

**Report of Head of Licensing and Registration**

**Report to Licensing Committee**

**Date: 17<sup>th</sup> December 2013**

**Subject: Strong Alcohol Schemes**

Are specific electoral Wards affected?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s): City and Hunslet		
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number:		
Appendix number:		

**Summary of main issues**

1. Ipswich is reporting success with a voluntary scheme that asks off licences and supermarkets to remove the low cost, high strength alcohol from sale in order to affect antisocial behaviour in their area.
2. This success and the introduction of the scheme in a number of other areas, including Wakefield, suggest that Leeds should also consider this scheme as a solution to antisocial behaviour being experienced by residents and users of the city centre.

**Recommendations**

3. That Licensing Committee consider the contents of this report and instruct officers to commence discussions with partners on designing a similar scheme for Leeds with a further report to be brought the Licensing Committee on the findings.

## **1 Purpose of this report**

- 1.1 To inform Licensing Committee on the progress being made in other areas with a voluntary scheme which works with businesses to remove the high strength, low cost alcohol from sale in areas which are experiencing incidents of alcohol related antisocial behaviour..

## **2 Background information**

- 2.1 'Super strength' alcohol includes lager, beer and cider with an alcohol volume of 6.5% or over that is sold very cheaply. It is often bought by young people, or those with alcohol-dependency problems. Excessive consumption of these drinks can lead to health problems for the individual, can make them vulnerable to various types of crime and can lead to anti-social behaviour and community issues.

### Reducing the Strength - Ipswich

- 2.2 Partners in Suffolk have launched a campaign to stop the sale of super strength alcohol from off-licences in Ipswich. Off-licence owners have been asked to become Ipswich 'superheroes' by becoming 'super strength free' and removing these products from their stores. Suffolk Constabulary, NHS Suffolk, Ipswich Borough Council, Suffolk County Council, the East of England Co-operative Society, Tesco and Martin McColl work together in an effort to end the sale of this kind of alcohol, which has serious effects on consumers and communities.
- 2.3 The campaign is targeting the sale of these items only in off-licence premises. Licensees in Ipswich have been asked to join the campaign by voluntarily removing the sale of these products from their stores. Twenty-three independent stores in Ipswich are already 'super strength free'. In total there are 130 off-licences in Ipswich, 53 of which were super-strength free following the launch.
- 2.4 A year after its launch, the campaign has helped cut crime. The Reducing the Strength campaign signed-up two thirds of the town's shops to the project. The Police advised the number of identified street drinkers dropped from 78 to 38 in a year. The force's statistics for the first six months of the scheme showed the number of anti-social "incidents of concern" dropped from 191 to 94 compared to the same period the previous year.

### Reducing the Strength – Wakefield

- 2.5 Wakefield are launching a [Reducing the Strength Scheme](#) in two areas in the borough. The pilot initiative will be introduced in two wards, Normanton and Airedale & Ferry Fryston, as these wards have some of the highest levels of harmful and hazardous drinking, and anti-social behaviour outside of the city centre. The wards are ideally positioned to pilot such an initiative as they are sufficiently isolated to prevent people going to neighbouring areas to purchase cheap, super strength alcohol. In total 23 retailers will be involved. It is hoped that the scheme will reduce alcohol consumption and drunkenness in the ward areas, especially amongst young people. This in turn will lead to improved community safety.

## Other Areas

2.6 Other areas to have introduced the scheme are:

- High Wycombe – [Super Strength Alcohol Initiative](#)
- Westminster – Westminster have sought to ban the sale of high strength alcohol since 2008
- Nottingham – Super strength free

2.7 The Grocer reports that over 20 authorities are seeking to introduce a similar scheme. Our research shows that the areas that are considering the scheme include:

- Brighton and Hove
- Cambridge
- Coventry
- Derby
- Lincoln
- Northampton
- Plymouth
- Portsmouth
- Sudbury

2.8 A voluntary scheme isn't the only way to address the issues of very cheap alcohol. Examples of other actions taken by licensing authorities include:

- Newcastle – introduced a voluntary scheme on alcohol promotions suggesting a minimum price be observed
- Ealing – Imposed condition on Sainsbury Local when applying for extended hours to stop the sale of high strength alcohol
- Watford – Convenience store licence suspended for one month, and condition imposed banning the sale of high strength alcohol

## **3 Main issues**

3.1 Leeds city centre attracts people with alcohol dependency problems for a number of reasons. It is where the treatment services are and where cheap alcohol is readily available. The bus station offers shelter, warmth and public toilets. There are a number of attractive open spaces.

3.2 Not everyone who is alcohol dependent displays anti-social behaviour, and in the past those that have displayed antisocial behaviour have been dealt with by way of anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs). However the abolition of ASBOs in 2012 and replacement of the scheme with a streamlined toolkit has led to antisocial behaviour being experienced again.

3.3 West Yorkshire Police have requested that Licensing Committee look at the schemes, such as Reducing the Strength, as a way of controlling the sale of the type of alcohol that is marketed mostly to people with alcohol dependency issues (also known as street drinkers).

3.4 The area of the city that causes the most concern is the area around New York Street and the bus station. The proximity to the bus station and treatment centres means this area specifically attracts a number of street drinkers. A day care provision is located in this area causes alcohol based anti-social behaviour in the daytime to be of specific concern.

- 3.5 In addition there is very recent history of antisocial behaviour caused by street drinkers directly outside the Mecca Bingo Hall. This includes fighting amongst themselves, arguing and the harassment of Mecca customers. There is inter-agency work currently ongoing to resolve this.
- 3.6 In the area around the West Yorkshire Playhouse, theatre goers and car park users at the rear are experiencing antisocial behaviour being displayed by street drinkers using a nearby off-licence. The licensee of the off licence has been issued a formal warning by West Yorkshire Police.
- 3.7 The licensee of the Scarborough Taps, Mill Hill periodically complains about street drinkers coming into the premises harassing customers for money for drink and also drinking their unfinished drinks. The licensee also acts as a spokesperson for the unlicensed businesses nearby, e.g. a card shop, where street drinkers would try to beg inside the shop and also vomit and urinate over their display racks. This has coincided with West Yorkshire Police action against the off-licence on Bishopgate St selling to persons in drink. This has led to an increase in problems in other business premises nearby.
- 3.8 A number of years ago West Yorkshire Police had many complaints regarding street drinkers aggressively begging outside Morrisons, Merrion Centre. This started early in the morning when up to a dozen street drinkers would congregate outside the shop waiting for them to open, often pre-10am catching the morning commuters but fighting amongst themselves and frightening shoppers. West Yorkshire Police worked with Morrison regarding selling to people in drink and street drinkers. This led to two positive results which were that Morrisons agreed to remove certain products from their sales range that were attractive to street drinkers (Westminster sherry/Frosty Jack cider) and stopped selling cans singly. After this initiative the neighbouring policing Inspector reported that street drinkers from the city centre were travelling to the Morrisons in his area to gain their supplies.

#### Local Alcohol Action Areas

- 3.9 The Home Office are seeking 15-20 areas with higher levels of alcohol harm to work with over a 15 month period. The Home Office and Public Health England will provide advice and support to areas in formulating their action plans and reviewing progress. They will share their expertise in licensing law and practice and public health improvement. They will also use their influence and that of other partner organisations to remove barriers to data sharing between agencies and assist in overcoming local resistance to change.
- 3.10 They will make connections with mentor areas that have effectively and innovatively tackled the same issues that local action areas face, and bring together local areas to share learning and solve joint problems. They are challenging the alcohol industry to support LAAs, prioritising the roll-out of best practice schemes and galvanizing the support of businesses.
- 3.11 The Home Office Press Office will work with Council communications staff to help harness the support of local media to take up the cause to reduce alcohol related disorder on high streets. In addition Home Office Strategic communications will seek to work with five willing areas more intensively on communications to facilitate new or build on existing partnerships with local businesses to reduce problem drinking and the associated harms.

3.12 There is emerging support for Leeds to follow Ipswich by introducing a voluntary scheme around removing high strength, low cost alcohol from off licences in the city. There are issues around antisocial behaviour connected with street drinking and this scheme has proved effective in Ipswich to reduce such antisocial behaviour.

3.13 With permission from the Chair, officers have completed the Expression of Interest form on behalf of Licensing Committee.

## **4 Corporate Considerations**

### **4.1 Consultation and Engagement**

4.1.1 This report is a preliminary report seeking guidance on whether further work should be carried out into the implementation of a voluntary scheme. Part of that work would be to consult with residents, alcohol workers, partner agencies, ward members etc.

### **4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration**

4.2.1 There are no implications for equality and diversity/cohesion and integration.

### **4.3 Council policies and City Priorities**

4.3.1 The licensing regime contributes to the following Best Council Plan 2013-17 outcomes:

- Improve the quality of life for our residents, particularly for those who are vulnerable or in poverty;
- Make it easier for people to do business with us.

4.3.2 The licensing regime contributes to our best council objective:

- Ensuring high quality public services – improving quality, efficiency and involving people in shaping their city.

### **4.4 Resources and value for money**

4.4.1 The implementation of a voluntary scheme will be resource intensive until it is established. As it is voluntary, ongoing enforcement would not be required, however an annual review to ensure the scheme is still meeting its objectives would be recommended. The cost of the implementation would be borne by the Council, however a reduction in antisocial behaviour would reduce the number of complaints the council currently deals with in relation to this issue.

### **4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In**

4.5.1 This report is requesting guidance on a voluntary scheme; as such there are no legal implications.

## **4.6 Risk Management**

- 4.6.1 As this is a preliminary report and no substantive decision is sought, there is very little risk associated with the proposal.

## **5 Conclusions**

- 5.1 With antisocial behavior displayed by street drinkers being experienced in all parts of the city, officers are recommending that further research is carried out on whether a Reducing the Strength type scheme would be appropriate and effective in a large city such as Leeds. These types of schemes have proved effective in other areas.

## **6 Recommendations**

- 6.1 That Licensing Committee consider the contents of this report and instruct officers to commence discussions with partners on designing a similar scheme for Leeds with a further report to be brought the Licensing Committee on the findings.

## **7 Background documents<sup>1</sup>**

- 7.1 There are no unpublished background documents that relate to this matter.

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<sup>1</sup> The background documents listed in this section are available to download from the Council's website, unless they contain confidential or exempt information. The list of background documents does not include published works.