

The impact of alcohol on policing London's Night-Time Economy

Police and Crime Committee

Background

Alcohol consumption is a major factor in the growth of the Night-Time Economy (NTE), which is worth an estimated £66 billion to the UK.¹ In London, alcohol consumption supports a NTE worth millions, and the Mayor is committed to growing the NTE: he recently proposed the creation of a “Night Mayor” for London to “bring together night-time businesses, local authorities and the emergency services to ensure that night-time activity can thrive”.²

However, excessive alcohol consumption can have a number of negative consequences for the individual, the economy, and the community, including:

- harm to the individual in respect of their health;
- crime, including violence;
- the fear of crime;
- A&E and hospital admissions;
- street cleaning;
- sale to under-age persons; and
- noise and light pollution from clubs and pubs.³

Alcohol and crime

The number of crimes in which alcohol is a factor is higher in London than other parts of England and Wales. The Mayor’s Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) states that “London experiences a disproportionate level of crime [linked to alcohol] because of the number of night-time economy spots [...] the Metropolitan Police Service has to manage much of the disorder and violence that stems from public drunkenness.”⁴

The proportion of violent incidents across England and Wales perceived to be linked to alcohol has remained relatively steady over the last ten years, despite a reduction in the overall volume of violent incidents. In 2013/14, victims of crime perceived the offender(s) to be under the influence of alcohol in just over half of violent incidents in England and Wales (an estimated 704,000 ‘alcohol-related’ violent incidents). 70 per cent of violent incidents occurring at the weekend were linked to alcohol and the proportion of alcohol-related violent incidents increased as the day progressed, from 23 per cent between noon and 6pm; to 52

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per cent between 6pm and 10pm; and 83 per cent between 10pm and midnight.⁵

Violence with Injury (VWI) is one of the MOPAC 7 priority crimes.⁶ In contrast to most of the other MOPAC priority crimes, VWI in London is increasing. In the year to June 2015, there were around 71,000 incidents of VWI, compared with just under 62,000 in the previous year (a 15 per cent increase). At Mayor's Question Time on 17 September 2014, the Mayor told Members that there were two issues related to the increase in VWI: an increase in reporting of domestic violence; and drunkenness in town centres. He said that "there are particular areas or particular hotspots which are contributing very considerably to the pan-London figures."⁷ The Committee has also heard that better recording has contributed to an increase in recorded VWI.⁸

The impact of alcohol fuelled crime and ASB on policing

Alcohol fuelled crime is estimated to cost the UK between £8 and £13 billion every year.⁹ Much of this cost, and the resource to tackle it, falls onto public services. The Institute of Alcohol Studies (IAS) recently surveyed over 4,000 police

officers, ambulance staff, and other front line workers nationally, for views on the impact that alcohol has on the emergency services. It estimates that up to 80 per cent of weekend arrests are alcohol-related, and just over half of all violent crime is committed while drunk. In respect of policing, the survey found that:

- police officers spent on average half of their time dealing with alcohol-related casework;
- 92 per cent felt that policing the NTE had a large or very large impact upon workload;
- 92 per cent felt that they had performed the job of another emergency service when dealing with alcohol-related incidents;
- 90 per cent of respondents felt domestic violence and assaults were affected by alcohol;
- three quarters of respondents had received an injury when dealing with a drunk member of the public; and
- around 40 per cent reported that they had been harassed or assaulted by drunken people when on duty.¹⁰

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This resource pressure is taking place in the context of significant cuts to police force budgets. Following the Comprehensive Spending Review, it is certain that central government funding for policing will reduce further. For the Metropolitan Police (the Met), this is likely to mean a reduction in budget of up to £800 million, which will significantly alter the way it operates.

Measures to address alcohol fuelled crime and ASB

The Met has launched a number of initiatives aimed at tackling the influence of alcohol on crime. One initiative launched last year, Operation Equinox, aimed to reduce the number of violence-related offences across London in the run up to Christmas 2014. It set out to deploy resources across a wide range of activities “from problem-solving and crime prevention initiatives”, including “licensing inspections, enforcement of no drinking zones and rigorous spot checks carried out in high profile venues in collaboration with local authority licensing officers.”¹¹

The number of alcohol licences granted in an area, the sales capacity covered by the licensed premises and the licensing

hours all affect the availability of alcohol. Alcohol licensing in England and Wales is governed by the 2003 Licensing Act (the Act). The Act introduced a range of measures, including:

- 24-hour licences;
- a transfer of responsibility for licensing to local authorities, including the power to grant premises licences to sell alcohol and grant the hours covered by the licence;
- a simplification of the day-to-day administration of licensing; and
- the introduction of four clear licensing objectives: prevention of crime and disorder; public safety; prevention of public nuisance; and protection of children from harm.

The majority of police officer respondents in the recent IAS survey (68 per cent) blamed the introduction of 24-hour licensing for alcohol fuelled crime and ASB.¹² However, it has also been suggested that 24-hour licensing has not had the effect on crime that had been expected before its introduction, and that an increase in violent crime in the early hours of the morning has been offset by a larger

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decline at traditional closing times (e.g. 11pm-midnight).¹³ The IAS suggest, however, that the increase in violent crime in the early hours “has caused logistical problems for the police”, by pushing crime further into the night.¹⁴

The police are supportive of the stricter regulation of licensing. The Met’s Commissioner Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe has said that 80 per cent of arrests in the evening are drink related and more has to be done to control the supply of alcohol.¹⁵ In his speech to the Royal Society of Arts on police reform in March 2015, he said “we need to make sure there is good control of the supply of alcohol. This means licence numbers, density and licensee-regulation being a priority for local authorities, however much they would like to develop their local economies.”¹⁶

Role of MOPAC

The Mayor’s manifesto committed to developing “smarter solutions” to alcohol crime.¹⁷ The Mayor’s Police and Crime Plan 2013-16 for London states that MOPAC will “develop an alcohol-related crime strategy for London focused on prevention, enforcement and diversion.”¹⁸ London has

previously had an alcohol strategy that aimed to reduce alcohol related harm, and which focused on issues such as crime, disorder, accidents, and effective treatments.¹⁹ The Mayor also committed in his manifesto to improve data sharing between hospitals and the police to understand and cut the levels of violent incidents in the city. Known as “the Cardiff Model”, this involves “gathering new data from the London Ambulance Service and A&E departments while maintaining patient confidentiality.”²⁰

The Mayor and MOPAC have agreed with central government to the introduction of a new sentencing power, the Alcohol Abstinence Monitoring Requirement (AAMR), to tackle alcohol-related violence (also known as compulsory sobriety). The AAMR permits courts to impose a requirement that an offender found guilty for offences such as drink driving, assault, and drunk and disorderly conduct, abstain from alcohol for a fixed time period of up to 120 days and be regularly tested, via a transdermal alcohol monitoring device in the form of a ‘tag’ fitted around the ankle. This requirement can form part of a Community or Suspended Sentence Order.

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MOPAC is carrying out a sobriety pilot using AAMR powers in south London, across the boroughs of Croydon, Lambeth, Sutton and Southwark. The pilot began in July 2014 and ran for a year. It was subsequently extended for another six months, until the end of January 2016. A mid-year review of the pilot found that 91 per cent of offenders subject to an AAMR remained sober for the period of monitoring. As at July 2015, 111 AAMR orders had been issued and more than 100 offenders had complied with their order and remained sober for up to 120 days. MOPAC is working closely with the Government to drive support for a London-wide roll out of the scheme.²¹

Purpose of the investigation

The investigation's terms of reference are:

- To examine how alcohol fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour affects the demand placed on policing in London.

- To examine the role of the Mayor, MOPAC, the Met and other partners in helping to reduce alcohol fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour in London.
- To examine what more the Mayor, MOPAC, the Met and other partners could do to reduce alcohol fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour in London.

Questions for the investigation

The Committee will seek to answer the following key questions:

1. What are the levels of alcohol fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour in London, and where are the hotspots?
2. How has alcohol fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour changed with the introduction of 24-hour licensing?
3. What are the consequences of 24-hour licensing for policing in London?
4. What are licensing authorities doing to prevent alcohol fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour, and what more could help them carry out their duty?

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5. What role does MOPAC have in supporting public services to prevent alcohol fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour?

How the Committee will conduct the investigation

Public meetings

The Committee will hold two meetings, one in December and one in January. At the first meeting it will hear about the levels of alcohol fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour in London, and the demand it places on policing. The Committee will also discuss how the Licensing Act is applied across London. At the second meeting, the Committee will hear from MOPAC about its role in helping to tackle alcohol fuelled crime.

Site visits

The Committee will consider holding a site visit to see the work being carried out to enforce licensing conditions in the NTE.

Literature review

The Committee will make use of existing research into the impact of alcohol on crime, anti-social behaviour, and policing. The Committee will seek to avoid duplication by reviewing, and where possible making use of, findings from previous work carried out across London.

How to contribute

The Committee welcomes written views and information to inform its review. Submissions should aim to address some or all of the questions listed above. Please send submissions to Becky Short at becky.short@london.gov.uk

About the Committee

The Police and Crime Committee examines the work of the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and reviews the Police and Crime Plan for London. The Committee can also investigate anything which it considers to be of importance to policing and crime

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reduction in Greater London and make recommendations for improvements.

For further information about the Committee and its work go to <http://www.london.gov.uk/who-runs-london/assembly>

End notes

¹ Night Time Industries Association, [Forward into the night](#)

² The Mayor of London, [London's grassroots music venues plan](#), October 2015

³ GLA Economics, [Alcohol consumption in the night-time economy](#), September 2012

⁴ MOPAC, [Sobriety pilot](#)

⁵ Crime Survey for England and Wales, [Violent Crime and Sexual Offences - Alcohol-Related Violence](#), 12 February 2015

⁶ The MOPAC 7 priority crimes are crimes which have a high impact on victims. They are burglary, criminal damage, robbery, theft from a motor vehicle, theft from a person, theft of a motor vehicle and violence with injury. MOPAC set a target for the MPS to reduce crime across these crime types by 20 per cent by 2016.

⁷ Mayor's Question Time, Reducing violence in London, [Question 2014/3074 \(Oral\)](#)

⁸ AC Helen King, Meeting of the Police and Crime Committee, 13 November 2014

⁹ MOPAC, [Sobriety pilot](#)

¹⁰ Institute of Alcohol Studies, [alcohol's impact on emergency services](#), October 2015

¹¹ Metropolitan Police, [Operation Equinox](#)

¹² Institute of Alcohol Studies, [alcohol's impact on emergency services](#), October 2015

¹³ Christopher Snowden, [Drinking fast and slow, Ten years of the Licensing Act](#), May 2015

¹⁴ Institute of Alcohol Studies, [alcohol's impact on emergency services](#), October 2015

¹⁵ The Telegraph, [Britain needs fewer pubs, top cop suggests](#), 12 March 2015

¹⁶ Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe, [Speech to the RSA on public safety in a global city](#)

¹⁷ Boris Johnson, [Fighting Crime in London](#)

¹⁸ Mayor of London, [Police and Crime Plan 2013-2016](#), March 2013

¹⁹ Greater London Authority, The London agenda for action on alcohol: Mayor of London's priorities to reduce alcohol-related harm in the capital, November 2003

²⁰ Boris Johnson, [Fighting Crime in London](#)

²¹ MOPAC, [Mayor extends sobriety tag pilot, following 91 per cent success rate](#), 27 July 2015

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