

Agenda Item No: 9

Report to: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 31 March 2014

Report Title: Street Drinking Issues Update

Report By: Mike Hepworth
Head of Environmental Services

Purpose of Report

To update Cabinet on developments associated with issues raised in petitions about street drinking in Central St Leonards, first reported to Cabinet on 9th September 2013.

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that Cabinet accept the findings of this report and endorse the work being carried out in relation to street drinking in Hastings.

Reasons for Recommendations

This is a serious issue for residents and businesses in the areas affected, and a high priority for the Council. It is hoped that the local alcohol action area initiative will help the Council and our partners to identify and implement even more best practice initiatives to address the problems associated with street drinking, and Cabinet should continue to monitor the progress of this work.

Introduction and Background

1. On 9th September 2013 Cabinet considered a report responding to 2 petitions on street drinking in Central St Leonards and associated anti-social behaviour. The petitioners asked the Council to use their licensing powers, as follows:-
 - Effectively restrict the sale of alcohol to street drinkers;
 - Ban the sale of certain high strength beers and ciders;
 - Review the licences at every opportunity and reduce off licence trading hours.
2. A report is now required updating on progress with the issues discussed at that meeting.
3. Central St Leonards is one of the most deprived Wards in the country and there is a higher than average number of street drinkers living there. Many are also class A drug users, and their chaotic lifestyle impacts on other people living and working in the area. This is an important issue for local people, as street drinking can have serious effects on quality of life and economic development in areas where it is prevalent.

The Council's Role

4. The Council takes it's community safety leadership role very seriously, & chairs the Safer Hastings Partnership. The partnership draws together all of the agencies operating across the borough, to ensure that we all work together as effectively as possible. Addressing alcohol related crime remains a very high priority for the partnership. Through the partnership, the Council actively seeks to influence the degree to which other agencies such as the Police, the County Council and the health sector provide essential services to address substance misuse problems within Hastings.
5. The following are all good examples of ongoing work & new initiatives that the Council & our partners are implementing to try & further reduce the impact of alcohol related crime in Hastings & St Leonards:-
 - The Council chairs the local Community Alcohol Partnership drawing together agencies including the Police, licensing & trading standards, to specifically address alcohol related issues in the borough.
 - Since last October the Council has been hosting a new Hastings community safety hub, providing office space for the Police & local social landlords to work alongside our licensing and environmental protection & waste teams in our main Aquila House offices.
 - This January as promised, we launched the Reduce the Strength Initiative, which is specifically aimed at off licences selling strong beers, lagers & ciders to street drinkers.
 - Last autumn the Council successfully submitted an expression of interest to the Home Office, to become one of only 20 local alcohol action areas in England.

This new Government initiative will help the Council and key partners to identify more best practice initiatives to implement in Hastings.

- The Council's warden service continues to spend more time in Central St Leonards than other areas of the borough. Eg. in 2013/14 29% of all fixed penalty notices issued for irresponsible dog ownership offences were in Central St Leonards.
- The Council supports proposals for national minimum pricing laws but the Government isn't currently implementing them.
- The Council leads and co-ordinates monthly rough sleeper & street drinker multi-agency meetings, again seeking to improve the linkages between substance misuse enforcement & support agencies in Hastings. This group targets the top 10 most problematic street drinkers / drug misusers.
- Our Licensing Team are very proactive and work closely with colleagues from the Police & trading standards. Eg. the Council has revoked five premises licences appertaining to off licences for breaches of conditions or sale of illicit products.
- The Council funds a rough sleeper outreach service delivered by Seaview.
- The Council continues to co-ordinate partnership work to reduce the impact of chaotic drug users, such as those frequenting Cross Street public conveniences.

Discussion with Central St Leonards Community Representatives, and the Need for Better Access to Drug and Alcohol Abuse Treatment and Support Services

6. One of the original lead petitioners has also raised their concerns about street drinkers with the MP and the Police and Crime Commissioner. As a result they jointly hosted a meeting with community representatives on the 7th March. It was also attended by local Councillors and the Lead Member for Community Safety, several Council officers, as well as local community representatives and other service providers such as Seaview.
7. Although residents and businesses appeared to appreciate the multi-agency work already underway to address street drinking and the associated crime and disorder, they believe that the associated drug abuse is becoming more prevalent and want more robust action on this from the Police.
8. The Police and Crime Commissioner acknowledged their concerns, and told the community representatives that she would be working closely with the Chief Inspector for Hastings to address them.
9. Although local residents and traders want robust enforcement to reduce the impact of street drinking, like the Council and Police, they also appeared to recognise the importance of providing good access to health care services such as those currently provided by Action for Change. In April Crime Reduction Initiatives (CRI) are taking over alcohol services from Action for Change. It is hoped that there will be benefits from one provider delivering both alcohol and drug support services in the town. CRI is a charitable organisation specialising in working with offenders including those with serious drug and alcohol problems. Such organisations help

get street drinkers the sort of treatment that can help them control and reduce their substance misuse, which in some cases can lead to significant improvements for local residents and businesses.

10. The need for better access to support services was also discussed, including the need for locally based daytime diversionary activities to help those accessing treatment services to maximise their chances of recovery. Examples included drop in facilities and supervised restorative justice type initiatives, on the basis that such services would help reduce anti-social behaviour affecting the wider community. Comparisons were drawn with work in Brighton where the scale of street drinking is far greater than in Hastings.
11. All agreed that better communication was needed between enforcement agencies, service providers and the community, and it was agreed that the group should meet again in June to review progress.

Home Office 'Local Alcohol Action Areas' Initiative

12. The Government recently announced that Hastings is to be part of the new Home Office local alcohol action areas initiative. We expressed an interest in this initiative last autumn, as it will help us to focus on reducing alcohol related crime and disorder and alcohol related health harms.
13. The Government's commitment is designed to enable 20 local areas to strengthen partnerships and take the right action for their community. In order to do this the Government will support the 20 areas until March 2015 to:-
 - Identify underlying causes of the problems they face;
 - Develop innovative strategies to tackle these;
 - Monitor and assess their projects in an effective and standardised way;
 - Make connections with mentor areas that have successfully tackled the same issues faced by alcohol action areas; and
 - Put in place processes necessary to underpin future consideration of introducing health as a licensing objective linked to cumulative impact policies through effective local licensing partnerships and use of health data.
14. Our understanding of this new Government initiative is that it won't include the provision of additional funding, but that it will focus on providing us with strong mentoring to help us to address the alcohol related issues affecting the town.
15. A prerequisite of submitting our expression of interest was that it had to be fully supported by the Police and Crime Commissioner, the local Clinical Commissioning Group, and the Chief Executive of the local acute trust.
16. We believe that this new Government initiative will provide an excellent platform for the Council to work even more collaboratively with the health sector to improve the support available to address substance misuse in Hastings. As well as highlighting this important local issue to the Police and Crime Commissioner.

17. We are also one of only five of the local alcohol action areas that will be receiving additional intensive support from Home Office communications specialists.
18. A first meeting with the Home Office and Public Health England mentors took place on 10th March. It was chaired by the Lead Member for Community Safety, & attended by the Chief Inspector for Hastings Police, and officers from the Council and the County Council.
19. The potential scope of the project and how we wanted to develop it in Hastings was discussed, and a project brief is being drafted for circulation amongst those attending the meeting, and agreement prior to the next meeting in April. Although street drinking issues will feature strongly in this project, it's important to recognise that the project also needs to address wider alcohol issues that also result in health harms and crime and disorder.
20. At the time of drafting this report officers were liaising with the Home Office in relation to a possible visit by Norman Baker, the Home Office Crime Prevention Minister to discuss the initiative.

Progress with the Reduce the Strength Initiative

21. This initiative was launched in January 2014 following a successful workshop with the local licensed trade last autumn. It aims to stop the sale of strong beers, lagers and ciders to street drinkers from off licence premises. It is primarily operating in 3 wards (Central St Leonards, Castle & Old Town), with over 30 outlets now involved (increased from 18 at time of launch). We're considering expanding to address reports of dispersal issues.
22. It is too early to make a meaningful assessment of the initiative and this will be carried out in the next 12 months as part of the local alcohol action area initiative.
23. The Council is heavily reliant upon our statutory partners to provide evidence of breach of licensing conditions and to bring forward applications to review premises licences. This requires effective and well developed working relationships between our licensing team, the Police and trading standards officers. These arrangements have been in place for several years and were further strengthened last autumn when we established the community safety hub based at our main offices in Aquila House.

Policy Implications

24. Street drinking and the issues associated with it have clear implications for equalities and community cohesion, crime and fear of crime, environmental issues, and local people's views. Examples include:-
 - Tensions between street drinkers and the rest of the local community due to anti-social behaviour in public places, resulting in some people feeling intimidated by the street drinkers, & not feeling safe in areas they frequent.
 - Environmental issues such as increased littering, dog control offences, & drug taking paraphernalia being left in public places & on private property and potentially blighting such areas.

- Equality of access to services such as outreach support for street drinkers.
- The fact that local people submitted petitions to the Council in 2013 raising their concerns & raised continuing concerns with the MP, is indicative of the impact of street drinking & the strength of feeling about it.

25. The Council's partnership approach to addressing street drinking ensures that these issues are addressed as effectively as possible by the most appropriate agencies. Our approach is a difficult balance of contributing to enforcement to safeguard the general public, and supporting and promoting outreach initiatives to help the street drinkers.
26. This approach recognises the needs of the street drinkers and the local residents, & the fact that ultimately reducing health inequalities will also reduce levels of street drinking & the associated crime & anti-social behaviour.

East Sussex Alcohol Strategy 2014-19

27. The Council has recently helped to influence the development of the East Sussex Alcohol Strategy, to ensure that it recognises the need to address community concerns about street drinking in Hastings. Particularly the importance of enforcement initiatives such as 'reducing the strength' combined with better access to healthcare and support services.

Conclusions

28. Sadly there are always likely to be residents living in the borough who have serious substance misuse issues, resulting in serious crime and disorder and anti-social behaviour impacting on other residents, visitors and businesses.
29. The Council is clearly continuing to treat this as a high priority, and is seeking to be amongst the most innovative and effective local authorities in finding and implementing sustainable ways of supporting the individuals involved; and reducing the impacts on our communities.
30. The general public look to the Police to deal with the more serious anti-social behaviour associated with street drinkers, and the way that street drinking issues are policed is a matter for the Police. It is encouraging that the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner has taken a personal interest in the issues affecting Central St Leonards, and this bodes well for the local alcohol action area initiative.
31. Similarly, public health interventions and substance misuse outreach support are primarily a matter for the County Council public health service and the local acute health service providers.
32. However, the Borough Council is providing the essential local community leadership that is necessary to ensure that all of these agencies are fully engaged, and that they deploy the appropriate resources to areas such as Central St Leonards where this problem is particularly prevalent.

Recommendations

33. It is recommended that Cabinet accept the findings of this report and endorse the work being carried out in relation to street drinking in Hastings.

Wards Affected

Central St. Leonards

Area(s) Affected

South St. Leonards

Policy Implications

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	Yes
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	Yes
Risk Management	No
Environmental Issues	Yes
Economic/Financial Implications	No
Human Rights Act	No
Organisational Consequences	No
Local People's Views	Yes

Background Information

Cabinet report of 9th September 2013: Petition - Anti Street Drinking in Central St Leonards

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