot be dealt with in isolation and needs further collaborative work. Measures which are proven to have an impact are:
- positive activities which divert young people from hanging around on the streets;
  - managing the evening economy;
  - continuing effective school-based programmes; and
  - the control of under-age sales.

- 6.2 The issues are not unique to any local authority area and require more creative solutions through joint scrutiny or regional scrutiny across north east local authorities.
- 6.3 It was very clear that there are a lot of individuals and organisations working on tackling alcohol use and misuse amongst young people. The Working Group were impressed by the dedication and commitment of all those who came along to give evidence and who were delivering innovative, effective and, often, nationally recognised results.
- 6.4 Tackling alcohol misuse by young people needs to be done through a range of approaches, but whilst some of those are easy to access (for example, most people know Trading Standards are responsible for dealing with underage sales), responsibility and awareness is not so clear in other cases. A single strategy for Sunderland could counter this.
- 6.5 Finally, the Working Group recognised a simple fact; tackling alcohol misuse by young people is incredibly complex, and ultimately relies on significant cultural change. But the difficulty of dealing with the problem must be compared with the dangers of not dealing with it. Misuse of alcohol leads to so many problems – health, road accidents, teenage conceptions, school exclusions, anti-social behaviour – that the cost of failing to act is too high.

## APPENDICES

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### Membership & Operation of Review

#### Membership:

The working group was established by the Children's Services Review Committee.

Members were:

Councillor Richard Bell (Chair), Councillor Dianne Snowdon, Councillor Robert Oliver and Mrs Pat Burn.

#### Operation of the Working Group:

The Working Group met 5 times on 3 September 2008, 13 October 2008, 11 November 2008, 10 December 2008 and 9 February 2009.

#### Contributors to the review:

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Leanne Davis	Drug & Alcohol Strategy Manager	Safer Communities Team, Chief Executive
Chief Inspector Jackie Clark	Sunderland City Area Command	Northumbria Police

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### Background Papers

Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy 2004	HM Government
National Alcohol Strategy: Safe, Sensible, Social	HM Government
Safe Sensible Social: The Next Steps in the National Alcohol Strategy 2007	HM Government
North East Alcohol Misuse Statement of Priorities 2007	GONE
Youth Alcohol Action Plan 2008	HM Government
Young People and Alcohol Guidance	HM Government
Adolescents and Alcohol 2007	Institute of Alcohol Studies Factsheet
Safer Communities Survey (Fear of Crime Survey) 2008	Safer Sunderland Partnership
Local Alcohol Profiles for England (LAPE) 2007	Centre for Public Health

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