

## Report by Cllr Tony Kearon for Health Scrutiny – 7<sup>th</sup> January 2015

As I am unable to attend your meeting to provide a verbal report on my activities as portfolio holder for community safety, please accept this written summary of the issues I would have mentioned. This report is intended to provide members of the committee with a short summary of some of the activities within my portfolio that may relate to your committee and its remit. This is not intended to be a comprehensive list, but it does give members of the committee a sense of the work that the community safety and partnerships team is carrying out and/or which is being funded by us, which may have overlaps and scope for further collaboration in the context of health and wellbeing.

### Drug and alcohol dependency

As a team we are working with our partners in the Police and other agencies to tackle crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour associated with drug and alcohol misuse. But we recognise that in the long term tackling drug and alcohol dependency is the most effective way of reducing the impact that it has on the wider population. A good example of this is our current 'reduce the strength' campaign. Retailers in and around Newcastle town centre have been encouraged to take cheap super strength beers, lagers and cider off the shelves, or to increase the price to an extent that the product is no longer financially attractive to dependant drinkers and young people. But this service is deliberately linked to also providing help and support for dependant drinkers to address their dependency.

### Health and wellbeing and the Safer Nights strategy

Members of the committee will already be aware of the Safer Nights strategy that involves the police, the borough council, licensed premises in the town centre and other partners to make sure that night-time visitors to our Town centres have a safe and enjoyable experience. This is not just an issue of policing – we work with town centre businesses, the police and our licensing team to make sure that the health and well-being elements of alcohol consumption are also managed and addressed promptly. For example the operation of a first aid triage in Newcastle to minimise pressure on A&E and to have first aid on hand for prompt intervention in situations where a potentially dangerous injury has been suffered by a member of the public. Police, licensees and door staff are also taking steps to ensure that alcohol is not served to individuals who have already consumed too much alcohol – as part of this we have provided portable breathalyser devices to door staff to aid in identifying individuals who have had too much to drink. But the strategy is also linked to a lot of education work, preventative strategies and campaigns. For example, we have been running a designated driver campaign 'call me Des' – groups of people visiting the town centre are encouraged to identify a designated driver who can get the group home safely at the end of the night. The licensed premises involved in the campaign provide free soft drinks to designated drivers. We have also produced educational tools for use in licensed premises – such as beer mats – that advise drinkers about the problems associated with excess alcohol use. We have also been working with the County council and local schools and colleges to raise awareness about the problems of alcohol misuse with young people. We have also been working with the town centre partnership to try to make changes to the night-time culture of the town centre – to make it a more diverse experience involving food and other elements rather than mainly alcohol use. The recent award of a Purple Flag to Newcastle town centre is evidence of the progress that we have made in this respect.

## Working with health professionals in identifying early indicators of vulnerability

Another key aspect of our campaigns to raise awareness of the problems associated with excessive alcohol consumption relates to our domestic violence work – for example campaigns to highlight the links between high profile football matches, excessive alcohol consumption and peaks in domestic violence in the borough. Our work into identifying causal factors, triggers and early indicators of domestic violence has involved significant collaborations with colleagues from the NHS and other health related agencies. Community based healthcare professionals are often in an ideal position to spot early indicators of abusive behaviour, as are other clinical professionals who may encounter early warning signs in their interactions with clients. Colleagues from health have played a full and active role in recent reviews of domestic homicides and attempted domestic homicides in the borough, and it is clear that there is a key role for health related agencies in our procedures to protect and safeguard children and vulnerable adults in the borough.

## Mental health and public safety.

Members of the committee may be aware of recent media coverage of an alleged suicide ‘hot-spot’ in the centre of Newcastle. Expert advice is that any publicity of such a situation can actually increase the incidence of suicides and attempted suicides at the location, so I will not say any more about the location in question. But we have been working with a range of agencies (including mental health support services) to try to defuse this situation – including increased guidance, support and advice for at risk individuals. We are also in the process of securing funds to make changes to the physical environment at the location to make it unsuitable for suicide attempts.

## Young people and the impacts of violent crime

In collaboration with a range of partner agencies we have been carrying out work to tackle the roots of violent and aggressive behaviour amongst young people – with knife crime being a case in point. Although the incidence of such crimes is very low in the borough, we have been working to reduce it even further. In part we have been working on tackling the culture of young men carrying knives as a display of ‘macho’ behaviour. We have done this by funding (via the JOG) educational activities in local colleges that focus on the physical impact of a knife wound on the human body – the potentially fatal changes to a body that can be caused by a wound from even a small blade.

## Purposeful activities for young people

In recent months, as the range of funded activities provided by other agencies has been cut back severely, the borough council has stepped in to fund organised activities for young people, to help and encourage local groups to secure alternative funding and to ensure that young people still have opportunities to remain physically active through organised sporting activities. We have done this as a mechanism for reducing possibilities for youth related anti-social behaviour, and we have had some notable successes on this front. But the impact of regular sporting activities for children and young people in terms of health and well-being, reducing early onset obesity and related conditions also has to be acknowledged. This is one area where we could perhaps do more to pool our efforts and resources to ensure that young people in our borough have enough opportunities to remain fit and active.

Cllr Tony Kearon, Portfolio for safer communities, 15<sup>th</sup> December 2014