

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. THE REASON FOR THE PROJECT

- 1.1 The new power of health scrutiny allows local authorities with social services responsibilities to create overview and scrutiny committees (OSC) to review and scrutinise any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services in the local authority area.
- 1.2 When prioritising its initial work plan the OSC felt that the issue of health damaging behaviour amongst young people was a key issue that should be addressed at an early stage.
- 1.3 After considering the various aspects of health damaging behaviour the OSC felt that the issue of alcohol misuse offered the best opportunity for the committee to make a positive impact as there appeared to be a gap in service provision in this area as services have tended to focus on drug use rather than alcohol.
- 1.4 The OSC set up a sub-group to carry out this project and report back to the full committee.

2. MEMBERSHIP OF THE SUB-GROUP

- 2.1 The sub-group consisted of Joan Nash (chairperson), Margaret Edney and David Fowles.

3. OBJECTIVE

- 3.1 The agreed objective of the project was to consider existing initiatives aimed at reducing alcohol misuse among young people in Gloucestershire, identify gaps in service provision and recommend possible initiatives that would improve the services and reduce alcohol misuse

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 4.1 The following terms of reference were agreed:
 - To identify current initiatives aimed at reducing alcohol misuse amongst young people, liaising with those most closely involved with providing these services
 - To identify areas of weakness and gaps in current service provision
 - To gather the views of young people on how best to reduce alcohol misuse
 - To produce recommendations on how to improve current services and reduce alcohol misuse amongst young people
- 4.2 The term young people refers to people in the 11-25 years age group.

5. MEETINGS OF THE SUB-GROUP

- 5.1 The sub-group met on three occasions to discuss existing prevention services with those agencies involved with the provision of services and on one further occasion to discuss recommendations based on consideration of the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England and young people's opinions about alcohol misuse. These meetings were held on 27th October 2003, 5th February 2004, 1st March 2004 and 13th April 2004. Two interim reports were provided to the OSC for

consideration and discussion at its meetings on 20th January 2004 and 23rd March 2004. These reports can be found in annex 1.

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1 The sub-group considered a number of national reports highlighting the extent of the problem of alcohol misuse in Britain in order to establish the severity of the problem. A list of background papers is attached at annex 4.

6.2 The sub-group considered evidence from 7 organisations involved in the provision of services during its first three meetings. The organisations involved were:

- Health Promotions Unit, Cotswold and Vale Primary Care Trust (27th October 2003)
- Young People's Substance Misuse Service (5th February 2004)
- Local Education Authority (5th February 2004)
- Youth Service (5th February 2004)
- Youth Offending Service (1st March 2004)
- Substance Action Groups (1st March 2004)
- Community Fire Safety Team (1st March 2004)

The sub-group greatly appreciated the help that these organisations provided and their willingness to come to speak to the group at short notice.

6.3 A questionnaire was produced with co-operation from the Youth Service to gather young people's views on preventing alcohol misuse. This questionnaire was distributed through the District Council link officers and within the County Council to employees and their family and friends. A copy of the questionnaire and summary of results are attached at annex 2.

6.4 The final meeting of the sub-group considered the areas of weakness identified during its earlier meetings in the light of the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England and results of the questionnaire in order to produce recommendations on how to improve services.

7. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 The sub-group's investigations revealed a number of areas of weakness and gaps in existing service provision, these were as follows:

- The lack of services aimed specifically at alcohol misuse in comparison to efforts to try to tackle the problem of drug use
- Lack of a National Alcohol Strategy
- Lack of national campaigns aimed at raising awareness of the dangers of alcohol misuse
- Lack of consistency in the quality and quantity of alcohol education in schools
- The transitional period from young people's services to adult services
- Involving parents
- The quality and focus of current literature aimed at young people

7.2 Consideration of the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England, which was published on 15th March 2004, addressed some of these issues but left a number of areas of concern, which became the focus of the sub-group's activity. An assessment of the extent to which the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy addresses the initial concerns raised by the sub-group is provided at annex 3.

7.3 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.4 Recommendations to the Secretary of State for Health

- i. **THAT alcohol misuse be made a higher priority nationally in order to redress the balance between drug and alcohol services.**
- ii. **THAT further efforts be made to promote the Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for England.**

7.5 Recommendations to all agencies involved in providing substance misuse services:

- i. **THAT the agencies take note of the OSC's concern that services are weighted too heavily in favour of drugs use at the expense of alcohol misuse.**

7.6 Recommendations to the Gloucestershire Community Safety Partnership

- i. **THAT preventing alcohol misuse amongst young people should be made a high priority in Gloucestershire**
- ii. **THAT the YPSMS and the GCSP reassess the transitional period between young people's services and adult services so that young people between the ages of 19 and 25 can continue to be treated by the YPSMS if this type of treatment that best suits their individual needs**

7.7 Recommendations to the Local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships

- i. **THAT preventing alcohol misuse amongst young people be made a high priority in Gloucestershire**

7.8 Recommendations to the Youth Service

- i. **THAT they lobby the Gloucestershire Community Safety Partnership and the Local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, making the case for the prevention of alcohol misuse amongst young people being made a high priority in Gloucestershire**

7.9 Recommendations to the Youth Offending Service

- i. **THAT they lobby the Gloucestershire Community Safety Partnership and the Local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, making the case for the prevention of alcohol misuse amongst young people being made a high priority in Gloucestershire**

7.10 Recommendations to the Local Education Authority

- i. **THAT they lobby the Gloucestershire Community Safety Partnership and the Local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships making the case for the prevention of**

alcohol misuse amongst young people being made a high priority in Gloucestershire

- ii. **THAT all schools in Gloucestershire be encouraged to provide comprehensive alcohol education that covers the whole range of consequences of alcohol misuse and is not just limited to the minimum level prescribed in the National Curriculum.**
- iii. **THAT schools serving wards where young people are at increased risk of experiencing problems associated with substance misuse be encouraged to provide additional alcohol education in order to help reduce the level of risk.**
- iv. **THAT schools in Gloucestershire should be encouraged to try innovative ways of delivering alcohol education wherever possible within the current framework of PSHE and Citizenship.**
- v. **THAT schools should be strongly encouraged to inform parents when they are planning to provide alcohol education and encourage them to help support the sensible drinking message.**
- vi. **THAT schools should be encouraged to experiment with different methods of involving parents in alcohol education, perhaps using parents' evenings or fact sheets.**

7.11 Recommendations to the Young People's Substance Misuse Service

- i. **THAT they lobby the Gloucestershire Community Safety Partnership and the Local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, making the case for the prevention of alcohol misuse amongst young people being made a high priority in Gloucestershire**
- ii. **THAT the YPSMS and the DAAT reassess the transitional period between young people's services and adult services so that young people between the ages of 19 and 25 can continue to be treated by the YPSMS if this type of treatment best suits their individual needs**

7.12 Recommendations to the Primary Care Trusts

- i. **THAT they develop new ways of distributing information to parents on alcohol misuse in order to make the material available as widely as possible.**
- ii. **THAT they completely re-examine their approach to the issue of preventing alcohol misuse and consider making it a higher priority for the Health Promotions Unit.**

7.13 Recommendations to Trading Standards

- i. **THAT the law be enforced more rigorously in order to reduce the amount of alcohol sold to underage people**

7.14 Recommendations to District Councils

- i. **THAT they give careful consideration to how they will implement the new licensing regime**

8. LESSONS LEARNT

- 8.1 The method of using a small sub-group to carry out this project on the OSC's behalf worked effectively. The size of the group was particularly helpful when it came to arranging meetings as it allowed for greater flexibility to fit in with the availability of the expert witnesses.
- 8.2 It is vital to agree sensible and manageable outcomes at an early stage when developing a project if the study is to be successful.
- 8.3 Setting a challenging timeframe for a project can be useful as it helps to focus the work of the group.
- 8.4 The project required a considerable amount of officer time to arrange meetings, take minutes, examine the variety of background information and produce briefings and reports.
- 8.5 Questionnaires can be a very useful tool for the OSC during its investigations. However a considerable amount of time needs to be set aside for carrying out a survey and they must be carefully planned if they are to achieve useful results without incurring excessive costs. On this occasion the timescale was insufficient for carrying out a fully effective survey and as a result the OSC only received a small number of responses making the results of very limited use.