

Public Health - Case file

Your local authority, Chadwick Valley MDC, has recently been invited by the Sustainable Community Strategy team, in collaboration with the Director of Public Health, to consider how different stakeholders across the county might work together on some of the 'big issues' of the day. One of these is alcohol and, in particular, the evidence that it is playing a greater part in the lives of young people, both in terms of their own health and the well-being of others. At the opening meeting of the stakeholder 'working group' it is decided that the focus should be on reducing the prevalence of alcohol use in the under-21s, and you have been invited to look at this for the next meeting in a fortnight's time. Ultimately, the intention is to establish a Local Area Agreement on this issue.

As the one Environmental Health Practitioner on the 'working group' (the others so far represented are: the Police; the Primary Care Trust - Accident & Emergency and Department of Gastro-Intestinal Disease; social services - Director of Youth Services; the local education authority, and the Licensed Victuallers Association) you will be part-responsible for the composition an inter-disciplinary 'strategy' for presentation to the recently established Chadwick Valley Health Forum. It is intended that this will draw to the attention of local councillors, community leaders and school governors, the nature and extent of alcohol abuse across a range of areas, including its effects on mental and physical health, public order, family-life and employment.

For the moment your specific remit is to consider how local authorities across the county might collaborate on a general health campaign to reduce consumption amongst young people, focusing on alcohol purchased from licensed premises locally, whether or not it is consumed on the premises from which it was purchased. Clearly, the inference is that as the licensing authority, councils will have an important role to play in this direction.

Although this is an opportunity for some 'blue sky' thinking, you have been asked to research how Government and health professionals currently view the problem, and specifically whether any particular forms of intervention focused on young people can be shown to have delivered improvements. In this respect you might consider 'young people' to cover those aged 11-21, since there is increasing concern that in out-lying parts of the District especially, children are often seen wandering around at night in an intoxicated state, and the A & E Consultant on the working group reports treating children as young as 11 with alcohol-related problems.

Public Health - Tasks

Task 1

Draft the outline of a 'briefing paper' to the 'working group' detailing the current nature and extent of alcohol misuse amongst young people in the UK.

(70 marks)

Task 2

In response to a personal request from the Chair of the Licensing Committee, Cllr. Mrs Goddard, draft a memorandum to her in which you describe some of the options that might be open to Chadwick Valley MDC if it was granted greater discretion by the Government on alcohol licensing, particularly that which might impact on the health and well-being of young people.

(30 marks)

<p>For the purpose of this examination you should justify any assumptions you have made within the answers given</p>
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Public Health - Marking Advice

- 1 *Draft the outline of a 'briefing paper' to the Chadwick Valley Health Forum detailing the current nature and extent of alcohol misuse amongst young people in the UK.*

(70 marks)

Candidates may draw from whatever source(s) they wish to give the 'briefing paper' the data required to establish a case intervention in respect of alcohol misuse amongst those considered under-age or especially vulnerable because of their comparative youth e.g. the Inter-departmental Youth Alcohol Action Plan (June 2008). The 'paper' might begin, though, 'setting the scene' and explaining, briefly, the context in which this has become a major public health issue of our time. Some of the points that might be included are detailed below:

- a number of notable changes have occurred in recent years in how young people drink alcohol and how *much* they drink. First, while there has been an overall fall in the proportion of young people drinking, there has been a sharp increase in the alcohol consumption of young people who do drink.
- the average weekly consumption of alcohol for 11–15-year-olds increased from 5 units in 1990 to more than 11 units in 2006.
- there are differences in patterns of consumption between girls and boys. In a recent study, 47 per cent of 15-year-old girls had been drunk at least once in the past four weeks compared with 37 per cent of boys of the same
- there is evidence of an associated increase in 'drinking to get drunk' – the latest evidence on drinking by 11–15-year olds suggests that 35 per cent of those who had drunk alcohol in the previous four weeks had done so deliberately to get drunk.
- there is evidence that young people increasingly favour higher strength alcoholic drinks – stronger brands of beer, cider and lager, as well as spirits.
- while levels of alcohol consumption by older adolescents who drink have remained consistent, younger adolescents' consumption has steadily increased. A recent study describes 11–13-year-olds as less likely to have had a drink in the previous week (14 per cent in 2001 to 9 per cent in 2006), but of those who were drinking, their level of consumption had risen from 5.6 units a week in 2001 to 10.1 in 2006 [Fuller, E. (2006): *Smoking Drinking and Drug Use Among Young People in England in 2006*. London: NCSR and NFER].
- there is evidence of a trend towards increased unsupervised drinking by young people in open-air public places – in parks, at bus stops, and in shopping areas, for example. The proportion of 11–15-year-olds who drink on the street, in a park or

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- somewhere else outside has increased from 21 per cent in 1999 to 31 per cent in 2006 [Fuller, E. (2006): *ibid*]
- [drinking by young people in public places is the form most likely to be of concern to the public – over half the people who said they had witnessed drunken or rowdy behavior claimed it was due to young people drinking in public places [Hughes, S; Bellis, M.A; Hughes, K; Tocque, K; Morleo, M; Hennessey, M. & Smallthwaite, L. (2008): *Risky drinking in North West school children and its consequences: A study of fifteen and sixteen year olds.*
 - drinking in public places is the kind of drinking that is most likely to put young people at risk of being victims of crime. A recent study in the North West suggests that 40 per cent of young people who drank outside in public had experienced alcohol-fuelled violence either as victims or perpetrators [*Safe. Sensible. Social. The next steps in the National Alcohol Strategy for England (2007)*]
 - alcohol consumed by young people is increasingly likely to be obtained from the home. Of the 11–15-year-olds who drank 14 or more units in the previous week, 48 per cent claim to have been given alcohol directly by their parents whilst 42 per cent claim to have taken it without their parents consent [
 - Much of the alcohol obtained from the home by young people is also consumed there, under the supervision of parents, but a good deal is not [Valentine, G; Holloway, S.L; Jayne, M. & Knell, C. (2007): *Drinking places: where people drink and why.* York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation];
 - widely understood that drinking to excess can lead to a range of health problems in adulthood, yet it is less clear exactly how much drinking significantly increases the risk of these problems and at what ages
 - there are strong reasons to believe that there are particular risks for young people who consume alcohol and those who drink heavily in particular, leading the Australian Government to recently conclude that there is no amount of alcohol that can be said to be safe.
 - There is evidence from the UK of a sharp increase in liver cirrhosis among people in their 20s – almost certainly linked to heavy alcohol consumption in the teenage years;
 - a strong association between alcohol consumption and accidents involving young people. This is particularly the case for road traffic accidents – but also related to accidents and injuries more generally. Thirteen children a day are admitted to hospital as a result of drinking alcohol [*Rogers Review (2007): National enforcement priorities for local authority regulatory services*].

2. *In response to a personal request from the Chair of the Licensing Committee, Cllr. Mrs Goddard, draft a memorandum to her in which you describe some of the options that might be open to the Council if it was granted greater discretion by the Government on alcohol licensing, particularly that which might impact favourably on young people.*

(30 marks)

Candidates should be awarded marks for suggestions that would 'fit' with the current regulatory position and / or might be part of a new regime where the observations of stakeholders, particularly those who are critical of the liberalisation of the licensing laws, might figure in a stricter application of the law (or even its repeal and re-enactment of a laws that gave local authorities tougher powers).

Such a position is indicated in current debates over how alcohol might be made less available to young people, whilst remaining tolerant of it remaining lawfully sold and consumed sensibly. As an example is a major conference held in London on 13th July 2010 entitled: *The Alcohol and Young People Summit 2010: Rethinking the Licensing Regime – Back to the Future?* In which the advance agenda indicated a range of objectives:

- a ban the sale of alcohol below cost price;
- a review alcohol taxation and pricing to ensure it tackles binge drinking without unfairly penalising responsible drinkers, pubs and important local industries;
- an overhaul the Licensing Act to give local authorities and the police much stronger powers to remove licences from, or refuse to grant licences to, any premises that are causing problems;
- authority given to councils and the police to shut down permanently any shop or bar found to be persistently selling alcohol to children;
- a doubling in the maximum fine for under-age alcohol sales to £20,000;
- local councils to be entitled to charge more for late-night licences, and this to be used to finance additional policing;
- Establish collaboration with the alcohol industry to reduce the sale of alcohol to under-18s and also to market and promote alcohol in a more responsible way; and,
- working with police and the courts to stop young people drinking in public places, including a new offence to tackle persistent possession of alcohol