



Practice Note 33

East Dunbartonshire Off-sales Initiative

Contact Name: Neil Miller

Position Held: Licensing Officer

Telephone: 0141 578 8781

Email: neil.miller@eastdunbarton.gov.uk

Address: Licensing Office,
East Dunbartonshire Council,
1 Grange Avenue, Milngavie, G62
8AQ.

Topic Areas: Partnership Working, Personal Safety, Safety of Vulnerable Groups

Project Background and Aims

The pilot campaign of the Off-sales Initiative ran in East Dunbartonshire between 1st July 2009 and 30th January 2010. The initiative was aimed at reducing underage drinking in East Dunbartonshire by decreasing the availability of alcohol to underage young people and increasing the availability of diversionary activities for young people as a healthy alternative to using alcohol.

The initial idea for the initiative came from anecdotal evidence of underage alcohol sales and underage drinking in public space in the local authority area, which appeared to be a prevalent and visible issue. Moreover, Community Support Officers reported that some licensed premises were selling alcohol to young people who were known to engage in antisocial behaviour and disorder, whilst evidence collated from the licensed trade showed a consistent level of attempts by local youths to purchase alcohol.

The Off-sales Initiative promoted responsible sales practice within off-licences and targeted adults and older teenagers acting in the role of 'agent purchasers', that is, those people buying alcohol on behalf of underage young people. The initiative also signposted young people to healthy diversionary activities available to them in their local area, providing them with free leisure pass to culture and sport services.

The pilot campaign was led by East Dunbartonshire Council Licensing Standards, with a planning group made up of representatives from the Licensing Department, Community Safety, Young Persons Alcohol Prevention Service, Strathclyde Police and the Health Improvement Alcohol and Drug Team. The initiative was also supported

by the local Health Improvement Team and elected members. Funding for the initiative came from the East Dunbartonshire Council Alcohol and Drugs Partnership.

Outcomes

National 6: 'We live longer, healthier lives',
8: 'We have improved the life chances for children, young people and families at risk',
9: 'We live our lives free from crime, disorder and danger', and
11: 'We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others'.

Resources

Funding: East Dunbartonshire Council Alcohol and Drugs Partnership.
Partners: East Dunbartonshire Council: Licensing Standards, Licensing Department, Community Safety and Health Improvement Team
Young Persons Alcohol Prevention Service and local councillors;
Strathclyde Police and the Health Improvement Alcohol and Drug Team.

Monitoring and Evaluation

An evaluation report was drafted at the conclusion of the campaign. The evaluation drew on statistical analysis provided by Strathclyde Police in relation to alcohol related offences and alcohol related detections, interviews with key stakeholders and interviews/focus groups with local young people.

The evaluation report and further information is available on request from the Licensing Officer.

Activities

At the outset a multi-partnership working group was established to draw on skills and experience from across as wide a spectrum as possible. Due to time constraints the campaign had to be designed, organised and implemented within a six week planning period. A number of meetings were held with the representatives on the planning group to develop three phases – planning, launch and implementation - of the initiative.

Various campaign materials were developed during phase one. A bespoke Off-sales Guidance Brochure was compiled that focused on identifying best practice in relation to dealing with underage sales. A multi-size high visibility poster was produced, which included details of all agencies involved. The poster was produced for display in off-sales and licensed premises.

Key stakeholders from diversionary facilities and initiatives were approached for details of the services they provided for young people. This information was collated and used to create x4 diversionary posters for display in youth facilities.

600 free leisure passes were printed, offering reduced price sport at all East Dunbartonshire Council leisure centres. These passes had a unique membership number created to enable any young person to book and use facilities irrespective of the cost of the formal membership.

In phase two an invite letter was sent out to all potential licensees in the East Dunbartonshire area asking them to attend a Licensing Seminar. 50 individuals from across all aspects of the Licensing Trade attended the half-day event.

The Off-sale Initiative was introduced at the seminar through three keynote speakers from East Dunbartonshire Council, the NHS and Strathclyde Police. The presentations endeavoured to illustrate the actual cost of alcohol misuse to young people, their families the wider community and the licensees themselves. Licensees were asked to actively support the campaign by being aware of their responsibilities under the law, being vigilant regarding young people trying to buy alcohol underage and being on the look out for adults or older teenagers attempting to buy alcohol for underage young people. They were also asked as part of the campaign to record any incidents of attempted underage sales or agent purchasing in refusal books.

Each delegate at the seminar was given a pack containing a good practice Off-sales Guidance Brochure, free refusal books and two multi-size multi-agency high visibility campaign posters. The same pack was hand-delivered by the Licensing Officers to all other outlets not in attendance at the Seminar. The relevant diversionary posters were distributed to all Off-sales identifying local activities and clubs available to young people throughout East Dunbartonshire.

The campaign was officially launched at the start of phase three, on the 1st July 2009, and ran for six months as planned. During the campaign, participating licensees displayed the high visibility campaign posters and diversionary posters in their premises. Most licensees were cooperative and proactive in identifying agent purchasing and attempts from young people to buy alcohol underage and recording incidents of refusals.

The free leisure passes were distributed by Community Safety Officers on their patrols to young people who were hanging around in identified hotspot areas.

Licensing Officers carried out some 162 visits to off sales premises over the course of the campaign during which inspections of off-sales premises were conducted to ensure compliance with Licensing Law and offer advice and support to licensees. At the same time, the police increased checks on licensed premises in the local authority area. Offences detected by either the Licensing Officers or Police led to formal action being taken.

Impact

The seminar at the launch of the campaign was very well attended and received by the licensed trade, local councillors and all the external partners in attendance. Good

local press coverage was ensured by a photo shoot and press release on the day of the seminar.

The numbers of crimes relating to the sale of alcohol increased during the campaign period. From the 1st of July to the 31st of December in 2008, no crimes relating to alcohol sales were recorded. Over the same period in 2009, two agent purchases were recorded, along with three sales of alcohol to children and young people and two allowing sales to children and young people.

This increase suggests that the Off-sales Initiative impacted positively upon the detection and reporting of crimes relating to alcohol sales. For example, Licensing Officers would visit off-sales premises at peak hours then feed information to Strathclyde Police in order to identify problem spots. Community Police Officers and Community Safety Patrol Officers reported some displacement of underage drinking from certain hotspot areas during the campaign.

The 162 visits made to off-sales during the six-month campaign resulted in 24 warnings and eight compliance notices being issued. One premise was reported to the Licensing Board and its license was revoked permanently for selling twice to underage youths.

Although the campaign did not significantly impact upon the already good practice in many off-sales premises (particularly large retailers such as supermarkets) it did impact positively upon the daily practice of smaller local shops. Positive feedback was received regarding an increase in the use of refusal books and a decrease in underage sale attempts. Licensees also reported an increased feeling of confidence to deal with underage and agent purchasing than prior to the campaign being run. Several licensees gave examples of refusing sales to youths and suspected agents, subsequently verified by the increased use of the refusal books given out by Licensing Officers.

Any increase attendance at the diversionary activities promoted by the x4 diversionary posters was difficult to ascertain. However, 405 of the 600 leisure passes produced by the Off-sales Initiative were used by young people.

Lessons Learnt and Sustainability

The license that was permanently revoked during the campaign was the first such instance within the Strathclyde Police area. This was picked up by the local and national press, thereby sending out an extremely powerful message of the seriousness of the campaign.

Further campaigns may benefit by being run across smaller areas to enable a greater concentration of resources and a more in-depth and focussed analysis within one key area. Also, future campaigns would benefit from greater interaction with young people at the planning stage in devising campaign materials and more publicity activity to raise local awareness prior to its commencement. An increase in in-depth

monitoring of the uptake of diversionary activities would establish concrete feedback channels to assess more effectively the impact of the campaign.

The key to any future campaign is to utilise changes in the Licensing Law to continue to alter and affect the mindset of both licensees and the public alike.

Summary

The Off-sales Initiative ran in East Dunbartonshire between July 2009 and January 2010. The project utilised a prevention/intervention model to address underage drinking in the local authority area. A promotional campaign was used to inform licensees of the responsibility to maintain good practice and promote diversionary activities to young people, as a healthy alternative to alcohol consumption. The campaign was followed by enhanced checks on off-sales premises by Licensing Officers and Strathclyde Police.

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Address:

2 Hill Street Edinburgh EH2 3JZ,

Tel No: 0131 225 8700

E-mail: info@scsn.org.uk

Website:

<http://www.communitysafetyscotland.org/>