

HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28 AUGUST 2013

TACKLING RISING ALCOHOL-RELATED HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS IN THE BOROUGH

Introduction

Members will recall that, at previous meetings of the Health Scrutiny Committee, the issues of rising rates of alcohol-related hospital admissions has been raised.

This paper sets out the work, either currently being done or planned to be done, across a range of different organisations based or working in the borough to tackle these issues.

Scale of the Problem

As said, the issue of rising numbers of alcohol-related admissions to hospitals is one which is being faced not only by Newcastle-under-Lyme, but also across Staffordshire as a whole.

In terms of Staffordshire, the numbers of admissions trebled between 2002/3 and 2011/12 from fewer than 6,000 in the county to over 18,000.

In addition, estimates suggest that between one in three and one in four adults in Staffordshire drink alcohol at above the recommended levels.

In North Staffordshire (which includes Newcastle under Lyme), the position is even more acute. Despite the overall rates of admission being lower than the national average (488 per 100,000 population compared to 492), the rate of increase in admissions in North Staffordshire is way above the national average. In 2011/12, the area saw a 10% rise in alcohol related admissions to hospital in contrast to the national average of around 1%. In 2012/13, it is suggested that the rate of increase will be 7% in North Staffordshire.

In terms of presentations to A&E in the area, the majority of patients were between 45-51 years old; and males accounted for 75% of attendance. The majority had significant health, social care, and welfare needs and some had chronic liver disease and were at the end of life/requiring palliative care.

It should be pointed out that some of these figures are the result of better detection and also changes in the way in which the figures are put together.

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Despite this, different organisations across Newcastle-under-Lyme borough have responded to this growing problem and sought to develop better ways of preventing alcohol abuse amongst people; detecting people with alcohol issues at an earlier stage of their development; and also providing less costly treatment but maintaining improvement in terms of recovery and well being.

Tackling the Problem

A key aspect of the work on tackling alcohol issues in the borough has been a focus on partnership and collaborative working. It has been recognised, for instance, by the Staffordshire Health and Well Being Board that – prior to 2012 – there was no co-ordinated approach to alcohol across the public sector in Staffordshire. This led to duplication between agencies and inconsistency with little or no prevention work.

As a result of recognising this problem, a joint partnership approach to tackling alcohol was developed across Staffordshire. This has been adopted in the borough of Newcastle under Lyme, where partnership based approaches have been developed involving a range of different organisations in key projects.

One of the key outputs from this work has been a common approach across partner agencies to tackling alcohol abuse. This approach has focused on areas such as prevention and early intervention and has sought to move away from the more expensive forms of treatment where possible.

In Staffordshire, the work tackling alcohol issues has been overseen by the Alcohol and Drug Executive Board, which has focused more heavily on prevention and early intervention and also on enforcement and regulation (in order to make sure that the wrong people are not getting their hands on alcohol, including children and younger people).

A key part of this collaborative approach has been the work of the North Staffordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). The CCG has recognised the cost of admitting people into A&E (£110 per head) by developing multi-agency teams “around the person” which emphasise early intervention and direct them to services which are not emergency based. This work has resulted in reductions in A&E attendance and non-elective admissions of over 20% since 2011/12.

In addition to this work, a number of other initiatives have been established to tackle the issue of alcohol in Newcastle: -

- Alcohol Education in Schools programme – as part of the review of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PHSE) education in secondary schools, a series of alcohol-focused sessions have been developed.

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Surveys have also been carried out in schools to measure attitudes to drinking and alcohol to support and inform an initiative focused on parental rule setting. Newcastle Community High School (NCHS) and Clayton Hall are interested in joining up with this scheme and have been in touch with Entrust who has provided the entry forms and more information. Clough Hall already signed up, and Blackfriars and the Coppice are interested. A district meeting in September/October time to get the schools together and all survey data will be collated and will be available by mid-September. The alcohol curriculum has been devised and is ready for the Schools to adopt

- **Strengthening Families** – strong parenting is recognised as one of the key factors that can protect young people from developing alcohol (or drug) problems. Over 50 staff from Families First (Staffordshire’s key providers of family support services) have been trained and the programme has been implemented across all 19 Local Support Teams (including Newcastle). This reaches around 100 families across Staffordshire. Positive feedback has been received from staff and families about the scheme
- **Campaigns** – parents are being encouraged, through campaigns, to discuss issues associated with alcohol with their children. The ‘Talk Alcohol’ campaign, involving various forms of media, was rolled out in early 2013. A second campaign will be implemented later in the year encouraging adults to access advice, information and self-help guidance using leaflets and web-based resources.
- **Brief Interventions** – screening and other approaches are available across Staffordshire via GPs and other social care services for the adults who drink above the recommended levels of alcohol
- **A&E Triage project** – an agreement has been reached between partners to provide a triage service in Newcastle town centre in order to assess any alcohol-related injuries or conditions without the need to refer to A&E (see CCG project above). Again, this approach seeks to relieve the pressures on A&E and also keep costs down.
- **Safer Nights** – a range of initiatives are being developed within this Newcastle-based project, including a ‘buddy’ system aimed at training door staff and others working in the town to recognise alcohol issues quickly and early enough to avoid serious repercussions. In addition, Alcohol Prohibition Zone signs have been installed at the North Staffordshire Justice Centre in Newcastle town centre
- **Let’s Work Together** – as a consequence of being aware of the hospital admissions figures outlined above, a project team from Newcastle under Lyme B.C., Staffordshire CC and Staffordshire Public Health was

convened to address the issue of alcohol. Using the framework of 'Let's Work Together' (a project designed to train staff who visit people's homes to be more aware of certain risk factors and refer them) a proposal was developed which will involve training these home visitors to be able to screen individuals and ascertain the level of any alcohol issues they may have. It is planned that this will be rolled out to staff from different organisations later in 2013

- Health and Well-Being Events – the Newcastle Partnership has agreed to develop the former Newcastle Pride events in order to provide a greater focus on health issues. This re-focus will include screening, prevention and early intervention processes being available to deal with potential alcohol risks in the community

Newcastle under Lyme B.C. has agreed, via the Revenue Investment and Budget Support Cabinet Panel to invest around £7,500 into health promotion and Health and Well-Being Events, including a potential focus on alcohol. On a much larger scale, the CCG has agreed to allocate a further £450,000 to the Staffordshire Health and Well-Being Board's investment into tackling drugs and alcohol to complement existing investments and enable treatment capacity in North Staffordshire to reach more dependent drinkers. Discussions are also ongoing to focus some of this resource into prevention and early intervention where possible and where necessary.

Conclusions and Further Questions

This paper has sought to outline the nature and scale of the problem of alcohol use and abuse in both Newcastle under Lyme and North Staffordshire as a whole (excluding Stoke on Trent).

In doing so, the paper has found that there are higher than average levels of drinking in the area, and that levels of alcohol-related hospital admissions are increasing at a rate which is considerably higher than the national average.

It is true to say that part of the explanation for these statistics lie in the improved methods of detection which now exist in the health services, but this cannot explain the whole picture.

In tackling these issues, partner organisations based in the borough of Newcastle under Lyme have come together to approach the matter in a co-ordinated way. In doing so, a range of initiatives have been put in place.

In considering this paper, Members may wish to ask further questions, such as: -

- What has the impact of these measures been?

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- Has enough been invested into prevention and early intervention (even now, only a small percentage of funding tends to go to these areas)?
- Does treatment work?
- What are the underlying reasons for increasing levels of alcohol-related hospital admissions?
- Can more be done to tackle these issues from prevention, early intervention or treatment perspective – e.g. is enough being done to educate older people as well as schoolchildren?

This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but will hopefully provide the Committee with some possible areas for further investigation.

Mark Bailey
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