

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE:	Communities, Housing and Infrastructure
DATE:	6 May 2016
TITLE OF REPORT:	Thematic Report - Policing of Aberdeen City Centre

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report seeks to provide members with information on how Police Scotland delivers the Policing Plan in Aberdeen City Centre and how we work in collaboration with key partners to achieve and deliver our objectives to ensure the City remains a safe and welcoming place to live, work and visit.

2. **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

Members are asked to note the paper.

3. **BACKGROUND**

The local City Centre Community Policing Team (CPT) is based at Divisional Headquarters, Queen Street, Aberdeen, and is led by Chief Inspector Graeme Mackie, Local Area Commander for Aberdeen City South.

Operation Oak is the long term strategy within the City Centre, developed and led by Police Scotland but involving the support and collaboration of local partners to deliver the following key objectives:

- Prevent and reduce violent crime;
- Prevent and reduce retail crime;
- Prevent and reduce antisocial behaviour and alcohol related disorder.

The success of policing Aberdeen City Centre is a result of strong and visible joint working between key partners, all of whom have invested significantly in terms of time and effort to ensure the City Centre continues to be a safe and enjoyable place to frequent. This partnership approach has seen Aberdeen City awarded the coveted Purple Flag for excellence in the management of the weekend night time economy; an accolade that has been retained for the past three consecutive years. The partnership structures currently in place have been specifically and positively commented upon by the Purple Flag assessors who regard Aberdeen as the 'lead example' in Scotland.

4. STRUCTURES

With a high concentration of licensed premises within the City Centre, one of the key issues for the local Community Policing Team is the management of the night time economy and ensuring those who live, work and visit the City Centre can do so safely and with confidence in the services provided by Police Scotland and its partners.

Strategic

The night time economy is managed from a strategic perspective through the Weekend Planning Partnership. This group works collaboratively to address local issues and ensure combined resources are targeted efficiently and effectively. This partnership also provides a direct link to the Aberdeen Community Safety Partnership.

The Weekend Planning Partnership is chaired by Chief Inspector Graeme Mackie and consists of senior members from Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeen Community Safety Partnership, Safer Aberdeen, Robert Gordon University (RGU), Aberdeen University, Scottish Ambulance Service, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Aberdeen City Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (ADP), First Group, Street Pastors, Aberdeen Taxi Group, Aberdeen Inspired, Unite Students, Unight (Licensing Trade) and Alcohol and Drugs Action Aberdeen.

The Weekend Planning Partnership has three strategic aims which are:

1. **Prevent and reduce violent crime** - led by Police Scotland;
2. **Create a culture of responsible drinking** - led jointly between ADP and Safer Aberdeen;
3. **Strengthening and promoting Purple Flag** - led by Aberdeen Inspired.

Recent collaboration by members of this group, namely Police Scotland together with Aberdeen University and RGU, has seen the implementation of projects to create responsible drinking and reduce incidents of violent crime involving their student community.

A recent media project undertaken by RGU students on behalf of the Weekend Planning Partnership saw a series of short safety videos delivered during the festive period and screened within Cineworld, Union Square, Aberdeen. These efforts attained national media coverage and have subsequently been nominated for a National Community Safety Award which, in turn, has further promoted joint working between the Weekend Planning Partnership and the City's Universities.

An invitation has recently been extended to members of the Aberdeen City Council Licensing Committee to view the work undertaken by Police Scotland and partners regarding Weekend Policing. It is hoped that this invitation will provide the Licensing Committee with an opportunity to experience, first-hand, the policing of licensed premises in the City of Aberdeen.

Tactical

The Aberdeen City Centre Weekend Policing operation runs every Friday and Saturday night, in addition to other designated evenings for particular events or occasions, as well as on Wednesday evenings during University term-time. The operation is overseen by a dedicated Police Inspector who is responsible for the event as well as the briefing and deployment of all staff. For the purposes of the operation, the City is split into sectors, with each being managed by a Sergeant. Officers are deployed on foot or as part of a mobile unit in marked Police vehicles. The number of staff deployed on a given night is co-ordinated by an ongoing planning process.

A weekly planning meeting held every Tuesday to review the previous deployment and to prepare for the upcoming weekend. This meeting is chaired by one of the City Centre Inspectors or the Inspector responsible for the forthcoming weekend operation and is attended by representatives from the local Police Scotland Corporate Communications (Media) Team, CCTV Suite, Community Safety Analyst, Local Intelligence Office and Police Licensing Department.

This meeting follows a set agenda and tasks are allocated as appropriate. Any local or national events which may impact on footfall within the City Centre will also be discussed and the proposed staffing numbers and deployment for the oncoming weekend agreed.

The meeting initially discusses any matters arising from the previous weekend, including volume and types of crime committed. With analytical support, this information can be used to ensure Officers are deployed to the right areas at the right times so as to have the maximum effect in reducing crime. This also allows for the identification of persistent or serious offenders and prevention plans to be implemented to address specific offending behaviour. CCTV operators contribute extensively in this area given their knowledge of offenders and their unique perspective on the City Centre environment. A further benefit of this process is that once persistent or serious offenders have been identified, a number of control measures can be considered to counter their behaviour, including the use of bail conditions and antisocial behaviour legislation.

Licensing issues are also discussed as are particular incidents of note so that Officers can be briefed and thus support local licensees in tackling crime or disorder within, or associated with their premises. Visits to licensed premises carried out in the course of Weekend Policing duties are a cornerstone of the operation and the input of the Licensing Team ensures that inspections are as focused and effective as possible.

Representatives of the local Police Media Team also attend the meeting to highlight any particular areas of media interest regarding the upcoming weekend/event. This meeting is also a forum to discuss any planned media releases highlighting specific safety messages or local /national campaigns. Increasingly, social media is being utilised as an effective way of promoting the Weekend Policing operation and sharing key messages in an accessible and engaging way with the wider general public.

Operational

The output of this tactical meeting is utilised to inform the operational briefing delivered to staff involved in the Weekend Policing operation prior to staff being deployed on a Friday and Saturday night. As well as covering the fundamental elements of the operation, this briefing includes specific information regarding persistent offenders, areas of concern, licensing issues and current intelligence related to the operation.

It is recognised, however, that Police Scotland do not perform this function in isolation and there is a diverse and well-established partnership of agencies involved at an operational level within the City.

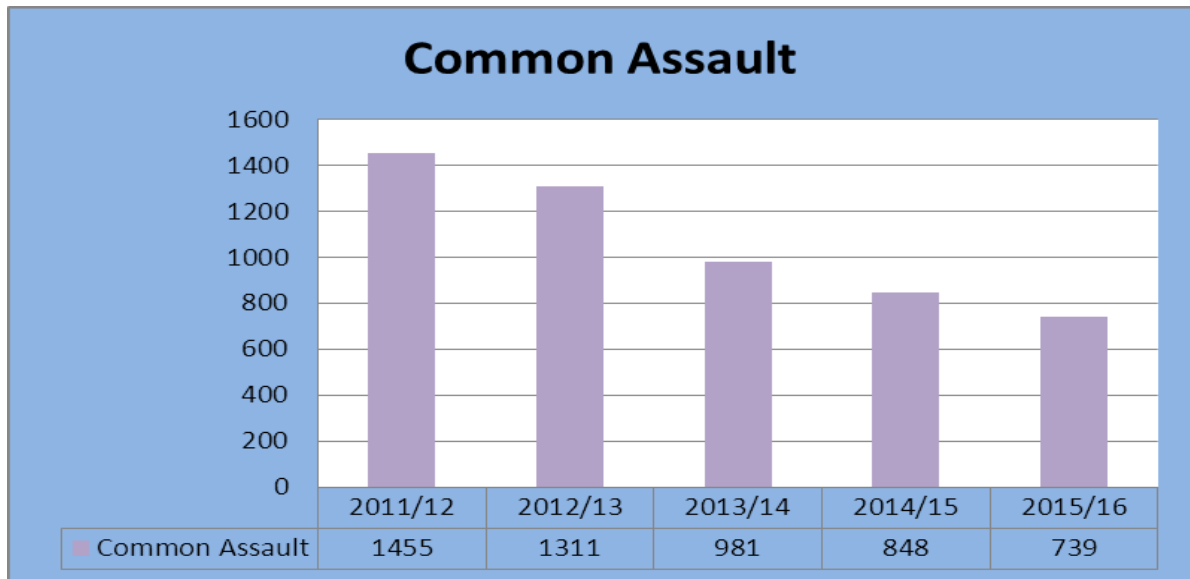
The operational briefing process has developed over the past 18 months and mechanisms are now in place to facilitate the passing of information to key agencies involved in managing the night time economy along with Police Scotland such as Door Stewards, Street Pastors and Taxi Marshals. Additionally, information gleaned from these partners can assist greatly in the efficacy of the policing operation. A dedicated radio network is also utilised and this allows Police Scotland, Door Stewards, Street Pastors, Taxi Marshals and CCTV Operators to speak directly with one another and seek support or pass information as required.

At the conclusion of each operation, staff are de-briefed and the output of this process informs the subsequent tactical meeting held on the following Tuesday.

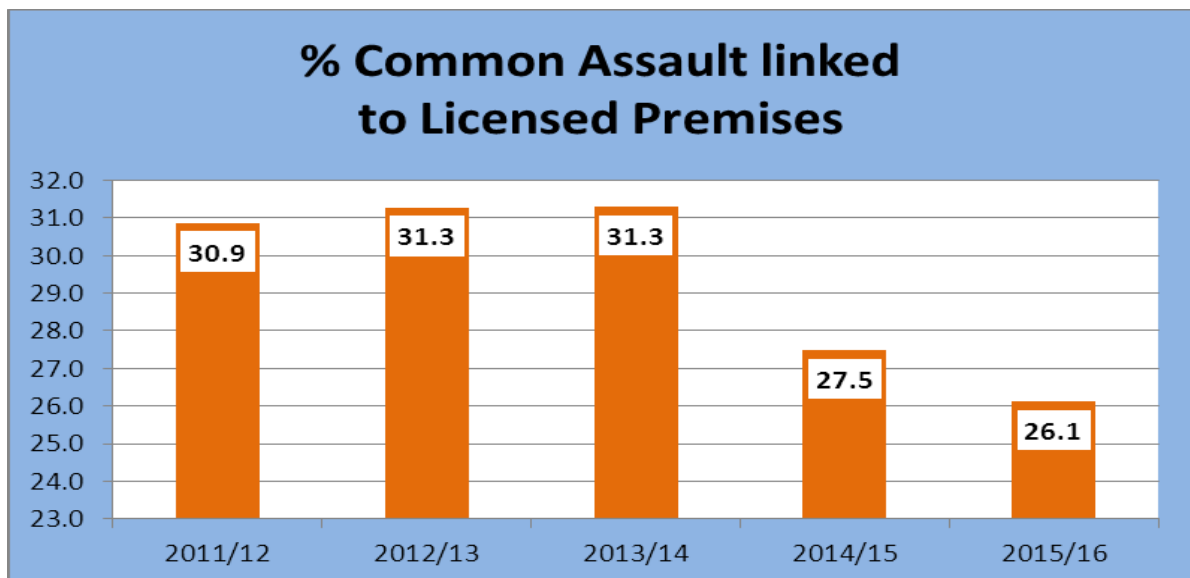
5. KEY CITY CENTRE POLICING PRIORITIES

Violence

Preventing and reducing violent crime within the City Centre is an absolute priority and where such crimes do occur, specific and robust processes are in place to ensure that thorough investigations are instigated to bring offenders to justice.

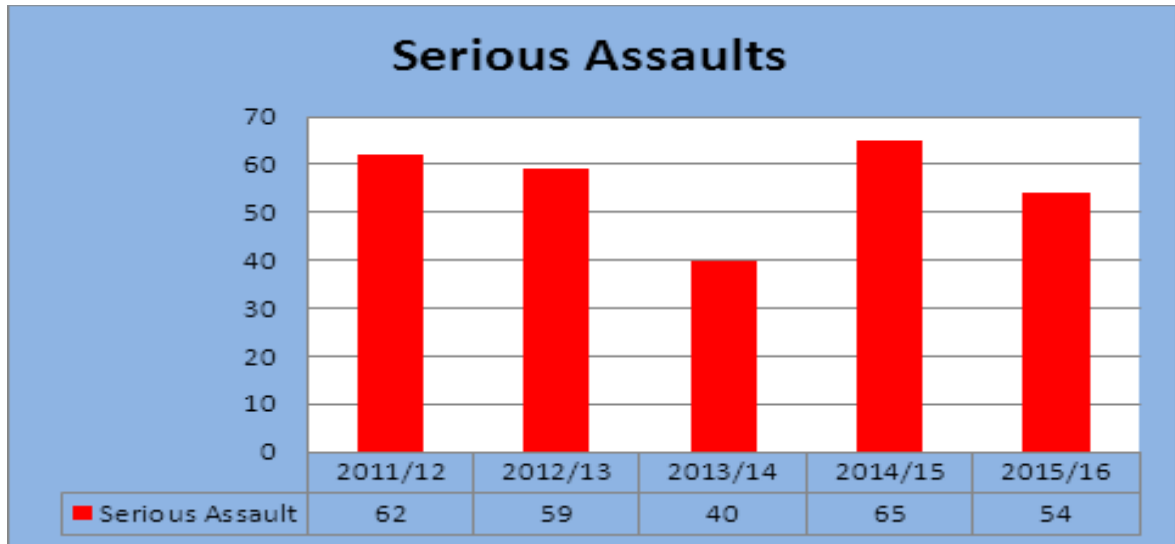


The graph above shows a downward trend in Common Assaults with fewer recorded incidents year on year. The 739 offences recorded in 2015/16, is 328 (30.7%) fewer than the five year average.

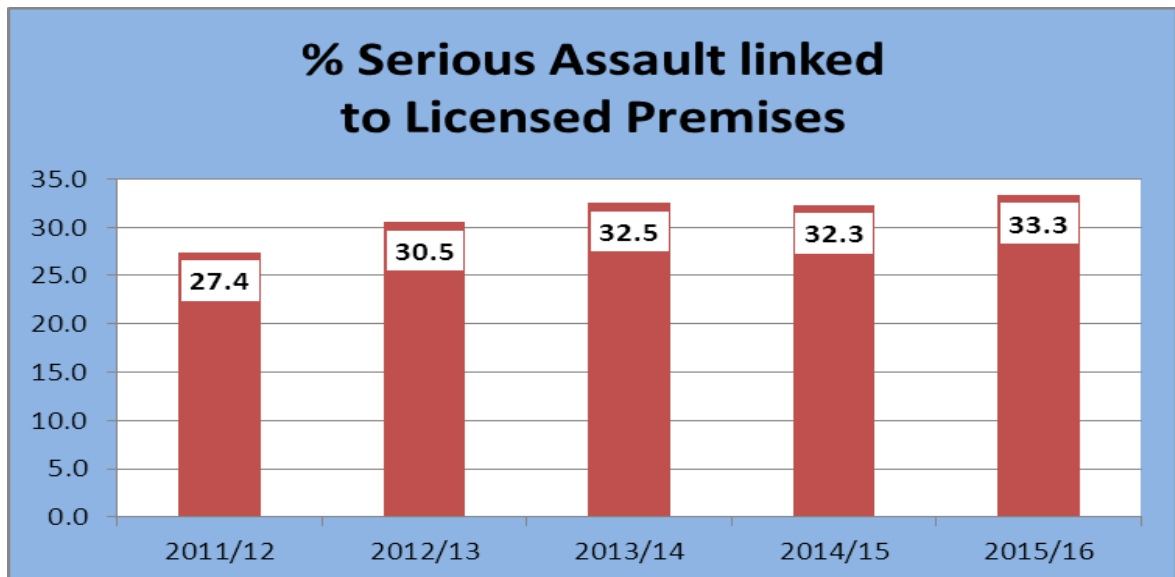


The graph above shows the percentage of Common Assaults recorded at Licensed Premises during each fiscal year.

After rising slightly in terms of overall share in 2011/12, the ratio of Common Assaults recorded in licensed premises has fallen to approximately one in every four in 2015/16.



The graph above shows the number of Serious Assaults in Aberdeen City Centre during each fiscal year.



In contrast to Common Assaults, the number of Serious Assaults linked to licensed premises has continued to increase. In 2011/12, just over one quarter of Serious Assaults recorded were linked to licensed premises, however by 2015/16 this had increased to one third.

Violent crime within the City Centre is, in the main, linked to the weekend night time economy. Persons from different areas of the City converge on a relatively small area and when combined with increased consumption of alcohol and other substances the potential for violent offending is significantly increased.

The majority of violent crimes within the City Centre involve the perpetrator and/or the victim being under the influence of alcohol (as shown in the following tables). The strategic priority for the City Centre Weekend Planning Partnership is to **'Promote a Culture of Responsible Drinking'** and is aimed directly at addressing this issue and thus reducing violent crime. The marketing of non-alcoholic events and products within licensed premises, promoting the **'Best Bar None'** awards aimed at rewarding and improving standards within licensed premises along with specific and targeted media campaigns around drinking responsibly, are all key initiatives which have been delivered through the Weekend Planning Partnership.

2011/12	Offender	Victim
Breach of the peace	92.1%	20.8%
Common Assault	87.1%	55.0%
Minor Assault of an Emergency Worker	87.4%	-
Serious Assault	90.2%	88.5%
Threatening or Abusive Behaviour	84.4%	18.3%

2012/13	Offender	Victim
Breach of the peace	91.9%	18.6%
Common Assault	89.7%	57.4%
Minor Assault of an Emergency Worker	90.6%	-
Serious Assault	94.6%	90.9%
Threatening or Abusive Behaviour	84.4%	23.1%

2013/14	Offender	Victim
Breach of the peace	93.8%	19.7%
Common Assault	87.0%	59.3%
Minor Assault of an Emergency Worker	81.3%	-
Serious Assault	85.7%	97.4%
Threatening or Abusive Behaviour	71.8%	14.7%

2014/15	Offender	Victim
Breach of the peace	95.7%	18.9%
Common Assault	84.7%	52.2%
Minor Assault of an Emergency Worker	77.9%	-
Serious Assault	90.0%	88.9%
Threatening or Abusive Behaviour	76.0%	16.6%

2015/16	Offender	Victim
Breach of the peace	95.5%	12.8%
Common Assault	80.7%	51.0%
Minor Assault of an Emergency Worker	85.9%	-
Serious Assault	91.2%	86.5%
Threatening or Abusive Behaviour	76.1%	10.6%

As illustrated above, offences in each year show a disparity in the proportion of offenders under the influence of alcohol in relation to their victims, with the exception being those who were the victims of Serious Assault.

In order to tackle violent crime, analytical support is used on a weekly basis to establish particular problem time periods and areas of the City Centre which experience higher levels of violent offending. This analysis allows resources to be deployed effectively and also identify reasons why such crimes are occurring in specific locations. Additionally the identification of environmental issues such as lighting, lack of CCTV coverage or street design as well as standards relating to the management of licensed and late hours catering premises can also be highlighted and whenever possible addressed.

Analytical support also allows for the identification of individuals who cause a particular risk in terms of their frequency or manner of offending in the City Centre. In partnership with the Local Authority and COPFS, enforcement including restrictive bail conditions and antisocial behaviour legislation has been utilised by Police Scotland to ensure the potential for these individuals to re-offend has been greatly reduced. This information is shared with all Officers involved in the policing of the City Centre so that such individuals can be identified and then robustly and appropriately dealt with.

Work in this area is constantly evolving and over the period of the last six months it has been established that a significant proportion (approximately 10%) of persons involved in violent offending within the City Centre are visitors to Aberdeen. In response to this and as part of a wider strategy to work closely with licensed premises, the Aberdeen City Centre 'Hotel Watch' scheme was established in partnership with the Business Improvement District - Aberdeen Inspired. 'Hotel Watch' has opened and improved lines of communication between Police Scotland

and City Centre hoteliers, whereby information is now passed to Police Scotland in relation to any persons or groups of concern who are staying within the City Centre. The scheme has also created a forum for Police Scotland to pass safety messages to visitors to the City and provide pertinent local information such as details regarding street drinking bye-laws.

'Hotel Watch' has also proved valuable in terms of generating investigative opportunities following incidents of violence as well as wider offending.

At a strategic and tactical level, relationships and communication have been strengthened, through the Weekend Planning Partnership between Police Scotland and Door Stewards, Licensees, Taxi Marshals, Scottish Ambulance Service and Street Pastors who work alongside one another during the Weekend Policing operation. By means of these strengthened relationships, valuable real-time information regarding problematic groups or individuals can be passed on, allowing for effective police enforcement and the prevention of violent offending. This early and effective intervention forms a key tactic in tackling violent crime within the City Centre.

Retail Crime

Tackling retail crime remains one of our key objectives under the 'Oak' strategy and is an ongoing priority for the local Community Policing Team.

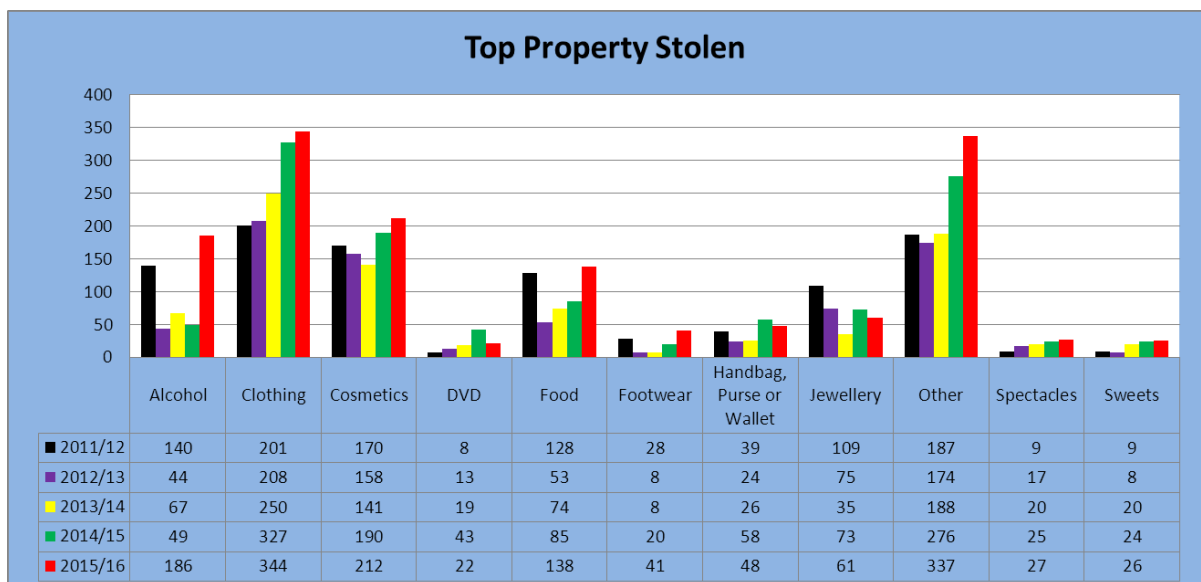
City Centre Officers continue to work closely with external partners in the retail trade, Aberdeen Inspired, Aberdeen City Council (Safer Aberdeen), Scottish Retailers Against Crime and COPFS.

A retail forum has been set up by Police Scotland in conjunction with Aberdeen Inspired and the main City Centre retailers focusing on issues such as crime prevention, information sharing, effective reporting of incidents and intelligence and detection of crime. This new forum has increased communication and awareness of crime trends and modus operandi and has provided reassurance to the retail trade. This work is ongoing with a view to developing further effective engagement with retailers.

Aberdeen Inspired issue a weekly newsletter to levy payers within the City Centre and Police Scotland regularly makes use of this facility to highlight areas of concern around retail crime as well as promoting good practice.



Since 2012/13, there has been a year on year increase in Shoplifting offences. Against the five year average 2015/16 such offences were up 30.5%.



The table above shows the type of property stolen where the annual average exceeded 10 thefts.

Clothing and cosmetics are the most popular identified items stolen, though thefts of alcohol show significant increase in recent years. Against the five year average, the 2015/16 increase is 91.4%.

It is evident that retail crime in Aberdeen City Centre has risen over the past 5 years and this figure is replicated nationally. At a national level, austerity may provide some explanation to a rise in retail crime, however at a local level an improved partnership approach has also seen reported crimes rise over recent years. This increased focus by Police Scotland and key partners on retail crime has seen certain larger national retailers reporting more crimes in the last 12 months than they had previously. This increased reporting has given a more realistic picture of the issue of retail crime and has provided opportunities around sharing intelligence to improve performance in this area.

Reducing Antisocial Behaviour and Alcohol Related Disorder

At present, there are 245 premises within Aberdeen City Centre which hold an On-Sales Liquor Licence and include hotels, restaurants, public houses, nightclubs and casinos.

On Friday and Saturday nights, pubs close at 0100 hours and nightclubs close at 0300 hours. Late night food premises are open until 0400 hours on both nights and as a result, footfall within the City Centre remains high until 0500 hours as patrons find their way out of the area by various means. Any increase to licensing hours would obviously have an impact on Aberdeen City Centre. Increased licensing hours elsewhere in the UK have seen late night licensed venues closing between 0400 hours and 0600 hours. These extended licencing laws often result in intoxicated patrons leaving the City Centre at the same time as the daytime economy is starting, thus creating a less than favourable environment within the City Centres concerned.

During the course of the Weekend Policing operation in Aberdeen, the key times for incidents requiring Police attendance are as the pubs close at 0100 hours and again as the nightclubs close at 0300 hours.

Police Scotland continues to work closely with local licensees both in terms of liaison with the Community Policing Team and also through the dedicated Police Licensing Team. Unight, the licensees' trade body within the City Centre, has recently been restructured and with the resulting increased membership now provides an enhanced forum for the discussion of relevant issues.

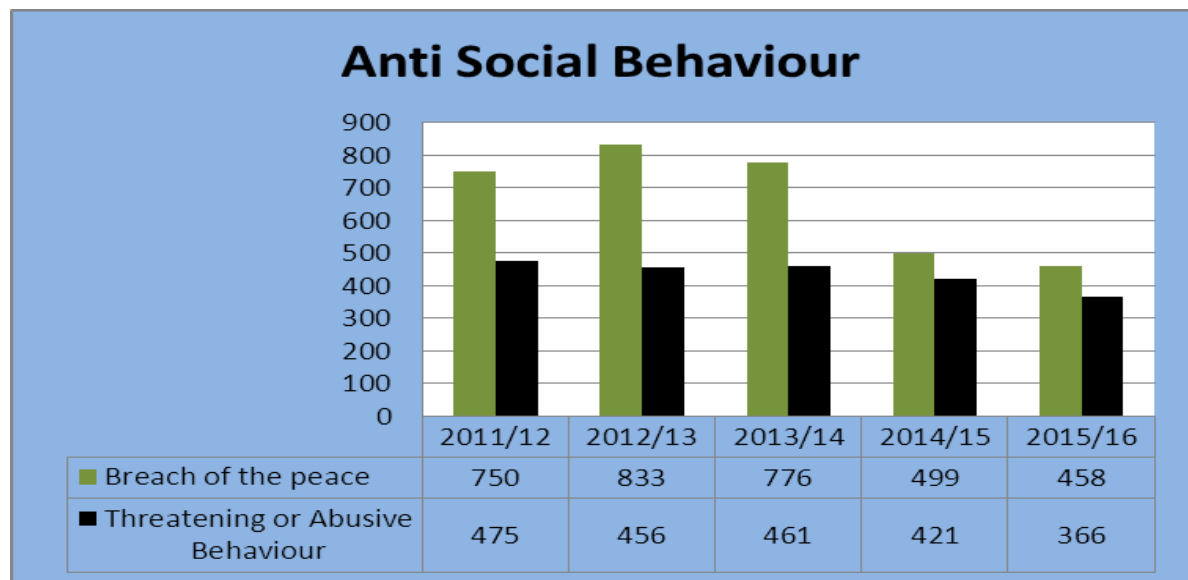
Police Scotland inspections of licensed premises form a vital part of the Weekend Policing Plan, whereby officers can support licensees and security staff in dealing with any issues promptly and effectively. Where issues are identified regarding a particular premise, or adverse incidents occur, mechanisms are in place for the Police Licensing Team to provide specific support to licensees. Such premises also receive additional follow up Police visits so as to provide advice and assistance in dealing with ongoing identified issues.

In recent years, Police Scotland has worked extensively with licensees and door staff in a shared objective of reducing incidents of violence and disorder linked to excessive alcohol consumption. Police Scotland has also carried out operations at

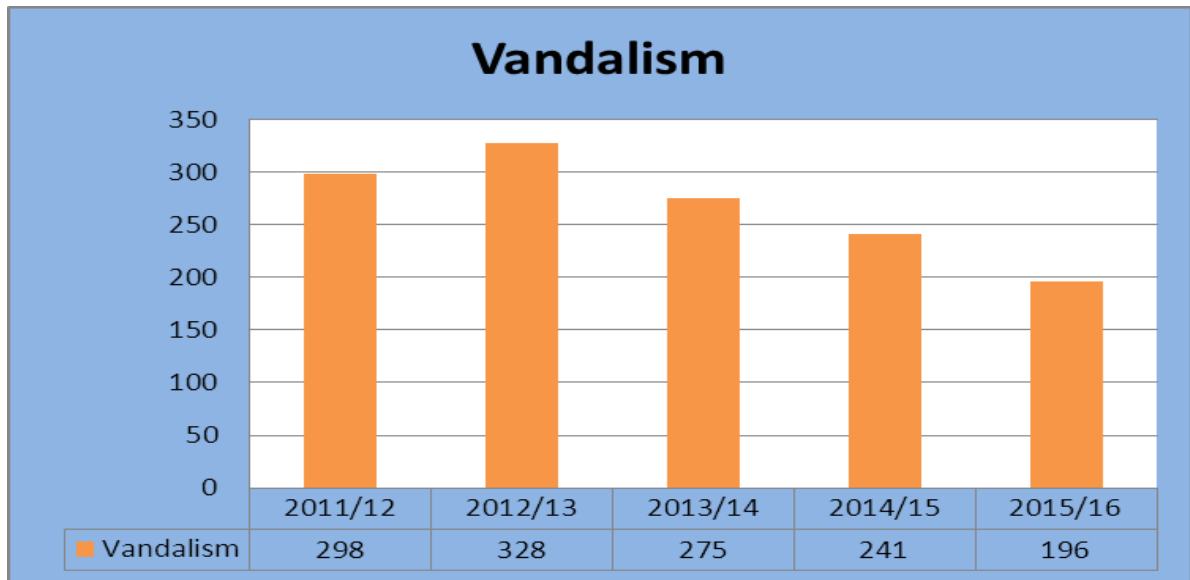
specific licensed premises aimed at tackling drugs misuse and the theft of personal property. These operations have proved successful and are well received by the licensed trade and the wider public.

The Weekend Planning partnership has also channelled significant energy and focus towards reducing antisocial behaviour with the over-arching aim of reducing violent crime, which often emanates from lower level disturbances.

Lower level issues which negatively impact on the quality of life for the community within the City Centre include public urinating, noise disturbances, litter and drunkenness. These issues are recognised by the local Community Policing Team and the wider Weekend Planning Partnership. Prevention methods such as the provision of portable toilets in the City Centre at weekends and the implementation of direct measures through Fixed Penalty fines coupled with the support provided by Street Pastors and Taxi Marshals have been introduced. These activities have sought to address and deal with antisocial behaviour at an early stage and are now very much ingrained in operational business and have undoubtedly had a positive impact on reducing antisocial behaviour within the City Centre.



Since 2013/14, there have been annual reductions in both Breach of the Peace and Threatening or Abusive Behaviour. Comparing 2015/16 with the five year average, there has been a reduction of 30.9% and 16% in Breach of the Peace and Threatening or Abusive Behaviour, respectively. When combined there has been a reduction of one quarter in such crimes since 2013/14.



Since 2012/13, Vandalism has reduced year on year and 2015/16's total is 26.8% less than the five year average.

7. CONCLUSION

Partnership working is embedded at all levels within the policing of Aberdeen City Centre. Police officers now work alongside key partners at an operational level in both the day and night-time economy. Additionally, strategic direction and oversight provided by the Weekend Planning Partnership in implementing preventative measures to reduce violent crime, seek to create a culture of responsible drinking and provided a focus regarding the future retention of Purple Flag status for Aberdeen City Centre.

This partnership approach has proven to be both an effective and efficient means of sharing resources. It has also created a platform that ensures engagement with all who use the City Centre, such as the young student population who assisted in the recent festive safety media campaign.

The success of these partnerships and community engagement through Operation Oak was specifically highlighted as effective practice in the May 2015 Thematic Inspection of local Policing by HMICS and this work continues to develop and strengthen.

With the anticipated changes to the landscape of Aberdeen City Centre, through the City masterplan, the partnership approach and community engagement to address local issues will continue to be one of the key strengths to Policing in the North East.

8. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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