

Birmingham Health and Wellbeing Board

Meeting Date: 21 January 2014

Agenda Item: 9

Agenda Item: Alcohol policy

Presented by: Adrian Phillips, Director of Public Health

Draft Resolution: The Health and Wellbeing Board convenes a workshop on this matter and includes the licensing committee.

Expertise to provide short term support regarding alcohol policy is sought.

That an update report on the Alcohol Strategy is received by the Board

Report

Introduction

Alcohol has played an integral part of our social fabric and will do for many future generations. It is an important part of the night time economy in the City. However alcohol in excess (either acute or chronic) has significant effects on an individual, their family and the community they live in. We are seeing an increase in the numbers who misuse alcohol in the long term and also those who consume large amounts of alcohol more infrequently.

Alcohol has significant effects on the health and wellbeing of the City. It accounts for over 5% of our life expectancy gap with England. It has significant effects on criminal behaviour, anti-social behaviour as well as disrupting normal family life. There is a strong association with domestic violence and it is a significant factor in many children who are taken into care because of parental behaviour.

Birmingham agreed an “Alcohol Strategy” in 2012 which has three aims:

- **Health** - Increased healthy life expectancy; reduced differences in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy between communities;
- **Crime** - Reduction in alcohol related crime and disorder and perception of crime and disorder;
- **Communities, Families, Children and young people** - Reduction in the adverse impact of alcohol on families and the wider community

Much work has been done in all 3 domains – for example alcohol-related violence and crime has fallen. We are including the “think family” agenda in our re-commissioning of substance misuse services. However more needs to be done for example domestic violence is fuelled by alcohol and we need to consider how best to

impact in this area. Whilst alcohol-related illnesses which require hospital care is stabilising, the acute effects of alcohol are vividly seen in the A&E departments of our hospitals most nights of most weeks. It would be appropriate for the HWB Board to receive an update on the strategy and share with the Community Safety Partnership.

There is strong evidence that the harms caused by alcohol are in the most disadvantaged groups. This is probably because the more advantaged have better knowledge about the effects of alcohol, greater psycho-social resistance to advertising etc., and be surrounded by people who are more likely to help them negotiate the adverse effects of excess alcohol consumption.

The rise in alcohol consumption which has been seen in England over the past 30 years is likely due to four factors:

- Price – it is widely accepted that this has a significant role and the unit price of alcohol has declined in the last 30 years.
- Availability – especially very strong drinks such as white cider and spirits.
- Mixing - with low risk products e.g. alco-pops
- Advertising – especially to women and older teenagers including university students where “Fresher’s weeks” are often sponsored by the drinks industry.

National Policy

There have been a number of initiatives over the last 15 years which have aimed to change drinking habits through altering alcohol policy. One of the effects was to reduce so called “binge” consumption by having alcohol available throughout the day and throughout the week. This policy has not delivered the desired outcomes.

More recently the Government have explored two other ideas. The first is the “Responsibility Deal” which includes the drinks industry. To date, this has had minimal change with the most notable success relating to clearer labelling of alcohol units on certain products by a number of companies.

The second had been to explore minimum unit pricing of alcohol. There had been a commitment to ensure alcohol was not sold at a price below cost price. This policy has now been withdrawn.

Local opportunity

There has been considerable interest shown by individuals and organisations in Birmingham regarding more responsible alcohol policy. This has been mirrored by other authorities. A recent event organised by the West Midlands Licensing Forum and the Public Health Network concerning alcohol and alcohol licencing identified a number of new opportunities. It was attended by many including the Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands Police. Whilst many delegates were very aware of the impact on crime and health, the major economic impact of alcohol misuse on a town centre through on-street drinking as well as general footfall through shopping precincts was underlined. Ipswich has been at the forefront of voluntary codes and has introduced a scheme

aimed at reducing the strength of alcohol. There has been special emphasis on a number of specific products especially strong “super-strength” ciders. This tends to be the drink of choice of individuals who embark on on-street drinking and general anti-social behaviour in city centres. This voluntary code has had a good take-up in the town centre in Ipswich. It has led to a halving of anti-social behaviour and other criminal offences and an increase in general footfall.. More importantly, many shops which sell alcohol have seen a big decline in abuse against staff as well as thefts.

There was consideration of how local licencing bodies can use regulatory powers such as Cumulative Impact Assessment to control alcohol consumption as well as using local By-Laws to reduce price either directly or indirectly. This is being actively considered by a number of places in the North West and now the Midlands. The importance of co-ordinated action was highlighted to minimise displacement.

It was also noted that CCGs are formally consulted on licencing applications and that more could be done to assist these organisations to respond appropriately.

Proposal

It is proposed that the following are undertaken:

- Further work is commenced with environmental health and other local agencies to explore voluntary codes on sales of strong alcohol
- Birmingham should help develop the West Midlands Licencing Forum to look at wider action in the conurbation to minimise displacement
- Review the potential of Cumulative Impact Assessment and other local licencing tools in Birmingham
- Consider co-ordinated approaches to reducing the strength of drinks, especially strong ciders and lagersl
- Consider co-ordinated approaches to pricing
- Work with surrounding Councils and Core Cities to ensure co-ordinated approaches and maximise lobbying
- To further support CCGs so that they can respond appropriately to licencing applications

Recommendation

It is recommended that a local workshop for the Health and Wellbeing Board is convened to take some of these matters forward and include the licensing committee. Additionally it is recommended that resources are used to bring in specific expertise to provide short term support. This will come from the public health budget. It is further recommended that an update report on the Alcohol strategy be received by the Board

Signing of Board Paper

Presented by Adrian Phillips