

LICENSING COMMITTEE (LICENSING ACT 2003 FUNCTIONS)

Agenda Item 15

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	'Sensible on Strength'		
Date of Meeting:	21 November 2013		
Report of:	Head of Regulatory Services		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 This report sets out to inform the Licensing Committee about the Sensible on Strength Campaign.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the Licensing Committee notes the contents of this report.
- 2.2 That the Sensible on Strength campaign is formally launched.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Officers from the council's Licensing and Trading Standards team are working together with officers from Sussex Police Licensing to develop a customer driven compliance campaign and accredited trader scheme, to be known as Sensible on Strength. The purpose of the campaign is to find ways of limiting the availability of super-strength drinks in the Brighton & Hove and to encourage retailers who sell alcohol 'off the premises' to operate good practice measures that will promote the four licensing objectives. The four licensing objectives are paramount under the Licensing Act 2003 and are; the prevention of crime & disorder, prevention of public nuisance, public safety and protection of children from harm. Through achieving this change, the ultimate aim is to reduce alcohol related harm and anti-social behaviour, and to move vulnerable drinkers onto weaker alcohol as experience shows that if this can be achieved, the level of deterioration in health is dramatically slowed and there is more likelihood that they will take the step to abstinence and long-term sobriety.

3.2 Community

The aim is to engage with the community and work to reduce anti-social behaviour as well as improving people's health and working with businesses to promote and support responsible retailing. Officers want to encourage licensed businesses to voluntarily stop selling super-strength beer, lager and cider above 6% and implement other good practice measures including a refusals system, CCTV and documented training. Additionally a full inspection will be carried out

on the premises to check compliance with their licensing conditions and any additional measures. Officers will then present a certificate and window sticker to the business if they pass the inspection (see draft window sticker at appendix 1).

3.3 Alcohol and Health

According to data from the Office of National Statistics, the number of alcohol related deaths increased by nearly a fifth between 1999 and 2004. Deaths in England and Wales rose from 5,525 in 2000 to 6,544 in 2004. Alcohol Concern believes that these figures are an underestimate of the true figure. They argue that other research and statistics covering illnesses and health problems related to excessive alcohol consumption including some types of cancers, strokes, heart disease and dementia as well as accidents, suicides and assaults, provides a more accurate figure of over 30,000 deaths a year.

The Government's Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy states that there are up to 22,000 premature deaths per annum and over 30,000 hospital admissions linked to alcohol dependence. It is estimated that 70% of admissions to Accident and Emergency departments at the weekend are linked to alcohol-related incidents.

Brighton and Hove scores poorly on virtually all alcohol impact indices and as such the Alcohol Programme Board has been implemented to address the adverse consequences of alcohol consumption in Brighton and Hove – members of the Board consist of Health departments, City Council, Police and other organisations. There are four 'domains' of work within the Programme Board, one of which is the Availability of alcohol and as such this project falls within that area but aims to have an overall positive effect on all domains.

As an example, a single 500ml can of 9% super-strength lager contains four and a half units of alcohol, which exceeds the Government's daily recommended safe alcohol limit of between two to three units for women and three to four units for men. This clearly breaches the drinks industry's corporate social responsibility guidelines.

3.4 Anti-Social Drinking

Drinking in the streets can intimidate members of the public, cause disorder and nuisance, and generally degrade a public space.

The Prime Minister's Strategy Unit launched the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England in 2004. It stated alcohol misuse is linked to disorder and contributes to driving people's fear of crime; 61% of the population think that alcohol-related violence on the streets is increasing, whilst 43% of women and 38% of men see drinking on the street as a problem. Many people are therefore less, rather than more, likely to want to spend more time in city centres perceived as violent and dominated by alcohol.

3.5 Campaign Message

The campaign has a really very simple message to educate and encourage businesses to operate a responsible retailing scheme. The simple message is that the super-strength drinks are a breed apart from other lagers and ciders and

responsible for killing many homeless and vulnerable people. These drinks are also responsible for anti-social behaviour and are a scourge on many local communities. Experience shows, where businesses have removed super strength alcohol they have seen a reduction in crime & disorder such as thefts, intimidation and violence to staff.

The campaign message is not anti alcohol and recognises the long established beer and cider drinking culture in the UK and our own vibrant city atmosphere. It emphasises that super-strength drinks are causing terrible damage to many people and that if people with drink problems move off the super-strength drinks then their health and life chances will improve. Officers also maintain that educating, supporting and encouraging businesses is a step in the right direction of improving the negative alcohol trends in Brighton & Hove.

- 3.6 Currently there are over 60 off licence businesses who have volunteered to remove super-strength alcohol from their premises. Once 'Sensible on Strength' is implemented in Brighton & Hove, officers will approach all off licences with a view to encouraging them to join the scheme.
- 3.7 Officers aim to have the scheme fully up and running before Christmas 2013 and are working with the council's press office and design team to ensure that the message is as widely spread and understood as possible.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

As an accredited trader scheme, the alternative option is do nothing. Reducing cut price super-strength alcohol aims to drive down street drinking-related incidents.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The Sensible on Strength campaign was led by officers in the Council's licensing and trading standards teams in consultation with Equinox, Sussex Police, the DAAT and Council communications and legal services. Small convenience stores and a national retailer have supported and joined the scheme.

6. CONCLUSION

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 Costs of approximately £500 for marketing as well as officer time associated with the campaign will be met from within existing regulatory service revenue budgets.

Finance Officer Consulted: Steven Bedford Date: 17/10/13

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 The campaign promotes the four licensing objectives.

Lawyer Consulted: Name R Sidell Date: 15/10/13

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 High ABV beer and cider is consumed by adults with low income at risk of drinking at hazardous levels. Transition to lower ABV products is anticipated to achieve health benefits.

Sustainability Implications:

None.

7.4 Any Other Significant Implications

Public health is not a licensing consideration but reducing high alcohol by volume drinks from the off licence trade should benefit alcohol related morbidity and mortality. Evidence based policy supports the local economy and retail industry. Local businesses report improved business conditions and income from adopting the Sensible on Strength principles.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Sensible on Strength draft window sticker.

Documents in Members' Rooms

1. None.

Background Documents

1. None.

