



# Reducing the Strength



*In partnership with*



In September 2012, Suffolk Police, Ipswich Borough Council, Suffolk County Council and NHS Suffolk launched the 'Reducing the Strength' Campaign - aimed at stopping the sale of super strength alcohol from off-licensed premises in Ipswich.

Since the launch of the campaign, we have been contacted by public sector agencies across the UK, asking us for information on how the campaign started, how we put it into place and what the results have been.

This document is designed to answer some of those questions and to tell you how we got to where we are today.

Twelve months have passed since the start of the campaign and 66%\* of all licensed premises in Ipswich are now 'super strength free'. The campaign still has a long way to go, so we are unable to say that it has been a complete success. We can however, say that we have received fantastic support so far and we are seeing significant results in relation to reported crime and incidents of anti-social street drinking

in the area.

Our work on these issues is far from complete, however, and we are continuing our efforts to achieve even greater sign up across the town.

I hope that the information here may give you a starting point for thinking about similar campaigns in your area. Although the specifics of our communities are different, the problems associated with this type of alcohol and the lifestyles of those who consume it are the same nationwide. Super strength alcohol causes problems for individuals, communities and organisations in every county, and initiatives such as this provide pro-active ways of us tackling the problem and improving the lives of those affected by this kind of substance misuse.

Tim Newcomb, Assistant Chief Constable,  
Suffolk Constabulary

\* Correct as of 30th September 2013.



## Why was this initiative necessary?

**In 2009, dedicated work to tackle problems surrounding street drinking in Ipswich began between police and partner agencies. In April 2009 a Street Drinking Liaison Officer was appointed in the town to work solely on issues connected to this area, working directly with affected individuals and licensed premises on a day-to-day basis.**

**In February 2011, Suffolk Constabulary identified a**

**critical issue for the force in relation to street drinking in Ipswich.**

**In the previous 18 months, four individuals linked to the street drinking community were murdered, and other issues affecting the local community were identified.**

In June 2011 a working group was created, and 'Start Afresh' was launched. The operation was multi-agency, consisting of Suffolk Police, Ipswich Borough Council, Suffolk County Council and Suffolk

Drug and Alcohol Action Team. Other statutory partners involved in the operation included a Residents Representative Group, Community Resource Centre and members of the public affected by the problem.

It was identified that a long-term operational strategy was necessary, with the primary aim of significantly reducing the negative impact on communities of anti-social street drinking and rough sleeping in Ipswich.

An analysis of the street drinking community at the time revealed the following:

- 25 Core + 45 Peripheral = 70 individuals
- 80% male
- Predominant age range 31 – 44, average age 40
- 90% consider super strength (over 6.5% volume) beer and cider consumption their primary issue
- Daily consumption exceeds recommended weekly level
- This is not a lifestyle choice for the majority

As part of the overall operational strategy, an action was created to tackle the specific issue of super strength alcohol, which had been identified as a key damaging factor in the lifestyles of the street drinking community. The 'Reducing the Strength' Campaign was therefore created.



## Key parts of the strategy were:

- Identifying the issues and objectives.
- Developing routes out.
- Improving community intelligence.
- The prevention of crime, anti-social behaviour and community issues.
- Community education.
- Maintaining a reduction in anti-social drinking, rough sleeping and community issues.



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**Ipswich is the county town of Suffolk, located on the River Orwell. It has a busy town centre with a vibrant shopping area and popular nightlife. The town is policed by the county's response officers and five Safer Neighbourhood Teams, which cover separate districts.**

**The main commercial and shopping area is covered by Ipswich Central Safer Neighbourhood Team.**

The town has seen a decrease in crime over the past year, which is in line with the trend for the whole county. Immediately prior to the launch of the campaign, to the end of August 2012, overall crime and anti-social behaviour in Ipswich was down compared to the previous year, but alcohol-related crimes and public disorder offences were up by 5.1%

Incidents specifically relating to street drinking had seen a slight monthly increase, with an average of 12 incidents recorded per month, compared with 7 per month in the previous year.

The Reducing the Strength Campaign was multi-agency from the outset, with representatives from Suffolk Police, Ipswich Borough Council, Suffolk County Council, NHS Suffolk, Suffolk Drug and Alcohol Action Team and the East of England Co-operative Society involved.

The East of England Co-Operative Society came on board as corporate partners, having agreed to remove super strength items from their Ipswich stores, and later from their stores across Suffolk.



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# The aims of the campaign were:

“The campaign was multi-agency from the start, which was crucial for us in achieving long-lasting results that would be positive for both agencies and communities”

**Mike Grimwood - Ipswich Borough Council**

1. To encourage licensees of premises with an off-licence to voluntarily remove all super strength lager, beer and cider from their premises on a borough wide basis. Following this, to persuade licensees to voluntarily change the terms of their licence to include a licensing condition not to sell such items.

2. To use the campaign to highlight the dangers of alcohol in general and in particular super strength alcohol, to the communities of Ipswich, and the wider Suffolk community.

The definition of super strength alcohol was agreed as any beer, lager or cider with an alcohol volume of 6.5% or more that is sold very cheaply.

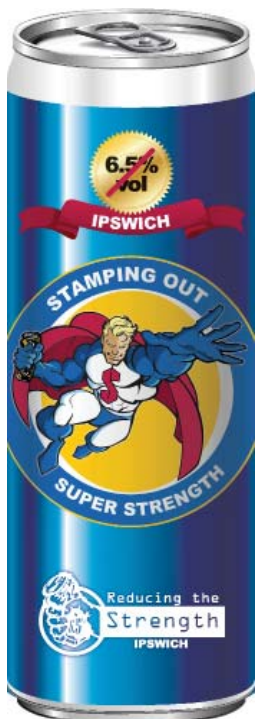
Representatives from the working group met on regular occasions to formulate a strategy for implementing the campaign. Actions were as follows:

- Create a comprehensive media strategy, containing agreed messages.
- Create branding and a campaign logo.
- Write to every off-licensed premises in the town to introduce the campaign and invite them to a launch event.

- Plan and facilitate a launch of the campaign, at a town centre location.
- Encourage licensees to sign up on the day.
- Visit premises that have signed up to discuss the removal of products from their store and explain the process of applying for a permanent minor variation.
- Carry out further communications with licensed premises to encourage sign up.
- Present premises that have signed up with a campaign plaque, advertising the fact that they are ‘super strength free’.

The campaign would be measured via the following methods:

- The number of premises that sell super strength alcohol (both before and after the campaign).
- The number of incidents of anti-social behaviour at or near off-licensed premises (both before and after campaign.)
- The amount of recorded crime at or near off-licensed premises, with particular reference to alcohol related crime/disorder and thefts from shop.
- The amount of media coverage achieved, thereby the level of public awareness raised.



# Communications Strategy

**Communications representatives from Suffolk Constabulary, NHS Suffolk, Ipswich Borough Council and Suffolk County Council created a comprehensive communications strategy for the campaign.**

Media partners were secured at the outset, with the 'Ipswich Star' newspaper and BBC Radio Suffolk pledging their support. It was agreed that the campaign would tie in with the Ipswich Star's 'I Love Ipswich' initiative.

A 'superhero' angle was created, encouraging licensees to become 'superheroes' of Ipswich by signing up, and creating a unique angle to interest the public.

## Key messages:

### GENERAL:

- Super strength alcohol is all lagers, beers and ciders with an alcohol volume of 6.5% or over, that is sold very cheaply. This does not include premium products.
- The negative impacts associated with super strength alcohol are significant for the consumer and the wider community, but also for the public services who deal with the consequences. This campaign aims to take the problem away at the source.
- Super strength alcohol is often favoured by those most vulnerable in our community. Providing these people with these products increases their vulnerability to becoming victims of crime, increases the likelihood of them becoming involved in criminal activity and the potential for them to suffer significant health problems.

Agency-specific messages were also created, such as:

### POLICE:

- 14.4% of crimes and 60% of violent crimes reported in Ipswich in 2011 were alcohol-related
- Alcohol-related crime and disorder has a major impact on the quality of life of many people.
- Drinking excessive amounts of alcohol, and particularly drinks with a high alcohol volume can make individuals more vulnerable to becoming victims of crime.
- In one area of Ipswich anti-social behaviour fell by 64% after super-strength alcohol was removed from the local off-licence.

### HEALTH:

- A single 500ml can of 9% super strength lager contains four and a half units of alcohol, which exceeds the Government's daily recommended safe alcohol limit of between two to three units for women and three to four units for men.
- In Suffolk in 2011, there were more than 13,000 admissions to hospital with an alcohol-related condition, and every other day, one person in Suffolk will die from an alcohol-related condition.
- Excessive consumption of alcohol, particularly super strength, can lead to health problems such as liver disease, cancer and strokes. Other consequences include depression, impotence and excessive weight gain.

### Key audiences:

- Licensees
- Street drinking community
- General public and wider community
- The licensed trade and drinks industry
- Partner agencies

### Strategy:

- Create campaign title / logo and branding, including superhero branding
- Arrange opportunities for interviews with key individuals for media partners.
- Issue press release to local and national media, inviting them to launch event
- Facilitate media at launch event
- Launch web pages dedicated to campaign on partner websites
- Utilise social media to publicise launch
- Continue to release timely updates on the campaign as it progresses

The campaign title 'Reducing the Strength' was agreed and a logo was created.

Reporters were able to interview a recovering alcoholic who used to drink super strength alcohol and who now supports the campaign.

They also interviewed the owners of a business in Ipswich who saw a huge reduction in anti-social behaviour around their store after super strength alcohol was removed from an off-licence in the same street.



Prior to the launch, interviews were set up for media partners, to allow them enhanced access to features and stories. This enabled them to increase their coverage of the campaign on the day of the launch.

Superhero branding and logo were created. Image of a window sticker above.



Representatives from partner agencies

## The Launch

The manager of every off-licensed premises in Ipswich was invited to the launch event, which was held in a function room of Ipswich Town Football Club.

Health, NHS Suffolk, Mike Grimwood, Operations Manager, Ipswich Borough Council Licensing Team and Roger Grosvernor, Retail Executive, East of England Co-operative Society.

The event was opened by ACC Tim Newcomb, who highlighted the issues surrounding super strength alcohol and the aims of the campaign.

Two short sketches were performed by a professional theatre company, Menagerie, and licensees were invited to speak with campaign representatives at the end of the event.

A short film was shown, containing images of the effects of street drinking in Ipswich and various interviews. These were with a recovering alcoholic who had been a user of super strength, the manager of a local off-licence that is super strength free, a local business owner affected by the sale of super strength in their area, a local MP and representatives from the town and county councils.

Leaflets were produced for attendees, (copies are included), giving an overview of the campaign and what the benefits are for those who sign up. Window stickers, stating 'We are super strength free', and including the superhero image, were produced to give to those licensees who signed up on the day.

Short inputs were given by: Pc John Alcock, Street Drinking Liaison Officer, Suffolk Constabulary, Sally Hogg, Assistant Director of Public

Journalists were invited to film during the event and to listen in. Interviews were facilitated with key representatives.



Granite plaques were made to be displayed outside those premises that had signed up to the campaign. The plaques were engraved with the campaign logo and stated that the premises do not sell super strength alcohol.





# Media coverage

Extensive local and national media coverage was achieved at the launch.

On the day, representatives from the East Anglian Daily Times / Ipswich Star, BBC Look East, ITV Anglia and Radio Suffolk were in attendance.

Chief Inspector Andrew Mason was interviewed on Radio 5 live, Radio 2 covered the item and enquiries were received from the Daily Telegraph and Financial Times.

Following the launch, the campaign received coverage in the majority of national newspapers, either online or in print. Interviews were carried out with Sky News, various BBC radio stations, national and regional newspapers and industry publications such as 'Retail Express'.

## Following the launch

The launch event was the public start of the campaign, but work had already been underway with licensing teams from the council and from police, by engaging with licensed premises over the issue of super strength, and in some cases, enforcing licence amendments where the sale of super strength alcohol was already an issue of concern.

Anyone who expressed an interest in the campaign at the launch was visited by a member of the Constabulary licensing team, to discuss the removal of super strength products and to explain the process of applying for a minor variation to their premises licence.

To encourage further sign up, Ipswich Borough Council agreed to cover the fee, on behalf of the applicant, involved in a minor licence variation for any businesses that signed up before April 2013. This charge is usually £89.

Further premises were visited to discuss the initiative and support was gained from national stores in the town who agreed to sign up, with some also agreeing to a minor licence variation.

Any business that has signed up has been presented with a plaque to be displayed outside the premises.

Following the campaign, media interest has been maintained through the publication of further media updates at regular intervals, highlighting the number of stores 'super strength free' and announcing further significant national support.

A media event was held in April at the six month point, which received significant local and national coverage.



Pc John Alcock, Mrs Patel of Ulster News and C/Insp Andrew Mason



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# The Results

## Crime and anti-social behaviour

### Number of stores signed up

- **Total off-licensed premises in Ipswich – 138**
- **Total number of off-licensed premises super strength free at the launch of the campaign - 53 (43%)**
- **Total number of off-licensed premises super strength free as of end of September 2013 - 90 (66%)**

**National retailers signed up locally - East of England Co-op, Tesco, Martin McColl, Debenhams, Marks and Spencer, BHS, Waitrose, Sainsburys, Morrisons, Asda and Aldi.**

Picture shows Campaign representatives at the 'Six months on' media event held in April 2013.

A significant reduction has been recorded in the number of 'street drinker events' reported to the police since the campaign launched. These are defined as incidents in which members of the public have called us to report a concern linked to street drinking. Two hundred and sixty one of these events were reported to police in the twelve months from the launch of the campaign (September 2012-September 2013), compared with 341 events in the same period the year before. This equates to a drop of 23.5%.

The number of reported incidents of crime and ASB at or around Co-op Stores in Ipswich have been analysed, both before and after the implementation of the campaign.

Only the 26 Co-op stores were included in this analysis, rather than all off-licences in the town, as Co-op stores were signed up from

the outset, rather than joining the campaign later in the time period, allowing the greatest statistically significant timeframe.

Statistics and feedback from the organisation show a drop in crime and ASB in these locations. This is alongside falling levels of crime and ASB across the whole of the town. Crime in Ipswich is down 17% and ASB is down 15%.

Under Start Afresh, an Operation launched in 2011 to tackle issues surrounding street drinking in the town, of which Reducing the Strength is an important part, huge improvements have been made. There has been a significant reduction in the number of individuals defined as being part of the street drinking community and the number of Section 27 'direction to leave' notices used by police has also increased, reflecting significant pro-activity in this area.



# The effect on the business community

Surveys were carried out with members of the business community in Ipswich in 2011, and again in February and September 2013. In February 2013, the surveys showed that:

- There was a 20% reduction in the number of people who stated that they witnessed a high level of street drinking, and those who considered the level of street drinking they witnessed to be low, increased by 10%.
- There was a reduction of 12% in the number of people who reported to have witnessed street drinking at all in the area around their business.
- Only 15% of those questioned stated that their business was significantly affected by street drinking.

In September 2013, the following comments were made by members of the business community:

**“Street drinkers no longer come into, and cause problems within stores since signing up the ‘Reducing the Strength’ Campaign.”**

**“There are less people drinking and not as many drunk people during the day on the streets of Ipswich, particularly in the town centre.”**

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## Case study: Austin Street

Austin Street was identified as having a significant issue with alcohol-related ASB and street drinking by the local Safer Neighbourhood Team. Prior to the start of the campaign, two off-licensed stores were selling super strength alcohol in the area; the Co-op and ‘MRS’.

The area is covered by the Ipswich Designated Public Places Order, allowing police officers to require a person to stop drinking and to confiscate alcohol or containers of

alcohol in public places. This was increasingly being enforced by officers in 2011/12. Research showed that all seizures of alcohol in the area were super strength, and all were from recognised members of the street drinking community.

At the launch of ‘Reducing the Strength’, super strength items were removed from the Co-op, who were campaign partners, and in December 2012, ‘MRS’ was taken to review following irresponsible

trading practices. As a result, there were no longer permitted to sell super strength items.

Figures show that 40 events related to street drinking were recorded in the period Sept 2011-Aug 2012 and 11 were recorded in the period Sept 2012 – Aug 2013, a drop of 73%. 70 crimes were recorded in the area during the period Sept 2011-Aug 2012 and 48 for the period Sept 2012-Aug 2013, a drop of 31%.



“We are extremely pleased that we are continuing to gain support for the Reducing the Strength Campaign, which will have such a positive effect on community life in Ipswich.”

“This is just one of the initiatives we are undertaking in Ipswich and we are seeing some fantastic results for the town.”

**David Ellesmere - Leader,  
Ipswich Borough Council**

# Going forward

Work in relation to the campaign is still in its early stages and all agencies are committed to gaining further sign-up to achieve more positive results for communities.

Liaison will continue between campaign leaders and the managers of off-licensed premises to discuss the significant benefits of the campaign, and to work through the reasons preventing retailers from becoming super strength free.

Additional work with members of the street drinking community continues, with support and

help being offered by all agencies to assist in providing routes out of this lifestyle.

The campaign has been regarded as an example of excellent practice in dealing with the shared issues experienced by towns across the country in relation to street drinking. Police forces and public sector agencies across the UK have contacted campaign leaders for help and advice in replicating the operation in their areas.

Planning is now underway for the campaign to be rolled out in other towns in Suffolk.



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