

Champs Public Health Collaborative Briefing

Developing a Cheshire and Merseyside approach to reducing alcohol harm: Licensing (November 2016)

1. Purpose of the Briefing

The purpose of the briefing is to provide a summary of work so far on a Cheshire and Merseyside common approach to reducing alcohol harm, with an initial focus on Licensing.

2. Background

As system leaders, Champs, the public health collaborative led by the Cheshire & Merseyside Directors of Public Health (C&M DsPH), works to identify areas where the wider system can make a difference to people's health and then attempts to enable collective action. Health harm from alcohol remains a significant issue for the C&M DsPH and they have identified this as a priority area for Public Health in the region.

Alcohol misuse across Cheshire and Merseyside (C&M) costs around £994 million each year (£412 per head of population). Of these costs, only £218 million are direct costs to the NHS. Harm from alcohol, therefore, remains a significant issue for C&M local authorities and partners. The C&M DsPH have identified licensing as an area where there is an opportunity to take action on a larger footprint that would complement local alcohol strategy work.

3. Scope

This work stream is led by Fiona Johnstone (Director of Health & Wellbeing, Wirral Council) as the lead DPH. A paper outlining the six proposed areas of work which could be addressed by the system as a whole was presented to, and agreed by, the Cheshire and Merseyside Chief Executives (C&M CEOs) in August 2016.

Following the agreement from C&M CEOs, a multi-disciplinary steering group was established and met for the first time on 20th September 2016. The initial discussion covered the practical considerations of the work streams in more detail and the allocation of tasks to willing members. A number of initial actions were agreed. The steering group is made up of a broad range of disciplines from member local authorities across the region including Licensing, Environmental Health, Legal and Trading Standards as well as Public Health. Representatives from local Police are due to attend the next meeting. The group will be responsible for overseeing the programme of work and ensuring that agreed actions are completed.

The six agreed work areas are as follows:-

a) Joint framework (to include recommendations for licensing strategy and Statement of Licensing Policy (SOLP))

There is an opportunity to jointly develop and implement a common framework around licensing strategy and SOLP to harmonise approaches to encourage greater consistency across C&M.

b) Enforcement of current law:

Liverpool's recent 'Drink Less, Enjoy More' campaign aimed for greater enforcement of the law which prohibits the sale of alcohol to people who are already drunk. There would be potential to expand the model more widely across C&M in settings where there is a concentration of licensed premises.

c) Local voluntary agreements (e.g. Reducing the strength, Ipswich)

These agreements involve engaging local retailers in collectively, voluntarily restricting the sale of high-strength products.

d) Development of Community Champions

There is the potential to create a programme of community champions in interested areas involving local Ward Members and residents. The aim is that any training would be accredited by the Royal Society for Public Health.

e) Essential training for responsible authorities and licensing committees

It is proposed to conduct a review of the Institute for Alcohol Studies' report on interpretation of the Licensing Act and potentially engage with a training provider to devise a programme which could be taken up by interested local areas as well as other responsible authorities.

f) Public health evidence against existing licensing objectives

There is potential to develop guidance around the available evidence for anyone making representations for or against licence applications.

These work areas will provide training and information to people involved in the licensing process, people employed in alcohol retail and the residents and communities where the licensed activities take place. They will range from enabling greater enforcement of existing law, to recruiting and training interested community champions in the effects of alcohol on their communities, signing local retailers up to voluntary agreements and producing guidance and training on finding and interpreting the available evidence within the current licensing process.

All of the work areas attempt to address health harms via the current licensing process by attempting to embed common practice across the region, by creating greater awareness and local responsibility and by addressing short term issues to ease the pressure on ambulance services, A&E departments and Police.

4. Next Steps

The next steering group meeting is to be held on the 9th December 2016. An event to share some of the learning with local colleagues is planned for the New Year.

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