

Social and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee Drugs Study Review Group

Notes from meeting held on 18 December with the drug enforcement agencies – Gloucestershire Police and the Cheltenham Crime and Disorder Partnership (CDRP)

- Alcohol abuse, and alcohol related violence are the major problems in Cheltenham
- Herbal cannabis is a growing problem in Cheltenham and is found to be used across the board from young people to adults as well as by people who are using it for so called 'medical reasons'
- Problems with drug pushers is not a major issue in Cheltenham and school-gate pushers are deemed to be only a minor issue in Cheltenham
- Hesters Way and Whaddon are the biggest areas for drug dealing in Cheltenham – Hesters Way's principal drug is heroin whilst Whaddon is cannabis
- The town centre is still the main hub for recreational drugs use, and includes those associated with the town's night time economy i.e, clubbers and pub and club users
- The police stated that the average age of users in Cheltenham is someone in their mid twenties (although there are still users aged 60 plus)
- The police believe there are opportunities to work more closely with the council with regards:
 - (1) managing and co-ordinating licensed door staff,
 - (2) managing and co-ordinating the council's licensing and enforcement functions and associated routine checks (especially now that the new enforcement team has been established)

The police stated that they would like to work more closely with the CBC enforcement team and also look at possible joint initiatives and working practices (multi-agency team), which would help to impact on drug and alcohol problems and concerns. Trevor stated that this could be looked at once the new enforcement team had had a chance to bed in

- The CDRPs drug itemiser (drugs machine) has been in use for four years now and continues to be used specifically to test people for drugs when going to night clubs (it is not yet being used in licensed premises – pubs) One of the main problems with using this machine is that it tends to only be used on occasions, due to it being resource intensive, and additionally most clubbers learn which clubs the machine is being used in, and as a result they choose to go to an alternative club
- The 'Night safe' project in Cheltenham is doing more to address drugs and alcohol issues in Cheltenham. Night safe is now looking at pubs and bars as well as night clubs, although it was originally set up simply for night clubs
- The Reduction in Alcohol Related Violence Project (RARV) which is currently being undertaken in Cheltenham was raised by Trevor. This is a joint project being co-ordinated by the CDRP and the Gloucestershire Police which has attracted £16k of GOSW funding to attempt to tackle alcohol related violence problems which are increasing being experienced in Cheltenham. This project which is backed by ACPO aims to create a hub of good practice for the South West and is looking at both national and international best practices in relation to addressing, tackling and combating alcohol related violence
- Drugs problems in Cheltenham's parks and green spaces were raised – the police suggested that with regard to the design and management of these parks and green spaces the council needed to look more carefully at Section 17 issues as well as opportunities to help alleviate drugs and alcohol related problems within these spaces (A review/audit of public open space by the council was suggested)
- Night time economy strategy – it was suggested that the strategy needed to look carefully at how it can help address, combat and alleviate drugs and alcohol problems in Cheltenham
- Drugs in schools – the police stated that they were not aware of this being a major problem in Cheltenham. Barbara talked about the DARE project which had previously proved successful. It was also suggested that the CDRP should consider speaking to the LEA about the possibility of taking the drugs itemiser into local schools

General issues raised

- The police suggested the possibility of looking at drugs prevention as part of the council's licensing conditions
- The police would like to see a possible project with all key partners which would see anyone arrested for drugs or alcohol offences being offered advice from a drugs worker or agency
- The police suggested that CBC/CBHs tenancy conditions (housing allocation policy) should consider taking positive action against housing convicted drugs dealers and pushers, or alternative it should require convicted tenants to attend drugs rehabilitation programmes and/or drugs support programmes
- The role of the Cheltenham Substance Action Group (SAG) was discussed. Both the Police and CDRP stated that there was a real need for a proactive partnership basis to tackling drugs and alcohol problems in Cheltenham. However concerns were raised as to whether or not the SAG group was actually having any real impact on this issue at this point in time, and additionally it was felt that the SAG group needed to look at monitoring the impact of its work using real and measurable performance outcomes.
- It was agreed that long term funding commitments and sustainable funding was needed to support drugs and alcohol programmes and initiatives in Cheltenham. 12 month funding commitments were simply not sufficient to secure such programmes, and all future projects and programmes proposed for Cheltenham should be established on the basis of much longer time scales.
- It was agreed that both national and international projects and programmes should be considered as potential opportunities to help combat the town's drug and alcohol problems. A possible wish list of projects and initiatives should be developed for Cheltenham, and this should be co-ordinated by the Cheltenham SAG group