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SERVICE UPDATE

<u>Name of Service:</u>	Public Protection Committee
<u>Date:</u>	10/12/2021
<u>Title of Update:</u>	Night-time Economy Safety Concerns, Aberdeen City
<u>Report Author:</u>	Chief Superintendent George Macdonald, Police Scotland
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UPDATE:

Following discussions at October's Public Protection Committee the following has been prepared as requested by the Convener.

Background

In October 2021, Police Scotland instigated a dedicated operation in response to a national concern regarding a number of reported incidents of potential drugging, predominantly within City Centre licensed premises across Scotland.

This operation is in place to better understand the challenges and associated risks connected to such incidents and to focus on the two key Prevention and Investigation strands.

Local Overview – Aberdeen

Reporting Overview

Incidents involving the 'spiking' of alcohol within licensed premises is not a new phenomenon in Aberdeen. This crime type has featured for many years and existing data confirms Police Scotland respond to and investigate a number of these incidents each year.

Recent media publicity correlated with a rapid increase in reported incidents. These incidents had a wide divergence of circumstance. A new dimension to this type of incident was added through media reporting that victims, in addition to the more commonly experienced Modus Operandi, were being injected.

After this initial heightened reporting period, incidents have 'week on week' significantly reduced. It is of note that media reporting has also significantly lessened across this period, again in correlation to reported incidents.

Incidents of drugging peaked locally over the weekend of 30-31 October, with 27 incidents reported leading to 17 recorded crimes for the week ending 5 November. Since then, the number of incident reports have decreased significantly and at week ending 3 December, we currently sit at 5 Incidents, a reduction in over 81%, and 3 recorded crimes, a reduction of 82%.

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This significant decrease in reporting mirrors the rest of Scotland and the wider UK.

Of note, a very small proportion of reported incidents have included victims indicating that small marks found on their skin are 'needle stick' injuries. These injuries have not/cannot be confirmed as such, therefore solid corroborative evidence to support this Modus Operandi being used is not present.

Reported incidents involve victims across the age, gender and social spectrums, but predominantly involve those between 18 and 26, in keeping with the profile of those engaging with the night-time economy.

The significant majority of those reporting these incidents are female (80%) and we are therefore engaged locally with Violence Against Woman partnerships across Grampian, where 'spiking' is the subject of ongoing discussion and monitoring to ensure everyone has a clear understanding of the facts and local context.

Incidents/Investigations

Our approach to incidents of this type is well understood, professional and victim focussed. All victims are provided with information for appropriate referral to support organisations as circumstances dictate.

When a report is received, our first priority is the safety and welfare of the victim. Once that aspect is addressed, an initial account is obtained with a view to identifying early lines of enquiry and capturing evidence as quickly as possible.

Our approaches include early capture of forensic samples and, as is normal in submission of forensic samples for examination, timeous reporting of incidents helps provide clarity on forensic outcomes.

Each report is taken seriously and, once it is clear an offence may have occurred, a Crime Report is immediately raised to ensure the appropriate management of the investigation.

These incidents often present with circumstances that are uncertain/ambiguous and with a lack corroborative accounts, however, a thorough and diligent investigation is undertaken with a view to fully understanding the circumstances.

The previously articulated surge in reporting instigated a significant amount of enquiries and it is assessed that it may take many weeks, and in certain circumstances months, to fully understand what has occurred in respect of each incident.

Prevention

For many years, Police in the North East have invested significantly in preventative messaging to support the night-time economy and, alongside the Licenced Trade, have promoted a number of awareness raising/safety campaigns such as 'Ask for Angela' and Bystander Awareness. This has recently been further enhanced by the Police Scotland 'That Guy' campaign.

National and local analysis is continually undertaken to develop the intelligence picture in respect of these incidents, with a view to supporting partnership working/enhancing preventative measures.

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Police Scotland proactively maintain an 'awareness and prevention' approach to the night-time economy and one positive to fall from recent publicity linked to these incidents is heightened personal safety awareness within said environment.

Enforcement

As stated, all reports are taken seriously and if a suspect is identified in the course of an investigation, appropriate action will be taken.

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