

Classification: Public

Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Licensing Committee
Date: 4 March 2015
Reporting officer: Sarah Kilkie, Assistant Director
Subject: Local Alcohol Action Area Project

Purpose and summary of report:

To inform Members of the purpose of the multi-agency Gravesham Local Alcohol Action Area (LAAA) project and of the progress that has been made in the delivery of the same.

Recommendations:

Members are asked to note the contents of the report

1. Introduction

- 1.1 In October 2013 the Home Office wrote to Local Authority Chief Executives to invite expressions of interest in taking part in a Local Alcohol Action Area (LAAA) project which aimed to offer up to 20 boroughs nationwide assistance with combating drink-fuelled crime and disorder and the damage caused to people's health. Work in the LAAA's was also to focus on promoting diverse night time economies.
- 1.2 In February 2014 the Home Office announced that Gravesham BC had been successful in achieving a place in this pilot project and the winning bid is attached as Appendix 2 to this report.
- 1.3 The project finishes at the end of March and the Home Office intend to report on the work and successes achieved by all the boroughs in the summer of 2015.
- 1.4 A multi- agency LAAA Group was established that meets on a monthly basis. The Group developed and agreed a Delivery Plan that included a range of activities aimed at:
 - Reducing alcohol-related crime and disorder; and
 - Promoting growth by establishing a diverse and vibrant night-time economy

- 1.5 The LAAA Group includes representatives from key partner agencies and Council officers with responsibilities that are linked to town centre day-time, evening and night-time economies, licensing and public safety. Meetings are also attended by an allocated Home Office Support Worker who has been able to assist us by sharing good practice from other LAAA areas and to secure specialist advice on Communications (to improve public perceptions of the town centre and what it has to offer) and Diversification (to increase the choice of activities and venues available during the evening that are attractive to and will cater for a broader range of people wishing to socialise and spend their leisure time in Gravesend).

2. A staged approach

- 2.1 The LAAA's Delivery Plan has taken a holistic approach and recognised that whilst a fundamental part of the project has been to address alcohol-related crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB), there are a number of other factors that contribute to both improving community safety more generally as well as how safe people feel. The Delivery Plan was formulated to ensure that as many of these factors were addressed as possible and took a staged and structured approach by concentrating efforts within 5 areas of focus:

- Prevention (through education, awareness-raising, the promotion of responsible selling of alcohol and initiatives to reduce opportunities for alcohol-related crime and ASB to occur);
- Control (using a range of enforcement tools to take firm action against those engaging in alcohol-related crime and ASB);
- Treatment (promoting services available to those with alcohol and other substance misuse dependency problems and improving access to services);
- Public Perception and Diversification (carrying out a range of activities to improve public perceptions of Gravesend Town Centre by enhancing the physical environment, and working to provide a diverse range of facilities and entertainment to meet the needs of our equally diverse population);
- Communication (to extend the ways in which we communicate and consult with local people to improve our understanding of what forms public opinion about the town centre and any barriers that exist that prevent people from visiting town centre venues/premises or businesses from investing in the area).

- 2.2 During the life of the project considerable progress has already been made in respect of each of the Plan's key objectives. The formation of the Delivery Group brought together all the main stakeholders and the structured approach that was adopted has provided clear direction.

3. Actions

3.1 Prevention

- Reducing the Strength Campaign - led by Gravesham BC's licensing team together with Kent Police licensing officers, a "Reducing the Strength Campaign" was formally launched on 24 July. The aim of such a campaign is

for partner agencies and stakeholders to work together to reduce alcohol related harm and anti-social behaviour particularly that associated with street drinking and to improve all people's health by working with businesses to promote and support responsible retaining from 'off-licences'. This is achieved by a voluntary agreement for beer, cider and lager with an alcoholic volume of 6.5% and above (with the exception of premium products) to be removed from sale. Prior to the launch, questionnaires were sent to all off-licences to assess what products were being sold and to invite licensees to participate. The scheme was also publicised on the Council website and in a licensing newsletter sent out by Gravesham BC's licensing team. Joint licensing visits were also made to premises to carry out inspections and simultaneously used as an opportunity to promote the campaign. The lead Member for Business and the Community and the Chair of Licensing Committee also visited premises to throw their support behind the campaign. Unfortunately voluntary take up has been minimal (only two premises) but continues to be promoted as a means of reducing the ready availability of higher strength alcohol to street drinkers in the town.

- Promotion of the G-Safe Safer Socialising Award – the Award has already been issued to The Grapes, T.J.'s, The Robert Pocock, The Goose and The King's Head. During the time that the LAAA project has been in operation, AMF Bowling, McDonald's and Blake's have expressed an interest and are working towards meeting the necessary criteria.
- Responsible Retailing training opportunity – GBC Licensing were contacted by SAB Miller a brewery company who offered training for staff of licensed premises in Gravesham, including off-licences. 60 free places were offered (the usual cost is £180 per person) of which 50 were taken up and the attendees achieved a BIIAB Level 1 Award in Responsible Alcohol Retailing accredited by the British Institute of Innkeeping.

Seasonal work – particular multi-agency work to reduce the risks of alcohol-related crime and ASB takes place each year and this year focussed on the town centre to contribute to the LAAA's work programme. This included campaigns to raise awareness of the dangers of drink-driving, promoting responsible drinking, the use of taxi marshalls on key dates over the Christmas and New Year period (following consultation with Kent Police and local taxi drivers), the trialling of 'taxi hailing points' at various locations throughout the town in addition to the taxi rank to help disperse members of the public more quickly at the end of the evening and working with Gravesend Street Pastors to provide support and assistance to potentially vulnerable people.

3.2 Control

- Enforcement Operation - A two-week Police-led Operation was delivered specifically to address street drinking and alcohol-related ASB taking place during the mid-summer months. Officers and Council staff (including the Community Safety Unit's Safer Place Officer) reinforced the message of responsible drinking and enforced powers granted within the terms of the Alcohol Control Zone where appropriate. Officers engaged with 110 people for alcohol-related reasons and 88 alcohol seizures were carried out. Key locations where street drinking takes place were confirmed and several persistent street drinkers were identified, enabling resources to be effectively targeted. Whilst successful in causing the street drinkers to move away from

the area, there has been some displacement (particularly to the corner junction of Darnley Road and Pelham Road). Efforts will continue to be made to engage with these individuals alongside taking appropriate enforcement action whilst longer-term solutions are explored.

- Review of Alcohol Control Zone signage – a review has been completed and additional signage installed in locations where street drinking has been identified as being more prevalent.
- Use of G-Safe (Town Centre Crime Reduction Initiative) Exclusions – there is a close working relationship between G-Safe, the Council and Kent Police with the sharing of intelligence taking place on a daily basis. Joint work has included the use of G-Safe Exclusions taken against those involved in alcohol-related crime and ASB.

3.3 Treatment

- Joint work with Crime Reduction Initiatives (CRI) – CRI is the West Kent Treatment and Recovery Service, the commissioned provider of services for those with alcohol and drug dependency problems. CRI are an active member of our LAAA Project Group and have taken the lead on several initiatives. With a financial contribution provided by the Community Safety Unit (CSU), 4 CRI clients with alcohol dependency issues and who have in the past or may be at risk of engaging in domestic abuse, are being supported through the Community Domestic Abuse Programme (CDAP) alongside their recovery plan. They will be able to complete the 22-week programme in Gravesend (CRI will be hosting the sessions) and support will also be provided to their partner/families. This is the first time that this kind of collaborative approach has been taken locally. CDAP has an excellent track record in changing behaviour of those undertaking their programme; progress will be monitored and reported through the LAAA meetings.
- Dealing with complex alcohol misuse clients – CRI have also taken the lead in coordinating a multi-agency approach to better meet the varied needs of those with complex alcohol misuse problems. Meetings bring together all those agencies that may be able to offer some kind of tailored support to deal with specific issues such as accommodation, access to training and employment opportunities etc. The approach is similar to that that has been adopted by the Community Safety Partnership's Reducing Re-offending Sub-Group that has been proactively addressing the issues that manifest themselves as pathways to offending behaviour. The intention is to clearly identify what kinds of intervention different agencies are able to provide to the individuals and that interventions are then delivered in a 'joined-up' fashion.

3.4 Public Perception and Diversification

- 3.4.1 Public perceptions about levels of crime, ASB and personal safety are strongly affected by environmental issues such as street cleanliness, inadequate street lighting, criminal damage caused by vandalism and graffiti. It is also widely acknowledged that if such issues are left unattended they tend to increase and attract further problems. In efforts to improve public perceptions of Gravesend town centre and to create an environment in which people will want to spend their spare time and in which businesses will want

to invest, considerable work has already taken place that is contributing not only to the LAAA Project Group's objectives but also towards the Council's Corporate Plan.

3.4.2 Enhancing the physical environment

- Street lighting – following consultation with Kent County Council (KCC) in May, the County Council agreed to clean and repair street lighting in key roads in the town centre (High Street, Queen Street and King Street) to improve their functionality.
- Gravesham in Bloom - the extension of Gravesham in Bloom to the peripheral areas of the town saw flower planters and baskets installed through the town centre with many businesses participating. Gravesham Urban Knitters used knitted flowers and bunting to make areas of the town brighter and 'camouflage' vacant shop fronts and community planting and volunteering days took place with Council staff, local residents and school pupils all taking part. KCC Councillors used individual contributions from their Members' Grants to buy planters and baskets for the Old Town Hall, Library and Adult Education Centre areas. Gravesham succeeded in reaching the standards to achieve the Gold award.
- Repairing damage – broken down hoardings in Horn Yard have been replaced and redundant/dilapidated furniture around the one way system has been cleared and replaced. Bins, handrails and benches were repainted as part of the Community Volunteering Days during Gravesham in Bloom.
- Improving cleanliness – Large-scale, highly visible graffiti on the access to the town centre from Gravesend railway station and the exterior walls on the multi-storey car park has been removed. Street sweeping duties had previously ended at 17:00hrs; the extension of these hours has been agreed to improve the appearance of the town centre to counter otherwise negative impressions of the town to visitors in the early evening/night-time. As part of the environmental campaign for the town centre, 2 full-time Town Centre Maintenance Operatives have been employed to be dedicated to working in the town.

3.4.3 Diversification – developing the evening and night-time economy

- Paul Greengrass Cinema – The Woodville screens current films to provide local people with an affordable local alternative to visiting cinemas outside of the Borough. Consideration is being given to offering ticket plus meal packages to attract greater footfall.
- Food trails – The Group is exploring how food trails may be used to promote positive experiences for new visitors to the town using good food ratings to promote local restaurants and raise public awareness of the wide variety of venues available.
- Promotion/marketing of evening and night-time venues – a short film has been made that will be used to advertise Gravesend's night-time economy and to promote reputable restaurants, licensed premises and other venues. The intention is that this will be shown before first film screenings to

encourage cinemagoers new/unfamiliar with the town to also visit these premises. The film will also be able to be viewed on the Council's website.

- Encouraging business investment – it is hoped that some of the work co-ordinated through the LAAA Project will also mean that as perceptions of the town improve, more people looking to relocate or start up a business will find the town attractive. The Group monitors new businesses opening/planning to open in the town centre at its meetings to ensure that if there are opportunities to engage and work with them, these are not missed e.g. they may want to join the G-Safe Scheme, try to secure a Safer Socialising Award or be keen to take part in the food trail project.
- Night-time economy meetings – there is already very good communication between retailers and businesses that operate during the day-time, particularly assisted by their membership in the G-Safe Scheme and their radio contact with each other and with the CCTV Control Room. Consultation has been taking place between Licensing Officers, Town Centre staff and night-time economy premises with a view to establishing regular meetings for representatives from night-time venues as a means of sharing good practice, sharing information and intelligence and encouraging collaborative work to promote the town.
- Christmas events – Living Advent – The Town Centre Manager and Senior Licensing Officer worked with local businesses to ensure that 24 different live events took place in different venues in the run up to Christmas. The events took place between 5.00pm-8.00pm to provide some entertainment in the early evening to take people into the night-time economy hours and encourage them to stay in the town centre later.

3.5 Communication

- The Home Office commissioned marketing experts, Munroe and Fraser, to work with the 5 Local Authority areas delivering the LAAA initiative and who have expressed an interest in having support in developing a positive reputation as places to visit and in which to socialise. Good practice from other areas has been shared with Gravesham's Communications Team that took the lead on this aspect of the project.

4. Additional activity to address ASB in key locations in the Town Centre

- 4.1 The Clock Tower is a key historical landmark in the town centre but in the past it has been a regular meeting place for street drinkers and more recently become a gathering point for (according to reports received by Kent Police and the CSU) sometimes large groups of young people who are believed to have been involved in ASB. This is reputed to have included verbal abuse, the intimidation of staff of neighbouring businesses and their visitors and the causing of criminal damage to both Clock Tower itself and property nearby.
- 4.2 Specific work to address the problems relating to young people gathering and ASB that took place included:
- Officers, together with Kent Police, have considered new powers coming into effect on 20 October through the Anti-Social Behaviour and Crime Act

2014 to identify any new approaches that could be used. In particular they are looking into the feasibility of using a new Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) in the Clock Tower area. Home Office colleagues working with us on the LAAA Project have suggested that we consider this new Order as an option. The Order is quite different to the Dispersal Orders that have previously been used and is intended to be broader and less bureaucratic. Councils will take the lead in making the Order and will be expected to consult with the Police, the Police and Crime Commissioner and other relevant agencies. It is specifically intended to focus on the impact that ASB is having on victims and communities and their quality of life and has the advantage of being enforceable by Police Officers, PCSOs and Council Officers.

- KCC Youth Services Outreach Team visited the area, attempting to engage with the young people several times a week. The Senior Youth Worker leading this has had considerable past experience of working with young people in Gravesend and some of the individuals gathering at the Clock Tower are known to him. They have expressed an interest to him in having a youth club that they could attend in the town. The Youth Worker is now in the process of speaking to both the Methodist Church and the Emmanuel Baptist Church, at Milton Road and Windmill Street respectively, about the possibility of running sessions from each of these venues. The Youth Worker is 'negotiating' with the young people that he is willing to try to put in place some sessions for them but that this is also dependant on a marked improvement in their behaviour.
- There is one permanent CCTV camera directly in this area. The CSU arranged a site meeting between CCTV Engineers, the Town Centre Manager and local Police to assess the scope for the installation of 2 of our mobile CCTV mobile units. This is to ensure that we have good coverage of the Clock Tower in order to establish the extent to which young people are gathering there; obtain evidence of any wrongdoing and to gather footage that could be useful in supporting any decision taken to utilise powers to put a Public Space Protection Order in place. Secure and suitable lighting columns was identified and the installation of the mobile cameras is in place.
- The CSU Safer Place Officer visited the area daily and engaged with members of the public at the Clock Tower (of all ages) and particularly to advise in respect of the responsible disposal of litter. As from February 2015 the Kingdom team will be in operation in the town centre to take Fixed Penalty Notice action against those dripping litter. They will be briefed as regards the Clock Tower hotspot.
- Kent Police have confirmed that the Community Policing Team will continue to prioritise the Clock Tower for the foreseeable future ensuring their patrols visit the area regularly with particular attention being given in the evenings. The area is also a daily tasking for the Police ASB Patrol Car (Operation Army) whose reports are fed back into the CSU Daily Briefing meetings.

5. Home Office Input

- 5.1 LAAA meetings occurred on a monthly basis with a dedicated support worker from the Home Office in attendance to offer advice and to signpost good practice in other authorities.
- 5.2 The Director General, Crime and Policing selected Gravesham BC as an area to visit in July 2014 and was very complimentary of the approach being taken by the borough and all of its partner agencies.
- 5.3 Numerous workshops and seminars have taken place addressing the core themes of the LAAA project. Apart from the information disseminated at these meetings they have provided an ideal opportunity for networking, not only with the other participating authorities but also with many trade bodies and associations involved in the sale of alcohol and effects on communities. The last of these seminars will deal with sustainability after the project has ceased.
- 5.4 The Home Office intends to collate a report of good practice and learning points that have been gleaned from all participants in the LAAA project nationwide and this will be published in the summer of 2015.

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

6.1

Anyone wishing to inspect background papers should, in the first place, be directed to Committee & Electoral Services who will make the necessary arrangements.

IMPLICATIONS

APPENDIX 1

Legal

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a statutory responsibility on a local authority to work in partnership with key agencies with the aim of addressing identified priorities to reduce crime and ASB.

The LAAA project has given the opportunity to look closely at best use of powers available to the council and its partners in tackling these issues -including the new Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act 2014.

Finance and Value for Money

Whilst no grant funding was attached to the LAAA status; the support and networking opportunities provided by the Home Office, its experts, partner authorities and trade contacts have been invaluable in driving the project forward and helping to achieve positive outcomes.

Risk Assessment

There are no immediate risks to the completion of multi-agency activity in relation to the LAAA project and its continuation once the formal phase of the project draws to a close.

Equality Impact Assessment	Screening for Equality Impacts		
	Question	Answer	Explanation
	a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	Reducing crime and ASB as well as alcohol-related health harms will have only positive impacts on all local people and communities
	b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	Yes	The work of the LAAA delivery group will contribute to promoting equality by assisting and encouraging local people (who may be part of harder to reach groups or who may be more susceptible/vulnerable to certain types of crime and ASB) to access services that may be able to offer them positive support and assistance
	c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		N/A
<p><i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i></p>			

Corporate Business Plan	There are direct links to Strategic Objective 1 – Community Wellbeing and Strategic Objective 4 – Economic Development and Regeneration
Crime and Disorder	Fulfilling powers and duties under section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 is of direct relevance to the Council's obligations as well as addressing the objectives of the Licensing Act 2003 which are: a) The prevention of crime and disorder b) Public safety c) The prevention of public nuisance; and d) The protection of children from harm