

Health Impact Assessment of the Aberdeen City Licensing Board Statement of Licensing Policy

November 2017



Aberdeen City Health & Social Care Partnership
A caring partnership



Acknowledgements

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1. Abbreviations

AFS	Alcohol Focus Scotland
CFINE	Community Food Initiatives North East
HIA	Health Impact Assessment
LSO	Licensing Standards Officer
MUP	Minimum Unit Pricing
NHS	National Health Service
SLP	Statement of Licensing Policy
SWP	Scottish Whisky Association
TAAG	Torry Alcohol Action Group

2. Executive Summary

- In 2016, alcohol harm resulted in 56 deaths and 1,625 hospital stays in Aberdeen City costing an estimated £557 per person.
- The City has more than twice the national average of licensed premises.
- The aim of this study was to assess the impact of the current Statement of Licensing Policy (2013-16) on Aberdeen City prior to an upcoming review.
- A topic list was created by consulting Licensing Forum members and examining the Licensing Objectives.
- Twelve focus groups and interviews were held with community groups, social enterprises, recovery groups, Police and Trade representatives.
- These were transcribed and analysed for common themes.
- Two major themes were selected for presentation to the Forum:

Applications and objections

- Improved communication would allow applicants and consultees to follow the application's progress and provide enough time for a considered objection to be made if required.
- Feedback on decisions would demonstrate the criteria used to grant or deny a licence was applied in an equitable manner supporting the Licensing Objectives.

Vulnerable groups

- Recovery groups in particular raised issues about *overprovision* and having multiple licence holders within walking distance of their homes.
- Some had been exploited by shop owners to buy greater volumes of alcohol or pressured to purchase when they had declined.
- A number of groups illustrated alcohol's link to *mental illness* and conditions including depression.
- Both issues are concentrated in more deprived areas and can hinder dependent drinkers from being contributing members of their various communities.
- Although labour intensive, a qualitative approach allowed access to the views and opinions of groups affected by alcohol licensing and who are not normally consulted.

3. Introduction

In 2016, there were 56 alcohol-related deaths recorded in Aberdeen City¹ - the highest number for a decade - and 1,625 hospital stays due to alcohol². Approximately twice as many men as women die from alcohol-related causes. Aberdeen City's 654 licensed premises is almost twice the national average for the population³. In 2012, Alcohol Focus Scotland (AFS) estimated the total cost of alcohol harm to Aberdeen City of over £120m - £557 per person⁴. Alcohol is associated with adverse social outcomes such as homelessness, job loss, crime and violence which harm others besides the drinker⁵. These harms are related to differences in socioeconomic status demonstrating alcohol's causal link to social inequalities⁶.

Strategies to tackle alcohol-related harm generally combat its affordability, availability and marketing⁷. Scotland recently became the first country in the world to be allowed to set a minimum price for alcohol following a challenge by the Scottish Whisky Association (SWA)⁸. Availability, including the number of outlets in an area and their proximity to one another has been associated with higher consumption rates and harm in Scotland⁹.

3.1. Alcohol Licensing Policy

Alcohol licensing initially developed to limit public disorder¹⁰. As the deleterious effects of alcohol became more widely studied, granting permits for those wishing to serve or supply alcohol became more important in controlling its supply and protecting society from alcohol's effects. The Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 formalised five licensing objectives which are at the basis of every decision to grant, or deny, a licence¹¹. This included a novel objective to "protect and improve public health" following a sustained campaign towards Scottish Government by a number of health groups to incorporate a greater role for public health in regulating sales¹². The five Licensing Objectives are:

- (a) preventing crime and disorder
- (b) securing public safety
- (c) preventing public nuisance
- (d) protecting and improving public health
- (e) protecting children and young people from harm.

The 2005 Act recognised the continuing function of Licensing Boards who decide on whether a licence to provide alcohol should be granted. It also stipulates that every council must establish a Local Licensing Forum to scrutinise their conduct. The Act stipulates that each Board must publish a Statement of Licensing Policy (SLP) at three-yearly intervals. This Statement sets out how the Board will perform its functions and promote the Licensing Objectives. An "overprovision" statement must be included as part of the SLP; this refers to where the number and type of premises within an area is considered "excessive". This is not explicitly defined in the Act but guidance is given for a consultation including representatives of the Police, Health Board, licence holders, residents and others as the board sees fit. A new application for a premises sited in an area that the Licensing Board has declared *overprovided* would have to demonstrate exceptional features in order to be granted.

3.2. Aim and Objectives

This study aimed to answer the research question:

"What impact has the current Statement of Licensing Policy (2013-16) had on Aberdeen City?"

No Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) have previously been conducted in alcohol licensing for Aberdeen City. A 2010 HIA examined the City of Glasgow Licensing Policy Statement¹³. This study involved the Licensing Forum in the initial stages to identify areas for exploration and we acknowledge their approach here. Our study team also wanted to explore the views of vulnerable communities within Aberdeen City who are not normally consulted in alcohol licensing procedures and this proposal was put to the Forum at the outset. This study represented a new area of research for Scotland.

The objective of this study was to better understand alcohol licensing's impact on Aberdeen City. Identified issues would be reviewed by the team as part of the analysis and major themes presented to the Forum. The Forum as a whole would then discuss these issues and decide if recommendations could be made that warranted subsequent presentation to the Licensing Board with the aim of shaping the next SLP due in 2018.

4. Methods

4.1. Sample

An initial list of groups and representatives who would be affected by alcohol licensing was drawn up by the study group and included in the Terms of Reference approved by the Aberdeen City Local Licensing Forum. This list included trade representatives, local area community groups (including community councils) and vulnerable groups and their representatives. It was further honed by individual discussions with members of the Forum to select groups of special interest to them. Any contacts suggested by the Forum members were added to the contacts provided by the Aberdeen City Health and Social Care Partnership and of the Aberdeen City Alcohol and Drugs Partnership to arrange a series of ten focus groups and two individual interviews. A summary of the participants is given in Table 1.

Code ¹	Description	Category/ Notes ²
1CYP	Children's Rights Development Worker	Vulnerable – Interview in person
2OPN	Old People's Network	Community
3VCH	Volunteer Call-handlers	Vulnerable
4CCW	Community Council	Community – Focus group was part of CC meeting
5CCL	Community Council Liaison Officer	Community – Interview via telephone
6CCM	Community Council	Community – Focus group was part of CC meeting
7REC	Addiction Recovery	Vulnerable
8HAS	Housing Support Service	Vulnerable
9SSE	Social Support Enterprise - support individuals in communities; initially youth homelessness and unemployment.	Vulnerable
10CIO	Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) - meets needs of people affected by homelessness.	Vulnerable – workers with victims of Domestic Abuse
11POL	Local Area Police Sergeant	Community
12OST	On-Sales	Trade

Table 1. Summary of Participant Groups. ¹These codes are used to identify quotes in the Results section along with number identifying speaker. ²Discussions were held in focus groups unless stated.

4.2. Data Collection

A qualitative research method was employed to gain insight into group's experiences to illustrate social processes that may be used to influence local policy¹⁴. A basic topic guide was created (Table 2) for use in the interviews as a prompt, and relevant sections focused on for specific groups. For instance: discussions concerning the licensing process were pertinent for the community councils and trade representatives but were unlikely to be important for vulnerable group members. The basis of the questioning was in two (overlapping) sections. Firstly; responses relating to the five Licensing Objectives were explored in greater depth. Secondly; the input

of the Forum members was further sought through individual interviews to ascertain the areas they wished to explore with direct reference to the current Statement of Licensing Policy¹⁵.

A. Statement of Licensing Policy

- Applications and objections

What experiences have you had of the alcohol licensing applications and objections procedures?

How does the process impact on different populations in your community?

- Enforcement and review

What experiences have you had of the alcohol licence review process?

- Hours of Trading

How do you feel about current trading hours in your area?

Should premises be allowed to open for longer?

- Overprovision

Do you feel that the number of licensed premises in your local area is too few, about right or too many?

How does the level of provision impact on different populations in your community?

B. Licensing Objectives

What experiences have you had of alcohol?

How was this alcohol obtained?

Should there be more family-friendly premises?

What are your experiences of school events (and other events aimed at children) requesting alcohol licences?

How do you feel if the amount of alcohol sold took up less shelf space or was less visible?

C. General

What changes would you like to be seen made in the next Statement of Licensing Policy?

Before today, had you heard of either the Aberdeen City Licensing Board or their Statement of Licensing Policy?

Table 2. Main questions in interview topic guide.

An hour was requested for each semi-structured interview and these took place between June and September, 2017. Informed consent was taken prior to the interview. Each session was audio-recorded and transcribed from the recording after completion. An initial listen was performed before transcribing to develop a "sense" of the interview, and this was repeated after the transcription was completed to check for accuracy.

4.3. Analysis

Thematic analysis of the transcripts was conducted with a framework approach¹⁶. Two researchers independently coded the first three transcripts, charting the data on a spreadsheet. These researchers then met to agree on a final coding framework broadly aligned to the topic guide. Following this refinement, the framework was applied to all of the interview transcripts. A meeting was held of the research team

following the completion of this task to identify the major themes from the coding exercise.

5. Results

Themes and subsections resulting from the coding process are collected in the analysis framework below (Table 3). Summaries of each category are reported beneath and represent the areas of interest emerging from the topic list used in the interviews.

CODE	DESCRIPTION
A. Statement of Licensing Policy	
Applications and objections	Community councils; on sales traders; door supervisors; perceptions of the Board and application process
Enforcement and review	Police and Licensing standards officers (LSOs)
Hours of Trading	Public safety; extended hours; food vendors
Overprovision	Decline in pub numbers; high off sales numbers

CODE	DESCRIPTION
B. Licensing Objectives	
Preventing crime and disorder	Alcohol-associated crime; practice guidance; pricing deals; bans
Securing public safety	Torry Alcohol Action Group (TAAG); training
Preventing public nuisance	-
Protecting and improving public health	Access and visibility; preloading; education; social pressure; pricing; drivers and non-drinkers; mental health; social support; housing; domestic abuse
Protecting children from harm	Definition; occasional licences; family pubs

Table 3. Analysis Framework

Theme A. Statement of Licensing Policy

This theme represents responses most directly adhering to specific sections of the current Statement of Licensing Policy, initially identified by members of the Licensing Forum. These questions were often broached directly to those who may have had experience of the process as well as broader mentions in all interviews.

A1. Applications and objections

A1.1 Community Councils

Most of the views were expressed by two community councils: one who had attended a Licensing toolkit training day [4CCW] and one who hadn't [6CCM]. As recognised in Section 5.1 of the Statement of Licensing Policy, community councils are statutory consultees. A community council liaison officer helped put these views into context. Although both councils had only seen a handful of applications in recent years, the former gave a good account of an ideal process: applications were received in a timely manner and discussed with reference to local crime statistics

and anti-social behaviour including public health concerns such as underage drinking. Such discussions were enhanced by good working relationships with the local police and Licensing Standards Officers.

Yes, yes, I do feel that there's a fair hearing. You can bring up things. Genuine concerns: not tittle-tattle or idle gossip. We bring up the actual facts that we've got; the issues that we would have in the area; the effects it would have on our community and we'll make them aware of that. [4CCW, F1]

By contrast, the other council were unable to attend training due to time pressures on the volunteers. They were most dismayed about the short period of time they have to reply to a licence application sent by the Board.

We had it up in front of us – for across the road to get a licence. But what we got really angry about, because by the time it came here, by the time they had a meeting, it was too late. [6CCM, M1]

The Liaison Officer [5CCL] pointed out that approximately half of the Community Councils have not had training in dealing with license applications. This includes the Community Council covering half of Union Street. Licence requests and site information is sent via mail to the community councils taking around five days, leaving three weeks for a response when an ordinary meeting may not be timetabled. The notices placed around the requesting site contain more details and the public have longer to respond. If the Board does not receive a reply from the relevant council, they assume that no objection is being made.

These communities represent the neighbourhoods directly affected by licensing decisions and would like the chance to use their local knowledge to contribute to the debate e.g. major routes used by children to walk home.

I think that's what you'll find about W-: people are very community-oriented and very... it's very much kinda sometimes like a family where we protect our own site so, if there is an issue we will go and address it. We won't just sit back and let it fester and fester. [4CCW, F1]

They are looking for the applications to be sent via email and to receive feedback on previous requests to better understand the decision-making process. Improved channels of communication between the councils and the Board are necessary to give more time for the councils to provide a response. Ideally; a licence request should not be heard by the Board without this response.

One of the main things would be time and all the information that they want with it so this, they let you know this committee only meets once a month unless there's a special meeting so there'll be a time lag. So, I think we should get, you know, the information in plenty of time so we could make a judgement, you know. [6CCM, M1]

A1.2 On sales traders

The on sales representative echoed the council views of inconvenient timing particularly in reference to extended hours' applications for special events. They felt

that whilst the licence-holder had to be expeditious by getting their applications into the Board months in advance, no acknowledgement is received nor any indication of where their request sits on an established protocol. These licences may also be granted just before the extension date causing extra work in terms of staffing, promotions and so on. Further, a recent general extension of licensed hours for the City for an international oil and gas conference was barely publicised giving little time for the premises to arrange extra cover.

So you get your applications in by then and you don't hear nothing .So you know if you're asking us, the council's asking us to put in an application by a certain date then surely there should be parameters back to us saying that yeah ok, we received your application here, we are going to respond to your application here and you'll know the decision there. But there is nothing like it. [12OST, M1]

A1.3 Door supervisors

The Statement recommends that Security Industry Authority licensed door supervisors be used as a control measure to prevent crime and disorder. Their use after 23.00 may also be a condition of the licence to maintain security and protect the licensing objectives. Their role is vital in providing a safe environment for the patrons but the young person's representative saw them more as a threat.

I think they're the most worrying thing about being out in town, is the bouncers that work on the door. They just don't care, like, they don't seem to care about anyone. It feels like, if something happens to one bouncer the other ones cover them as well. [1CYP]

Erm, I think the bouncers are a bit bad with people sometimes as well, like their attitude towards people, erm, like, we've been in a nightclub and my friend's been drunk and he was like, I'll give you a free [drink] if you give me a blowjob... And you're like, hear of people, like, who've been taken out the back and battered by bouncers and stuff. [1CYP]

They were mostly concerned about not having an awareness of how to hold the door staff accountable for their perceived wrong-doings and enquired about the procedure for making a formal complaint.

Because like, people, like bouncers especially, my friends have, like complained about bouncers and stuff and like nothing gets done about it. They're still on the door the next week. [1CYP]

A1.4 Perceptions of the Board and application process

The community council who had benefitted from training and enjoyed good working relationships with other protagonists felt that their objections were fairly heard by the Board.

We have a licensing officer who brings the licenses to us and we discuss it if we have an issue or don't have an issue with it and they give it back to the licensing committee. [4CCW, F2]

However, the on sales group held the impression that the licensing objectives were unequally defended and there was a lack of general objections from the public.

To be honest the objections that ever really get are from the police or from the NHS. We don't tend to get any from the neighbourhood or residents. [12OST, F1]

The impact of these objections is lessened by the licence applicant knowing of these objections in advance of the Board meeting and having time to prepare a response through their legal representation. Such assistance and right of reply is usually lacking for members of the public. Additionally, the stated disapproval at the Board meetings are typically in a general form that doesn't resonate with the board and are easily dismissed as noted by the trade: *"But the police just tend to give you statistics; so do the NHS."* [12OST, F1]

The on sales group believed that off sales sites were held to different standards: *"I think that it would be good if off sales had to apply the same conditions that on sales did."* [12OST, M1]. They expressed their opinion that most problems derive from off sales premises but that most regulations relate to on sales sites. Demonstrating an ability to diligently follow these rules could result in rewards that would promote the business such as extended hours or promotions.

It does feel like in the past to get licences we have had to jump through a lot of hoops in terms of training and duty of care. Also if you don't follow procedures, they just seem to come straight after you. [12OST, F1]

I think that yes, you need rules that bind everybody but there should be cases for venues that are doing responsible stuff... Why can we not get the benefits of being a responsible venue by allowing some form of drinks promotion that tries to get people back in through the doors? [12OST, M1]

Both parties would prefer better communication and more feedback from the Board regarding the progress of licence applications and reasons for the outcome. This would hone more effective and relevant applications and responses, but also demonstrate to those involved that the Board has specific criteria to follow ensuring that each decision is made fairly in a standard manner. A lack of communication feeds the view of the Board as an autonomous, chaotic authority acting randomly.

A2. Enforcement and review

This report primarily covered the roles of the police as well as licensing standards officers (LSOs) in ensuring compliance of licensing conditions to investigate alleged unlicensed activities. Busy areas of the City tended to receive spot checks in popular on sales premises, often creating disruption to staff.

I mean at one stage we were getting visits maybe two times over the weekend. I could have one at each door, at the same time demanding to

Speak to me and I'd be like at the other door. Demanding to see records of all the staff that's working; I mean on a busy Saturday night with something like 20 odd staff, 25 staff working and you want to see their records. Demanding to speak to members of staff. [12OST, F1]

We actually have a very good relationship with the police. You can actually say, you know what, come on in, here's my keys, help yourself to my folder in my office but I can't get off the bar to spend time with you. [12OST, F1]

In addition, the police also investigate allegations of unlawful practices recording these visits on Inn Keeper software. The Licensing Department can analyse this data to identify "problem premises" leading to more robust visits to verify compliance with licensing conditions. As well as risking criminal action, these reports can be escalated resulting in further scrutiny by the Licensing Board and a loss or diminishment of their livelihood.

Oh, absolutely, certainly if there is a problem premises anywhere in the city, then: "robust attention": it's fed back to the various people who can then raise it further with the Licensing Board, with licensees, whatever and take action. It affects them as well if they ever need to apply for occasional licenses for extension of hours, it's like a case of 'no chance, they're not getting it'. [11POL]

Vulnerable groups, in particular, look to enforced legislation for protection: "I was just saying, that unless there is someone there stopping them they're nae gonna stop." [7REC, M3].

A3. Hours of trading

The CYP representative was happy with the current hours: on sales should only open past 3am on special occasions and the nationally mandated 10am to 10pm gave ample opportunity to purchase more than enough alcohol, and prevented purchasing after attending a club or pub where it would be unnecessary. The recovery group were eager to prevent young people from falling into dangerous habits and suggested using the trading hours to help with this goal.

A lot of us around the table will remember when the bars used to shut in the afternoon, 3 to 6, something like that, you know? I'm not saying that you should close the bars again but if you could get, if the Licensing Board would take on, like asking the shops to take that on, a lot of that would stop the young guys coming from schools. [7REC, M4]

This practice was also recommended for off sales sites, especially for local shops on school routes. There are geographical differences within Aberdeen City: areas outside the centre typically close by midnight so people who want to drink to a later time must make their way into the town centre. One common view against extended hours concerns public safety:

Personally, you know, wearing a police hat,... if they open an extra hour then they're just gonna be drinking an extra hour longer, aren't they? [3VCH, M1]

By contrast, the on sales trade felt that extended hours meant that patrons left throughout the night at their own time which also prevented a mass exodus at closing time onto the street.

We have definitely noticed since we have had that later license at the weekend there is that much, definitely that much diluted spread of people leaving... depending on what you want to do with your night. You've seen that, there's never been that mass of people here at 2 o'clock at closing time and the doormen are like, you know like hassling people and it is a bit of a stress. [12OST, M1]

Later hours in responsible venues could be coupled with the idea of staggered closing times.

You are going to get trouble hot spots when there is that kind of huge crowds of people. Why would it not be more beneficial to the police to have different termination times at different venues or whatever? So that they can then, you know rather than this mass exodus of people at the one time. [12OST, M1]

One argument against this proposal was provided by the police:

What happens is, if you close one big premises at a time, people then move on to the next one and it becomes rammed with people and it becomes more dangerous I think, with too many people in the premises. [11POL]

One further issue highlighted by the police is that food vendors and premises remain open after most licensed venues have closed leading to pockets of inebriated people forming around them.

When the licensed premises close by 3am, by 3am unless you go to a casino, there is no alcohol, but food premises, who are also licensed - but not to sell alcohol - for food service, are licensed to stay open til 4 or 5 in the morning. So you have people coming out of pubs and clubs, who are intoxicated and then hang around in the city centre at food premises, in queues for taxis; they become irate and get involved in fights and violence. [11POL]

There will still be stragglers in there at 5 or 6am and for me that causes an issue. We need to take the example that others cities have, in that their food premises close at 2am, so that if you want food before you go home, you have to leave a licensed premises before it closes. Once you have left, between 2-3am for example, you don't get back into casinos, for example, there is no admittance after 2am, so once you have left the casino, that's you done drinking for the night and it clears the city centre quicker and clears problems quicker. [11POL]

A4. Overprovision

Two distinct views were expressed during the interviews. Firstly, a decline in the number of on sales sites, and pubs in particular, was noted in most areas, which was

linked to a decline in the financial situation of Aberdeen; only the town centre seemed to be turning a profit.

There's nae that much pubs now in Torry. Kinda thinned out now, it's more or less into town now, ken? [2OPN, F3]

Some people do use the local pubs but I think that a lot of the drinking probably takes place in the centre of town, erm, or at home. [4CCW, F3]

By contrast, most groups commenting on the prevalence of off sales premises considered there to be more than enough in their local community. Each area was furnished with a large number of local shops as well as readily accessible supermarkets. All of these stores sell alcohol in the same vicinity as other everyday items.

I do think if there was any more shops supplying licensing for alcohol in the area for what a small area it is, you would – there's enough of them, you know? [4CCW, F2]

There's enough big supermarkets now and there's enough buses that people can jump on. [4CCW, F3]

I think the number of places where you can buy drink is quite excessive and like in other countries – again in Australia – the only place where you can buy booze is in the booze and fags shop [Bottle Shops]. You can't buy at the supermarket. You can't buy at the corner shop. I think that's great. [6CCM, F1]

The dozen participants of the recovery group represented all of Aberdeen City. Every member, bar none, had two shops that sell alcohol within a five minute walk of their home. Whilst this was viewed as an enabling temptation by some; there were other people who required a drink so desperately that the distance was almost of no consequence.

Me, I would just find it. Keep going till I find it. You've got to get that drink. Nothing'll stop you: you'll just keep going till you get it. [7REC, M3]

A few of the groups recognised that there would be some issues in addressing overprovision at this late stage which would have to be addressed by the Board. These included: reducing the licences in local shops rather than the all-powerful supermarket chains; and the necessity of defining guidelines that the public are able to see applied to their local area.

I think that we are now in a catch-22 situation where now it is too late. That's happened; I don't know how you could change that now. I mean, you could say no new applications or whatever but I think that the trend is that the applications were given, so that could be an unfair situation because you know there could be arguments where you know this venue there, next door got it, so why could we not get it? [12OST, M1]

Think there's also another issue with saying reducing the number of licences or reducing the numbers of shops that can sell it cos the likelihood is it'll be the Tesco and the Spar and the big chains that'll get the licence and the corner shop who's the one that kinda needs the custom more probably wouldn't. [6CCM, F1]

How many are you allowed or do you just give them out to every shop that wants to open? You know, respect the trade, say, "I'm sorry, open the shop but I'm sorry, all the licences are given out for that area; but we cannot give you a licence, unless someone in that area closes and you take over". [7REC, M4]

Theme B. Licensing Objectives

B1. Preventing crime and disorder

B1.1 Alcohol-associated crime

Most of the groups interviewed associated crime with people under the influence of alcohol or people in the same vicinity. (Domestic violence is considered under public health below.) Off sales staff can suffer verbal and physical abuse if they refuse to sell alcohol to a minor or drunk person, or they can find themselves the victims of thieves:

In fact, even if you've got to steal it, you know, when you're really desperate, you'll find a way. [7REC, M2]

Public drunkenness is an issue for some communities that affects those who live in the locality and requires policing.

We have a lot of alcoholics, a lot of Eastern European communities with a street drinking culture, so it's all off sales stuff that we're getting. Drinking in public places, the mess that it causes, the fear it causes other people because they are generally quite drunk. [11POL]

The police interviewee also testified to alcohol's association with the most violent crimes:

You get various assaults, serious at times, sometimes going further to attempted murder and murder and its alcohol-fuelled violence that has caused it. [11POL]

The young person's representative normalised adverse behaviour with going out: "Yeah, you always see trouble, like when it finishes and stuff." [1CYP]. Most incidents were thought to occur at the end of the night where large groups of people had amassed - typically in the centre of the City at weekends.

I wouldn't say that the streets are necessarily safe at the weekend. If I was in town, I wouldn't walk down the length of Union St 11 o'clock at night. I would get a taxi from one to the other, erm, or, you know, if I was in a crowd as

opposed to just myself and my wife, you know, I would taxi it for me and my wife. [3VCH, M1]

I think, the longer the pubs are open, the more, you know, I think we certainly saw an increase in calls between 12 o'clock midnight and 2 o'clock in the morning that there was years ago. Definitely the calls have increased because the drinking hours have been extended. The calls that we get, erm, you know, the peak is midnight til 3, 4 in the morning, and, you know, drink-related; drink is certainly part of that. [3VCH, M1]

Away from the mob mentality heightened by drinking on these same evenings, alcohol also creates a class of vulnerable and isolated people unable to spot danger or fend for themselves when confronted with those who would harm them.

People are loitering in the city centre on their own and there are predators out there as well and they see what is a stranded wildebeest, basically, standing on her own, walking down a dark lane towards her home and she is a sexual assault victim or worse... There is also the robbery aspect, people are out there looking to get money for their drug habit and see a vulnerable person who is incapable of, or sparked out on the ground, they are through their pockets: that's their wallet; that's their phone. [11POL]

They are victims, so the quicker you get people away, dispersed to their own homes, the better for policing, the better for their own health, if you know what I mean. [11POL]

B1.2 Practice guidance

The Statement of Licensing Policy states that adopting best practice guidance is a control measure that can assist in preventing crime and disorder (section 24.3). This includes guidance relating to drinks promotions and hence is considered here. The Alcohol etc (Scotland) Act 2010 effectively banned most alcohol promotions as well as introducing "Challenge 25" where anyone who looks under the age of 25 must be challenged to provide identification proving they are at least 18 years old. Challenge 25 was found to be rigidly enforced in both on and off sales sites likely because the person selling the alcohol is liable for the hefty fine and legal consequences.

The Age 25 is really strictly enforced. Erm, I mean, I've been asked for, I'm 30 and I've been asked for my ID, you know, and it's really strictly enforced. [4CCW, F1]

The door staff at licensed premises challenge everyone for photographic ID if they have a query or a thought that that ID is not their ID, that they have borrowed someone else's ID to get in. [11POL]

Yeah, they get challenge 25 anyway and they can get challenge 25 at the bar again if they look young. [12 OST, F1]

Despite the ban on promotions, pricing deals were still found to exist. These were tempting purchases to most groups interviewed but could also offer potentially dangerous amounts of alcohol for affordable amounts to those people trying to abstain. *“Bring you into the shop for a bargain; wind you in again.”* [7REC, M2]. Claims were also made of on sales premises offering deals which directly contravene the terms of the licence.

Well, last Friday I was in Tesco and got my Russian Standard vodka. I was only getting a 70 but it was literally a pound more for a litre. And I was like well, you’ll be a fool. And I know in my head that I shouldn’t but I’m thinking I’m an idiot not to do this, ken? Cos this stuff’s expensive. And I drank the litre, ken? I’m thinking that I’ll nae want to drink anymore so I’ll finish it tonight. [7REC, M2]

If you’ve gotta drink it: you’ve gotta finish it. [7REC, M1]

I mean that there are random bars that do “do you want to double up for a pound”. Which to me seems to go totally against the Licensing Act but seems to go through some sort of loophole because they are a massive national company and because they have enough money behind them that no one challenges them. [12OST, S1]

This pricing strategy complemented the ongoing glamorisation of alcohol in the media which the recovery groups had noticed and were concerned about its effect on themselves and children.

You watch TV an all, you don’t see anybody smoking, but they’re all in bars: drinking. [7REC, F2]

The alcohol, it looks sparkling the way they put it over in the advertising. It’s nice sparkling alcohol, you know. [9SSE, M2]

B1.3 Bans

Banning troublesome individuals is one method of preventing problems. CCTV is another approach to preventing antisocial behaviour and is often added as a condition to licences. Bans are apportioned in on and off sales premises and local networks can be used to prevent crime across many venues. Before their remit was expanded to include training and other networking opportunities, Unight promoted itself by stating: “a ban from one means a ban from all”. They operated with other organisations committed to keeping the City safe including the police and Safer Aberdeen. For smaller venues, management often initially have to manage incidents themselves and the effectiveness of these bans was questioned.

For minor drunkenness they are pretty good – they will ban people for bad behaviour, eject people, or whatever. It’s only if people try to come back and cause issues after being banned, that we get called to deal with it. [11POL]

But I know shoplifters like, when I used to work in the Co-Op. They would unban them – cos they get banned for stealing drink – then they get unbanned and still served. That's just madness in my opinion, ken? [7REC, M2]

B2. Securing public safety

B2.1 Torry Alcohol Action Group (TAAG)

The Torry Alcohol Action Group was set up in 2015 for licence holders to meet up - initially monthly - and discuss crime-related issues at their establishments in the presence of the local police, "*Whether that would be theft or violence, drug taking, anything.*" [11POL]. Uniquely, both on and off sales premises were invited and they communicated with each other via Radio Link (which was council-funded).

In Torry, the licensees, particularly in the pubs, they know their customers. So they pass a name to us, we check it out, date of birth, address, so we know who it is. So it's put to a vote, if two-thirds agree, he's banned entirely from purchasing alcohol for a period of time, agreed by them. [11POL]

These bans are serious compared to those discussed above: typically six months for a first offence, up to a year for serious infractions. Each participant is enrolled on a Data Protection scheme overseen by the police, allowing the police to provide pictures to each site. Although considered effective and empowering the community, there were a number of issues:

So it's difficult for the likes of Tesco, who have a transient kind of customer base, who don't know these people like the pubs know them and the local shops know them, so it's more for their benefit. [11POL]

The bans were non-enforceable by us [the police], in terms of legislation. [11POL]

Additionally, a couple of pubs either didn't partake in the scheme or wouldn't ban a specific customer who they may know and not have a problem with. This meant that the customer was able to obtain alcohol and remain in the local area. This project also involves a great deal of time and effort by those involved to maintain its effectiveness: a reason for its ceasing before the time of the interview.

So, it worked initially, through no fault really of the licensed trade, more us, because of a change of staff, loss of staff, whatever, for a considerable period of time the meetings dried up and stopped. I'm going to try to re-start that, to get the licensed trade who lost interest back on board to start regular meetings. [11POL]

Whilst it is hoped that the TAAG model will be introduced to other local areas, it should be noted that the City centre does operate a similar scheme in their on sales sites, making use of the extra resources available there.

We've got the same with our Radio Link you know? It will come in over the radio, you know, like a man in a blue jumper, don't let him in he's been violent in here or he's done this. Everyone in the whole city centre... I mean you can get the street pastors; you can get the CCTV; get the police you know. So we've got one of those and you know we've got the doormen linked on site to the management as well. [12OST, F1]

B2.2 Training

A few of the public-serving groups wondered about the level of training provided to staff and especially to those selling alcohol as off sales or via occasional licences. The trade group provided a summary of their extensive training given to the staff in a busy, popular bar.

That's something to work towards: a standard where, you know, all providers of alcohol, you know, whether it's permanent providers or ad hoc at school prom or whatever, er, should have awareness raising training of how to recognise and deal with customers who are either in loco parentis or are parents, or carers of children or vulnerable adults. What I would be suggesting is that whoever is dealing out the alcohol at the fete or whatever, who's selling it should have to meet the same standard as say, er, the standard that might be expected of a pub. [3VCH, F1]

Any of the management team or any of the supervisors, they probably get three, four days training... They get induction training, licensing training, refresh training and buddy up with a mentor or supervisor so there is on the job training. We tend to do group training; we tend to hire in a fair bit because we find that say you train ten staff and only five of them end up working so you try to train big groups and then move on to individual training and then there are staff meetings and move on to refresh training. [12OST, F1]

B3. Preventing public nuisance

This objective was not a major consideration in the interviews. Away from the town centres, pubs were thought to have fewer numbers which reduced community disruption.

There's nae noise, even from the pub that's round the corner. [2OPN, F1]

It was noted that the smoking ban led to people from the pub having to stand outside associating with passers-by but were also put in the way of non-smoking patrons within venues.

And that's the other thing: they've done away with the two entrances so you have to walk through folk; everybody that's smoking outside. [6CCM, F4]

Within the community generally, street drinking caused disruption to the local area whilst drunk people were also found on buses (and avoided), or annoyed their neighbours in housing estates.

We had a problem for a while with predominantly Polish people street-drinking up there. The rubbish, the mess was incredible, so we with a bit a cajoling them and enforcement we have moved them away from there. [11POL]

Probably where we see more drunks is on the public transport. That's where, you know, they sometimes make more of a nuisance of themselves than in the street as such. (4CCW)

People just get fed up of them turning up drunk, making texts, calling for money and turning up at the door and tapping for money. [8HAS, F1]

The younger group in particular noted that it was still expensive to travel home after a night on the town. They also mentioned Street Pastors as a good idea in assisting people at these times but they weren't seen, by them, where most people were on Union Street - but were seen around the taxi ranks in Belmont Street.

Taxis: so expensive. That's why like a lot of people, young people, are doing, like, lifts. Offering people lifts and then, like, it's a lot cheaper. [1CYP]

B4. Protecting and improving public health

Basing the interview topic list on a health impact assessment resulted in the coverage of many public health topics by all of the groups in the study. The most common motif was how alcohol was obtained in Aberdeen City. Primarily due to cost reasons, most alcohol is purchased through off sales sites which made up the bulk of the responses. Other strands considered why people may be accessing alcohol, drinking habits and educational messages. This section also considers some effects of alcohol including mental health and domestic violence.

B4.1 Access and visibility

When considering young people, there were issues of normalisation of alcohol use at a young age, including within one's own family, and obtaining alcohol when underage. Most opinions echoed the view that children seeing alcohol consumed by adult family and friends and their peers, normalised the use of alcohol and was more likely to lead them into trying it, although a couple of people thought that the tense environment in the house and constant arguments might serve as a deterrent.

I think it's also about the environment in which you're living. If that's a constant, and it's been like that since you were born, and most of the responsible people that you know have a problem with alcohol then that affects the way you view life. It's your starting point. [3VCH, F1]

I just think the way of growing up: I grew up on drink. See my parents there. I seen everyone there. Ken, when you turn 13, you want to be an adult. You think, let's just do what adults do. [7REC, M2]

A number of methods were described for children under 18 to obtain alcohol; the most common was lingering outside local shops asking adults to purchase for them.

Yeah. It's embarrassing thinking back how, like, you could ask someone at the shops, local shops to go in. [1CYP]

The kids who do drink seem to be quite organised about how they get their drink, whether that is an older sibling who will buy it for them, or friends who are older, of age, the Challenge system is pretty good. [11POL]

You can kinda get round it a bit [Challenge 25]. Yeah, and I think like, if a young person was standing outside a supermarket, they're less likely to get it from someone who's got to go all the way in to get it than someone that's just got to nip in to the shop that'll take two minutes to come out. [1CYP]

One person was concerned about the absence of limits at a single purchase:

You can still be 18 and buy. There's no limit on how much you can buy. An 18 year old can go in and go buy 20 bottles of vodka; enough to kill themselves, ken. [7REC, M3]

They described a number of other methods for getting alcohol on top of using older family's stocks at home. This included buying at a premium after-hours from a number of takeaway shops. Other interviewers knew of taxi drivers who carried a supply in their boot.

When I got to over 17 and stuff my mum would just go get it for me because the way she saw it she would rather know what I was drinking; get it for me rather than me going out and getting whatever I wanted. [1CYP]

I saw someone on Facebook the other week, as well, like, started off on Facebook saying that after, like, after 10, like selling drink and, like, making profit off of it; dropping off drink after. Yeah; it's mental. Yeah, like, he'd made little business cards for it and everything and I was like: it was hilarious. [1CYP]

The vulnerable-people groups were more acutely aware of just how visible alcohol was and of how easy alcohol could be purchased. For those contending with an addiction there were mixed views about how effective reducing access might be, although this was credited for initially nurturing the habit.

People will always find a way to get it, cos people want it, ken? I would say stop selling it in little shops, ken? Put the price up, make it less easy to get; if you have to go out your way to get, you're nae gonna be so tempted. [7REC, M2]

It's at the till. Like, ken, it's right there. It's the last thing you do. So, you can go round the whole shop being like, "I'm nae buying; I'm nae buying," and then the whole aisle is like: "You are, and look how cheap it is to do so." [7REC, M3]

I think that for a lot of people there might be that deterrent if they're on the crux of it but by the time we see people, they're well into a position of crisis. [10CIO, F2]

No one interviewed thought that reducing shelf space or even hiding the alcohol behind barriers would stop them buying alcohol if that was the reason for them going to the shop. However, placing alcohol in prominent positions – especially during festive promotions – was especially noted as offering a temptation.

If someone wants alcohol, they'll go and buy it, I don't think they'll care about how much shelf space there is. [4CCW, F2]

Yeah, but then they put them on the end of the aisles where the deals go. There's a deal on drink, end of the aisle, special, ken, come and get it. [7REC, M2]

In contrast to the pubs, this group knew where or how they could purchase alcohol when they should have been refused a sale.

One thing I find is, like, even if you're blazing and you go in, you get drinks – as long as you're not being aggressive. Then if you [order] a litre of vodka please. They just go: "Here you go, have a good night, ken." [7REC, M2]

Some of them are very strict, right: the supermarkets. If they smell drink on you, you ain't got a hope in hell of getting drink, right, but some of the other shops where they know your face. Even if you go in and you're being a nuisance; if they know you then you can even get it on tick, right, you know? And you'll keep going back to that shop and they'll look after you, you know? [7REC, M1]

A number of people in the recovery group gave examples of how they had been exploited as an easy, regular sale by unscrupulous local shopkeepers unconcerned with the harm they were contributing to.

And the first thing they'll say to you: "Are you wanting a bottle of vodka" And I go: no! Honestly, give me a half bottle. And they says you're cheaper with a bottle of vodka. And I says that I'm nae wanting a bottle of vodka. I asked for a half-bottle. [7REC, F1]

I used to speak with them sometimes: listen, I'm nae wanting a drink today so you shouldn't be asking me if I'm wanting drink and then they put the seed in your head and that's it. [7REC, F1]

I'd go in the shop as soon as it opened and he had a bottle of vodka waiting for me. He could see me coming. [7REC, M2]

B4.2 Preloading

This refers to the practice of drinking alcohol at home before going out. Each group who discussed this topic considered it a normal current occurrence.

That's how I think, like, a lot of the time if you're going out in town we wouldn't just go straight in town. We would have a few drinks at, like, your house or your friend's house or something before you go out. It just feels weird going straight out when you've not had a drink. [1CYP]

You only need a couple once you're out there. Just to keep the buzz. [6CCM, F1]

You're pre-drinking from where you are. Because it's so dear to drink in the town you obviously load yourself up. [7REC, M2]

The call-handlers postulated that this practice resulted in high levels of alcohol being imbibed by young people at home, and that socialising in pubs could help control the amounts taken and protect them.

[Young people] will drink a lot before they go out, erm, so you could argue that it pubs were more user-friendly to young people in some respect; that might help them regulate their drinking. [3VCH, F1]

Once they reach their destination out in town, preloaders are a source of disturbance and annoyance to on sales premises. They not only purchase less in these establishments but very quickly require assistance in their drunken state - very quickly becoming the responsibility of the bar to secure their safety taking up staff time. In the City, Street Pastors often assist in finding someone to take the afflicted person home.

Because they're preloading before they come in, you've no, like it's so difficult to monitor it. Because they come through the door and they look fine, they can have one drink at the bar and that's it and we've got a duty of care to make sure that they are ok. [12 OST, F1]

If somebody has been at home and they've had a fair drink at home, they come in here, have that one drink that just tips them over the edge, next you know they're either paralytic, collapsing, being sick or whatever unable to communicate... It's one of those weird ones where the police don't want these people; the ambulances don't want these people. Yeah, but because they're in our premises we are essentially liable for them. [12 OST, F1]

B4.3 Education

Much of the educational issues covered teaching about the dangers of alcohol to children, often with the help of people who've abused alcohol in the past. There was a perception that the amount of alcohol education in schools was small compared to the amount of time given to drugs education. However, getting through to children at a young age was the most effective way to combat the onset of harmful habits. One children's charity has a special team engaging with children in the final year of primary school.

I mean, I've got a 10 year old son who's just come out of primary 7 and I can't ever remember him coming home and saying that he's had any specific education on alcohol. Drugs? Yes: loads of times. But alcohol? No. [3VCH, M1]

Many of the recovery groups (who hold courses for their members) and similar support networks form links with local schools and youth groups to discuss how this insidious addiction can suddenly take over one's life and also describe the effects of alcohol on their lives.

From an early age, I never thought I was going to be an alcoholic. No, I truthfully didn't. [7REC, M4]

And I just grew up with alcohol, you know, and it just took hold of my life. I lost everything through alcohol you know, I lost everything through alcohol. It's a taker, it takes everything. [9SSE, M1]

I now eat more fruit and actually enjoy my food better now, I wasn't eating. You don't look after yourself when drinking. It's all biscuits and crisps or a greasy bag of chips, no pot of soup or mince and tatties cause that's too much money. [9SSE, M1]

One person thought that a lack of punishment towards underage drinkers sent a message of leniency:

And also, like, for underage drinkers and that, there should be actual consequences, ken. I always knew, ken, it was like that I could do whatever I want. I got caught blazing a million times by the police and they were just like get you home, ken? If I was thrown in a cell for the weekend and everybody was outside partying, maybe like that. [7REC, M2]

The community councils and their partners are able to impart information to children in their local area; formerly, this was assisted by community or youth workers at youth groups held in community centres – the demise of which is discussed further below.

We have a youth flat in the middle of Sandilands where the young people can go and they get things like alcohol and drugs awareness and things like that. There's also a community project at the top that also does the same. [4CCW, F2]

Finally, the recovery group mentioned that the consequences of alcohol abuse could be imparted to people selling alcohol making them complicit in their recovery attempts.

I think there should be more responsibility on licence holders to make judgements. Maybe, put in parcel that they, I'm not saying the corner shop starts to do ABIs but maybe they need some literature and information to pass on, you know, to take more responsibility because, what was described at the

start of the conversation was, you can go in absolutely blitzed, and they're still giving your alcohol. [7REC, M5]

B4.4 Normality of alcohol and its central role in making and sustaining social relationships

The normalisation of alcohol walks hand in hand with its ubiquitous presence in socialising and culture. Drinking is seen as something to do with your friends and was a part of most activities mentioned in the interviews.

But as I said, we're not alcoholics. Just like to be sociable. Sociable. [2OPN, F1]

Cos that's the other aspect, that it's a normal part of growing up, isn't it? There's that whole risk and that buzz and all that's going on in an adolescent brain. Which leads me to think that the key determinant, apart from availability, is, erm, what are your friends doing? Peer pressure. [3VCH, F1]

Yeah. That goes with socialising, ken? If you're out with mates, if you're having a good time, drink, ken? I never hear of folk, you want to go out, have a rocking time on the coffee, kind of thing. [7REC, M3]

For the young people, it was notable that no one in their social circle was teetotal and there was nothing else to do but drink. Underage drinking was instantly recognised by the recovery group as a potential slippery slope into problem drinking.

No, I don't know anyone who doesn't drink. Awful. Sounds a bit ridiculous but it feels that there's nothing to do. Like, at a weekend, there's not much to do apart from go out and have a drink. I don't know. I've always got like someone's birthday or something so that's just like partying on. [1CYP]

Aye, when you're young, it's a competition: I can drink more. And the ones that won turned into the total alkies, ken? [7REC, M2]

Alcohol's pervasive socialising role made it very difficult for people who were trying to avoid alcohol from meeting friends without succumbing to drink.

No, I couldn't go to the pub and just sit in there with a soft drink. You feel so uncomfortable and, you know, why put yourself in that environment? When you go into a pub, it's to drink alcohol. [7REC, F2]

I was in the pub about six months ago, ken. Once you step in that door, it's er, you're there basically 'til closing time, ken. [7REC, F1]

This often results in an uncomfortable choice between maintaining one's recovery and suffering the isolation of not drinking with one's friends.

The ones you used to drink with: when they see you starting to move on, they don't like it. For me, you've got to avoid them. You've lost a partner but it's no really a true friend cos they would help you get off drink. [9SSE, M1]

B4.5 Pricing

Pricing was thought to be very important in where people buy alcohol and how much. It was the main factor mentioned for why people are drinking at home rather than the pub.

For everyone at the table, it's not pubs because pubs are too dear. You only go to a pub for a special event. So, problem drinking is done from supermarkets, local shops. [7REC, M5]

One day of drink in the pub is like a week, ken. [7REC, M2]

Raising prices (including discussion of minimum unit pricing) was largely thought to prove a deterrent to mainly younger people or cause everyone with limited funds to buy nastier alternatives.

I was drinking some of that cheap cider and some of it was like paint stripper. It was 7 or 8 percent proof. And it was just absolutely burning my sides out. And I couldna speak, my tongue was all burnt. Ma throat, tha back of ma throat, ma tongue was all blistered. That was due to the cheap cider. [9SSE, M1]

Alcohol dependents developed a number of strategies as a group to ensure that they could drink every day.

You're on a sort of community as well. Everybody knows when their payday is. Aye, if you've got a group of mates that are all getting their money on different days, you can get all get smashed constantly, all the time, as long as you just know each other. [7REC, M1]

However; a number of groups expressed their concern about the effect of higher prices on people with limited funds where buying alcohol would take precedence over other essential purchases affecting their health and the wellbeing of their family.

It's very easy to get food for next to nothing, you know, when you're on benefits. And you can just spend all your money, all your benefits on drink and fags. Cos that's how you're living, you know? [7REC, M2]

The food bank will tell you that some of the poor folk get paid, and in two days all their money will be gone and they will be at the food bank for the rest of the time – it's crazy. [8HAS, F1]

A lot of people rely on those sort of services [Food parcels/banks] or they just get into huge amounts of debt because they're not paying things like rent or electricity or they're just not having them. You know there's some people just won't have like heating, you know, because that's not the biggest priority for them. [10CIO, F3]

An increasing desperation to get money to buy alcohol was thought to lead to risky and illegal measures affecting others in the community.

If you want it, you'll get it and the dearer you make it, the more avenues are opened up to illicit availability. People would make their own. (7REC, M5)

I would lie, I would cheat, I would steal, I would: you name it. I would sell things to get alcohol. I would go to the extreme to get alcohol. Beg, steal, borrow, sell stuff and that's just the way it was. [9SSE, M1]

No, well there's been a few times as well where we know the people haven't had money and it's been a question mark of how they got the money – sexual favours, you know? [10CIO, F4]

On sales sites are finding it impossible to compete with the buying power of supermarkets exacerbating the social problem of people drinking at home in isolation.

Loosen the restrictions we have, you know, on selling alcohol. If supermarkets can sell it as cheap as they can, people can just go in there and buy as much as they want. Why do we have to be limited to what we can do? I am not saying to go back to happy hours and cheap vodka, but you know what I mean. [12OST, M1]

B4.6 Drivers and non-drinkers

Some provision was made for those people, such as drivers, who wish to avoid alcohol when out. Interestingly, the drink-drive limit wasn't generally known. This mirrored the fact that no one interviewed routinely counted units or were aware of the recently changed recommended limits.

You're not allowed anything – it's zero, isn't it? (1CYP)

The idea of free soft drinks for designated drivers was met with universal approval although it's often only seen as a promotion around festive periods. The on sales site did state that their profit margin on such drinks is one factor on stocking non-alcoholic alternatives together with public reception of the taste.

Unfortunately for beers you don't make much GP [Gross Profit] off them, non-alcoholic beers, so you have to kind of make them at a price that is roughly the same but they are a wee bit less. They have to be that much so that we actually make some money on them or there isn't much point in us selling them. [12OST, F1]

What we personally have got is a designated drivers menu: the non-alcoholic beers we serve and the fact that we can tailor any cocktail to be non-alcoholic. Yeah, it's so popular that people want non-alcoholic cocktails. We dabbled with non-alcoholic wine for a while but it's just not... It's horrible. [12OST, F1]

B4.7 Mental health

For many people, often at the edges of society, alcohol is inextricably linked with mental health issues. It's commonly used as a coping mechanism when they are finding it hard to get by and are requiring assistance to restore their self-esteem.

I think as we discussed last time, I think, a lot of people use alcohol to self-medicate because they're not getting the support and the treatment they need. And they may already have mental health problems or it could exacerbate the problems cos it could make them feel more depressed.
[3VCH, F1]

For a lot of the people that we're working with, they're using it as a coping mechanism and they're saying: they've had enough. Are they then going to try and access it from somewhere else, are they? Or are they going to access other means of coping which is like, opening up to drugs and other things?
[10CIO, F2]

It's not a social thing for them: it's very much a coping mechanism for them.
[10CIO, F3]

Those people who had been abusers of alcohol described how it made them feel depressed. This depression was also associated with isolation: both factors together worsening in a vicious cycle that can lead to even more serious ramifications such as suicide.

But I just lived, breathed, slept alcohol, you know? Totally and utterly. And actually I didn't think I had a problem; it was everybody else's fault. So, I was defending it all the time and that. I can't function with alcohol. I just...It's a depressant. It just makes you depressed, it makes you isolated. [9SSE, M1]

People who have been re-housed find themselves in a vulnerable situation where they don't know anybody and are trying to piece their lives together:

It can be a really long day for some people, you know? Especially, we've moved somebody into temp last week... And they don't even have a TV for instance. Like a woman and her child are moved into a flat with no TV, you know, what do they do all day? [10CIO, F4]

And it's time as well; they don't want to get close and start speaking to neighbours and things like that and make a new friend because they know they'll be moving on. [10CIO, F5]

It gets emotional as well, it gets extremely overwhelming for people, and alcohol gives an easy way of escape really. People go from being in a situation to being quite isolated initially. [10CIO, F2]

The major complaint of the social services (particularly for those working in domestic abuse) is the difficulty in receiving psychiatric assistance which they

believe would make a huge difference in helping people get back on track with their lives.

I think referrals to things like mental health is really tough at the moment; like the waiting list is just so long for a lot of people like trying to get access to counselling; trying to even get an assessment for a lot of people is extremely difficult and that can be really tough. [10CIO, F3]

You cannot get a mental health assessment if somebody is on drugs and alcohol. It's usually the mental health side which they are not getting support with... Because they are on drugs and alcohol no doctor will refer for MH assessment til drugs and alcohol are tackled, which to me seems in saying how can you tackle that without tackling the mental health side of it? Especially since most people are using it as a way to cope with mental health issues they have got. I've seen them for at least 3 months before they will be assessed. [10CIO, F2]

It's just a cycle that can't really be broken. [10CIO, F4]

Recently, on sales premises have become more aware of mental health issues in their patrons and have taken steps to recognise this and offer support.

Unight did a whole training session on mental health, suicide awareness and bystander intervention. [12OST, F1]

B4.8 Social support

There are numerous organisations offering help for those who need help with alcohol abuse and associated issues such as domestic violence. Most of these are concentrated in the City and transport problems have been noted in Moray and the Shire. Accessing these services can prove a problem to many and the first role of these organisations is often to develop a relationship and demonstrate that support is available to navigate the administrative mire.

It's only when there is an incident or an accident or police involvement or whatever that draws the housing officer to visit, thinking that this family needs support and come back to us - it's like they are avoided, missed, slipped through the net. [8HAS, F1]

Yes, they're all home visits, plus for the social isolation we take them out for a coffee, you know, or something like that, we attend appointments with them, that's any appointment. [8HAS, F1]

I think for a lot of people as well, like we're mainly... that first point of contact who helps them to coordinate the other appointments. Cos it can be a minefield. I feel like a personal organiser. [10CIO, F2]

Yeah, like you have to know all about police court systems, benefit systems, housing, erm, mental health, other health issues, employment, all that sort of stuff. [10CIO, F1]

There are interpretation services available for non-English speakers who do manage to make initial contact. The wider-issue organisations are able to put their client into contact with alcohol services if they feel ready to do so.

We would tend to refer on to Alcohol & Drugs Action (ADA)... But that's if the person accepts that the primary issue for them at that point is the alcohol. Which for many people is low down the list as they sort of feel it is essential to use but it's not a problem as there are all this other stuff that they want to deal with first. [10CIO, F2]

That is the primary coping mechanism because they are not able to engage with the services quickly or you know it's quite...people are getting pinged from pillar to post quite a lot of the time. [10CIO, F4]

Similarly, people dealing with alcohol abuse have assistance through these recovery organisations and introductions to institutions that can further assist them with their goal.

I had a key worker that used to come in every Monday and she was like a Godsend to me because that was like say I was nae good with paperwork stuff like that and eh filling in forms, taking readings from meters things and that. So she got all that sorted oot cause I was only getting like a week to move house. [9SSE,M1]

I've been here over a year now and I often go to church at R-, the city church and both places has helped me. Cause I actually got this place through the job centre. [9SSE, M1]

They've fed me for over a year. Plus I maybe get a, a wee thing, you get stuff from CFINE [Community Food Initiatives North East] every Tuesday and there's always extras to go round. They always give a box of different stuff. [9SSE, M1]

The recovery group related how they find support in each other as well as the courses and group sessions run by the recovery centre. However, they were keen to point out that medication was an essential part of their programme and played a large role in keeping them sober.

A lot of us actually need the medication as well to help with cravings and alcohol problems. So, I mean that the fact that we've got to take medication actually helps us maybe to bypass the alcohol stand. But it's nae just self help but actually medication to aid that. [7REC, F1]

B4.9 Housing

A number of organisations interviewed were involved in finding housing for people affected by alcohol, or alerted to the resulting issues from people living in social housing. Homelessness was a real worry for people addicted to alcohol and was experienced by a number of those who were recovering.

Women seem to do a lot of bed hopping via friends. Men seem to get less pity. Some men are really quite violent and get bombed out and word gets around. But there are far more men. [8HAS, F1]

I was probably about 16 but I was drinking well and truly before that and my family had just had enough of me and I was sleeping rough, the graveyards and just anywhere for me to get my head down, you know. [9SSE, M1]

To the point I was on the streets sleeping rough for a while and bed and breakfasts and places like that, you know. Aye, I couldnae hold a tenancy down. [9SSE, M2]

The aforementioned boredom associated with being out of work and having nothing to do in a flat all day resulted in use of alcohol with associates risking their living quarters:

And they do it in groups so a flat can turn into a drinking den; y'know where they all gather. There's a high risk of losing their tenancies. [8HAS, F1]

The process of obtaining social housing involved a great deal of paperwork and contacting a number of institutes: the assistance provided by the associations interviewed - and similar organisations - proved invaluable in helping to get people back on their feet providing a stable base for their recovery even if the initial dwellings weren't always ideal.

If they are made homeless then they are homeless. They would have to present themselves to the homeless section and get an undesirable property. In 21 years I have not seen acceptable placements it's either Place A or Place B with drug dealers with one in every second building. [8HAS, F1]

I said to her there comes when you need to realise you can't do this on your own, I don't want to go to rehab she said, I'll lose my house. I told her she wouldn't lose her house, you'll get your rent paid up for a whole year. So she is now thinking about it, I've now been working with her for 3 years It's really a process she had to go through. [8HAS, F1]

I think people have to move really quickly cos the housing benefit gets paid to one or the other. So, the housing benefit gets paid to the temporary accommodation and then it has to be rearranged to be paid to the new tenancy which would be in E's name. They do it really quickly so it doesn't give people time but it would also get people into financial difficulty if they don't do it within 48 hours because of the benefit system. So that's another problem. [9SSE, F1]

B4.10 Domestic Abuse

There was a perception of alcohol being associated with violence from both partners and also the isolation and other issues experienced by women (mostly) who were given other accommodation.

I wouldn't say one was worse than the other; they are both bad in terms of abuse of alcohol and drugs but alcohol is the one which generally leads to violence, whether that's domestic or just falling out with friends or whatever. [11POL]

As my lady, he attacks her when she's been drinking. So the alcohol kind of leads to the abuse because he never attacks her when she is not drunk. [10CIO, F4]

This was mentioned by a number of the groups but was the main remit of the Cyrenians who run projects in this area.

I encouraged her to use the Violence Against Women project, which is part of Cyrenians, so we do a lot of inter agency working which is really good. [8HAS, F2]

I have a lady now who's been using alcohol as a means of coping for quite a while and was involved in domestic abuse. Her partner was involved but she was asked to leave the family home because of her alcohol use and that has sort of spiralled even more now. Erm; I just think when children are involved... If there's alcohol use the alcohol use is being seen as worse than the domestic abuse because this lady had to move from the home but the partner had been allowed to keep the children. This lady was turning up to groups with two black eyes and they knew what was going on. [10CIO, F3]

If someone comes to us and they are fleeing domestic abuse the first thing we would be looking at is them staying in accommodation. [10CIO, F4]

The support work involves developing a relationship with these fragile people and putting their safety first before getting helping them to re-build their lives.

And the temporary accommodation is sometimes a hostel setting. But that's usually for a couple of days unless they're quite vulnerable and it is felt that they needed supported accommodation. Most of the time people go into temporary flats. So it's pretty much a normal flat. So that can be quite isolating for a lot of people. [10CIO, F2]

With Violence Against Women we can do more long term support. So maybe someone wants help but they are not able to go there. We would be able to do more long term. Like I've went and picked people up and took them to appointments. So we can assist them to get there and support them into their appointment. More long term emotional support, practical support. Setting up appointments; doing referrals. Setting up benefits, helping them back to work; college that sort of thing. [10CIO, F3]

B5. Protecting children from harm

When asked to consider how children are protected from the harmful effects of alcohol, the call-handlers thought that the definition should be expanded:

We talk very much about safeguarding, erm, now – I'm sure you do the same in the Samaritans – and, erm, and very much within the health service as well. We're not concerned just with children and young people but also about vulnerable adults. So, is that something that should be considered to be added to that? Protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults from harm? [3VCH, F1]

As discussed previously, the call-handlers and social workers were careful to understand the reasons for alcohol use before directly addressing it. They could break confidentiality if the child was in immediate danger from someone under the influence of drink. Additionally, the police have steps in place to deal with and follow up a child who was drinking.

What we would do if it is a child who is drunk is investigate the circumstances and see if any criminality is involved, that would be enforced. Generally, what we will do is obviously make sure that the parents are aware and that they are settled at hospital and that the situation is not serious, the condition that they are in. What we do is submit a Vulnerable Persons Report (a VPB) which we share with partner agencies, the NHS, Social Work, whatever, just flagging up that we have a concern about this child who was found intoxicated, aged 14, so that social Work can put measures in place. [11POL]

The major issue concerned the provision of occasional licences in areas where children would be and especially for school events.

I think that should be absolutely no: no way. That alcohol should not be sold to, erm, adults in authority. [3VCH, F1]

It's awareness raising, isn't it? So, if you're the guy, you know, pulling a pint or whatever, and you're noticing that a parent over there is getting really tipsy and they've got very young children that that's something they should be trained not just to recognise but how to cope with that. [3VCH, F1]

Now, these are happening in hotels. Now, if the hotel has a licence then perhaps it should be highlighted to them: if you're running a prom, for example, a type of an event where adults are responsible for children, you too have a responsibility. [3VCH, F1]

The mooted idea of family pubs was met with a mixed response reflecting the different localities and hence any application would benefit from the input of the local population and community councils.

I dinnae think that real Place B people would entertain that. I dinnae think that. [2OPN, F3]

One it would be a good income for the bars and, two, it would be a place where you could show your children how to respect alcohol by, you know, people being drunk. [4CCW, F4]

I would maybe put food for them, we've said food. And a decent space for them, separate from say the public bar that's settled nicely. [4CCW, F3]

Well, I would say that children – let children be children. They've got the rest of their lives if they want to drink. So, if I wanted to go out, when I went out with my family, we went out as a family. We weren't out to drink. We were out as a family and it was soft drinks. [4CCW, F2]

6. Discussion

Two themes were selected to present to the Licensing Forum and to highlight a number of the issues presented in the results. *The licensing process* was selected as the first theme deriving from the SLP and containing distinct messages repeated in a number of groups: predominantly the community councils and on-sales trade. This provided a number of clear opportunities for recommendations that could enhance the operation and reputation of the Licensing Board as well as protect the objectives. Secondly, the unique approach of this study was summarised by focusing on the issues described by the *vulnerable groups* and *associated workers* allowing the Forum to see beyond the statistics to the people and understand better the importance of the objectives within the City.

6.1 Applications and Objections

Most of the information informing this section derived from the community councils and on-sales trade representative. Two community councils were interviewed in this study and there was a marked difference in their perception of the licensing process according to who had attended *licensing training*. The council who had accepted the invitation had developed good working relationships with the local police and LSO which smoothed their duties as a statutory consultant. Information provided in the training includes contact details to receive appropriate help when required and outlines what can be expected. Members of the council who had not attended training cited a lack of time as the main reason. However, the interview emphasised some of the issues that the training would help resolve persuading them to attend the next session.

Despite this, a number of suggestions were made about improving the administrative process. It was felt by everybody who has engaged with the licensing process that communicating via postal mail was not fit for purpose. Some councils were receiving applications five days after the initial application was made. Whilst community councils are statutory consultants as stated in the Act, the Board is not obliged to wait for a reply. When the community council wishes to make an objection, it is likely that they will not have a meeting planned in the three weeks before the Board meets to make its decision and must consult with its members on an *ad hoc* basis. One council was especially aggrieved to see a new licensed premises open in their area when they hadn't seen an application. They would have objected to this licence knowing that it lay on a major route between a housing estate and secondary school where the school children tarry on their way home. This fosters resentment towards the Board with the council feeling that their local knowledge was not included in a decision which daily affects their community. As the community council only sees a handful of applications each year, they felt that their opinion should be mandatory before a licensing decision is made in their area. Additionally, it was felt that licence applicants are at an unfair advantage by comparison to objectors. Applicants employ legal representation to navigate the court-like proceedings and have access to the objections ahead of time allowing them time to prepare a response. This is not afforded to the person making an objection and a member of the public, for example, may be unaware of how to put forward their opposition. Objections made by bodies representing the objectives, such as the Police,

Environmental Health or NHS, were considered to provide statistics that were often too general for the premises being considered and easy to dismiss. Finally, there is a perception that applicants who are able to recruit powerful legal representation have an unfair advantage regarding the success of their outcome; this was mooted as a reason why supermarkets generally have their applications granted.

The on-sales representative also commented on the perceived *application delays* although for them, this referred to the time taken to grant a decision for extended hours applications. These dates are posted on the website but may occur very close to the date requested despite the application going in well in advance of the deadline. This could only be remedied with more meetings for applications not requiring the full Board and public scrutiny beyond an initial posting period. An increase in capacity in this area would allow for more flexibility for local licence holders and increase business opportunities in the City.

Transparency and communication were two themes that derived from these focus groups. Applicants and consultants wanted a more formal, more immediate process that could be followed online. Applicants should have their application acknowledged and an indication of how their application is progressing. Currently, most communication takes place with the legal team but all parties should have access to the same information. Email communication with community councils would give them more chance to adequately assess an application. There may be scope for them to indicate to the Board that they wish to make an objection. Feedback on the outcomes of decisions would enable relevant parties to better understand the process and make more efficient applications or objections in the future. This can also increase transparency in the system and demonstrate the workings of an open Board. For instance: reasons why a licence is granted in an over-provided area should be stated to demonstrate a formal, structured process is in place and to increase the confidence of those people party to the licensing system.

6.2 Vulnerable groups

The usefulness of these sessions was affirmed in the first point made by a call-handler for a children's advice line; namely that "vulnerable" adults should be added to the Licensing Objective that protects children and young people from harm to better reflect society's role in offering assistance to those who require it. Whilst the wording of the objective derives from the Act and cannot be changed by the Board, they may view such an inclusion as something to consider in as being within the spirit of the objective.

In line with national strategies to combat alcohol's accessibility and marketing, the success of *Challenge 25* was heartening and having the intended effect on underage purchases. Other methods were employed by teenagers which included; persuading adults to buy on their behalf, having alcohol delivered as part of a takeaway order or even via a sales-person advertising on Facebook. Enforcement personnel have more time to chase these loopholes and illegal sales if they feel that licensed premises are acting responsibly, legally and appropriately. There is the opportunity for the new Statement to develop strategies to combat more modern sales techniques such as online sales. The level of off-sales training and adherence to licence condition was called into question by a number of groups who felt they were held to a lesser standard than on-sales sites and monitored less closely. Both recovery groups described how these sites exploited their vulnerability by

encouraging them to buy alcohol when they didn't want to, to buy greater volumes; or by having their usual purchases ready for them in a bag when they came through the door. They would typically buy the cheapest, strongest alcohol (which would be most affected by minimum unit pricing, MUP) and access to this toxin is not only harmful, but potentially lethal.

Overprovision was mentioned by every group interviewed. The recovery groups demonstrated how quickly they were able to walk to a number of off-sales sites. It is more cost-effective and convenient to purchase from these vendors and drink at home. Increased availability is associated with higher consumption and more harm due to alcohol¹⁷. In Scotland, a social gradient exists for alcohol (and tobacco) outlet density where the most deprived neighbourhoods have the highest densities, reinforcing inequality¹⁸. Despite these and other similar studies, one evaluation acknowledged the difficulties in defining and measuring overprovision, making it difficult to apply by the Board¹⁹.

A number of mental health issues were mentioned during the course of this study relating to isolation, depression, suicide and the use of alcohol as a “coping mechanism”. Those who found themselves in trying circumstances often required assistance to navigate cumbersome forms or identify appropriate assistance. Women escaping domestic abuse could find themselves in entirely new housing where they know no one. They may turn to the bottle to cope with a lack of social contact. A major obstacle is encountered in trying to obtain a mental health assessment for people trying to get their lives back on track. Mental illness may have been pre-existing or develops as a result of extremely difficult circumstances but until it is under control, the difficulties in contending with returning to normal lives multiply. Often, it is not feasible for people in these situations to be sober (or abstaining from drug use) for three months whilst they await evaluation. There may be a lack of communication between healthcare professionals and social workers where an understanding may be reached, for example in a one-stop shop where an evaluation is part of an initial assessment.

One group worked directly with children but a number of points were raised. The increase in schools requesting an occasional licence for charity events was strongly disapproved of, unless a level of awareness training was demonstrated in the servers. Both community councils complained about the funding cuts which meant that they had to stop their youth groups in the evenings. As well as offering activities for young people, they would have community or youth workers or volunteers impart healthy living messages. The young persons’ representative thought that many teenagers drank because there wasn’t anything else to do in their area.

6.3 Strengths and Limitations

The major *strength* of this study was that it was designed to go beyond existing routine data sources to develop a more complete understanding of how vulnerable groups were affected by alcohol licensing. This was the first time that a qualitative approach was applied to alcohol licensing in these populations. The Licensing Forum was part of the study at each stage and contributed to the areas of research, especially in describing which aspects of the SLP they wanted reviewed. This approach allowed the Forum to have a vested interest in the study and be more willing to develop recommendations to take to the Board. Giving a voice to these groups empowered the communities they represented with regards to alcohol

licensing. Presenting these views to the Forum is a vital role of the study team in this instance and important in informing future licensing policy to more comprehensively represent the communities within Aberdeen City as well as protect the Licensing Objectives.

A number of *limitations* were associated with this study and the method employed. In general, qualitative research is excellent for exploring views and opinions but is time and effort consuming to organise so many groups, chair the interviews, transcribe and analyse. It isn't a method that can be quickly utilised to give a rapid answer. For practical reasons, not every group identified in an initial scoping can be interviewed and discerning choices must be made to represent the views of the desired population as fully as possible. Occasionally, desired participants may not wish to take part in the study: the off-sales license holders approached all refused their invitations to take part and are therefore not represented in this study. Finally, by design, the Board and Forum contain people representing many different backgrounds and organisations and, as such, a degree of diplomacy is required to try and get everyone pulling in the same direction regarding the objectives of the SLP. There are people with different priorities to those of the researchers and these should be acknowledged in order to better address any potential challenges to the conclusions presented.

7. Conclusion

Using a *qualitative method* brought an added dimension to the usual statistics presented to the Forum and the Board and allowed them to explore the views of the communities they represent more deeply. By design, this study targeted vulnerable groups affected by licensing as well as specific community organisations who take part in the licensing process. This approach allowed themes to be identified which may not be apparent from routine data. The major success of this research was the development of a greater understanding of the issues faced by vulnerable and marginalised people with minimal social capital who often represent deprived areas. Addressing their challenges will not only combat the inequalities faced within Aberdeen City but would reduce alcohol-related harm; not only within high-risk groups such as those addicted to alcohol, but ameliorate the harm of alcohol to everyone affected by it within the City.

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