

4TH December 2014

Police and Crime Panel

Update on priority item “To tackle the harm caused by alcohol and drugs to individuals and communities”

Report of the Durham Police and Crime Commissioner



Tackling the harm caused by drugs

Local Progress

- Durham Constabulary's Organised Crime Group (OCG) uses a partnership disruption approach and traditional policing methods to reduce/ disrupt supply and reduce harm. The Constabulary regularly collaborates with social services to ensure that children of OCG members are subject to processes which discourage criminality. This disrupts activities and protects the children from accessing the substances or witnessing criminality at home.
- The Constabulary has undertaken excellent drug-related targeted operations and will continue to deal robustly with criminal offences committed by drug users and target organised crime groups (OCGs). It works with the licenced trade for intelligence. In the last 6 years, the force has dismantled 29 OCGs.
- Operational activity in the last year has yielded results such as one group of 13 offenders receiving more than 60 years of custodial sentences. The judge in the case praised what he described as a “diligent and useful” police investigation and commended four individual officers and staff involved in the case.
- A number of initiatives are in place to reduce the harm caused by drugs. PACT processes and Public Confidence Surveys enable the public to highlight concerns with drug use in their communities that can be tackled through local problem solving. Drug treatment referrals are cohesive parts of custody suites and prolific offender management through the IOMU (Integrated Offender Management Unit).
- Durham is the first in the country to implement a Drug Test on Arrest scheme in all custody suites, getting drug users into recovery and diverting them from crime, bringing about swifter access to treatment, reduce reoffending and help keep communities safer. In the first full week of the programme 40 tests were carried out with a number of positive results. The Checkpoint initiative will develop this further, with a wider range of interventions to address lifestyle issues linked to offending, which includes but is not limited to substance misuse.

National Progress

- As PCC, I am in favour of de-criminalising addiction and supporting health-based recovery for drug addicts. I have hosted a major symposium on the 27th November in Durham to debate the future of drugs policy and to garner support for reform.
- We need our leaders and policy-makers to have an evidence-based discussion about drugs. Policy on drug addiction should be moved to the Department of Health, in order for the focus to be on treating rather than punishing. I am pushing the debate further by sending a letter to all political leaders demanding a commitment to reform our national drug policy in their manifesto for the 2015 general election.

Tackling the harm caused by Alcohol

This priority is being delivered by The Alcohol Harm Reduction Unit (AHRU) which works in a multi-agency approach and participates in various projects to address alcohol harm across County Durham and Darlington:

- Alcohol Diversion Scheme: This is commissioned by Durham Constabulary and partners in custody Suites. This scheme offers an intervention session with a reduction in the ticket cost to people issued with fixed penalty tickets for drunkenness.
- Durham University Students: The AHRU and partners work closely with the university to address excessive alcohol consumption by developing a plan for Fresher's week and have reviewed their alcohol policy. AHRU staff have also delivered a vulnerability training package to all staff involved in the alcohol trade throughout Durham City.
- Night-Time Economy: Due to the national economic decline, the force area has seen a reduction in the Night-Time Economy apart from Durham City. It is predicted that an increase in the number of licensed premises in Durham City will have an impact on policing the night-time economy. AHRU and Partners have explored the use of Early Morning Restriction Orders (EMRO) to reduce licencing hours and Night Time Levy's for County Durham and Darlington.
- Operation A.R.I.E.S This partnership initiative aims at tackling under-age drinking and changing attitudes to drinking by:
 - helping communities tackle alcohol-related issues linked to young people
 - informing and advising young people about the impact of alcohol and that not drinking is an option
 - increasing awareness of parents and families of the risks to young people if they drink
 - supporting retailers to reduce sales and supply of alcohol to young people
 - promoting alternative activities

Since the launch of the operation in July, there have been around 400 underage drinkers engaged with Neighbourhood Teams and over 200 litres of alcohol has been seized. Retailer agreements have started to be rolled out to all off-licences across the Force and Penalty Notices for Disorder (PNDs, a type of fixed penalty notice) have been issued to Parents/Grandparents who have been identified as supplying alcohol to under-18s.

- Enforcement: Intelligence-led test purchase operations are carried out in partnership with local authority trading standards and licensing where necessary and a number of penalty notices have been issued as a result, or led to a review of a premise licence.
- Education: AHRU staff, in partnership with the County Durham Youth Drugs and Alcohol Service 4REAL, deliver education and awareness sessions in a variety of settings including schools, colleges and community events, and engages with the public in highlighting the harms of alcohol.
- Nationally, I support the APCC's Alcohol Working Group. Locally, I support Balance North East in their quest for Minimum Unit Pricing and support campaigns to raise awareness of the harm caused by alcohol and encourage responsible consumption and support changes to the Licencing Act.