MINUTES OF ALCOHOL AND HEALTH TASK GROUP
28 APRIL 2014

PRESENT:

Councillors Dodd, Mrs Garcia, Hazelton, Roodhouse and Sandison
Paul Anself (Scrutiny Officer) and Linn Ashmore (Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer)

In the absence of Councillor Mrs Watson (Chairman) Councillor Mrs Garcia took the chair for the meeting.

Note – These minutes are a record of the task group’s discussion. Comments recorded do not necessarily represent the views of the task group or of the council.

6. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2014 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

7. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received from Councillors Mrs Watson and H Avis.

8. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Dodd declared a general non-pecuniary interest by virtue of his employment with the West Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust.

Councillor Roodhouse declared a general non-pecuniary interest by virtue of being a member of the board of Healthwatch Warwickshire.

9. THEMES ARISING FROM THE MEETING ON 24 MARCH

The meeting on 24 March consisted of a wide ranging discussion and members raised a number of themes including:

Is there anything that makes Rugby a special case?
Data on alcohol-related admissions, attendance and mortality
Women and alcohol
Early Referral
Making every contact count
Planning and licensing influence
Drinking in public
Recreation
Early intervention

These themes were discussed in greater detail and the following points were made:
The data currently available did not necessarily reflect the present-day picture in Rugby because the latest data was always several years old. There was in any case some doubt as to whether the objectives of the present review would be better met by seeking further data.

There was a need for the review outcomes to be evidence based and it was possible that further work could be carried out in the future when more trend data might be available.

The priority health issue for women was smoking during pregnancy which falls outside the remit of this group and is being addressed by Public Health.

Members commented that there was a decline in binge drinking and a change in culture was being seen among young people who now regard it as ‘uncool’. This could also be linked to the relaxation of licensing laws.

It was agreed early referral was a key issue and the council could help by publicising support services.

It was reported that some frontline staff had been trained in the Making Every Contact Count (MECC) initiative though it was not clear whether this related to field workers making home visits or customer service staff. Members requested that more information be gathered to see whether this was actively happening, in what form, and if this initiative was imbedded in current ways of working.

It was noted that MECC was also included in the brief of the Eastern European Link Worker.

Council officers should be aware of, and obtain, the right level of information to encourage an early referral and allow a diagnosis to be made. A joined up approach with all support services was required to ensure help is targeted in the right way.

A single point of contact would enable support services for alcohol related issues such as domestic violence and mental health issues to be brought together.

An example was given of a local charity that is carrying out peer-to-peer work and also early intervention work for children from the age of seven. Members asked whether the council could deliver something similar.

The council has no control of the naming of premises, as suggested at the previous meeting. Also, no 24 hour drinks delivery company currently operates in Rugby but it would be difficult to refuse a licence when home alcohol deliveries are carried out by supermarkets and recognised wine clubs.

Further work should be carried out in connection with drinking in public areas. When the Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) come into effect the Crime and Disorder Committee has already agreed it will include this topic when it continues its review of alcohol misuse. It was noted that the Head of Environmental Services was already committed to working on this with the Crime and Disorder Committee after the legislation has been passed and its regulations issued, and it was important not to duplicate this work.

The Council could have an influence by including information of local support services on signs placed in areas where public drinking is known to take place.
The littering of cans and bottles on the Great Central Walk, recreation grounds and connecting footpaths was clear evidence of public drinking in open spaces and signage about support services may have some impact in these areas. It was noted that the issues were also dealt with at Community Forum meetings and with the support of Police Community Safety Officers.

This type of drinking in public activity undermines the Walking for Health initiative.

Alcohol issues lead to wider concerns including domestic violence, housing issues, marital breakdowns and anti-social behaviour for neighbours. These would all impinge on housing officers’ work and have an impact on staff resources, existing tenants and cost.

There is a need to address the issues around alcohol which are overlooked when dealing with domestic violence cases and this should be highlighted.

Alcohol issues also have a wider effect on individuals’ mental health and on other members of the household.

There is a lot of alcohol misuse relating to everyday drinking which is not covered by the MECC approach. Drinking in the home passes down to the next generation though learnt behaviour meaning there is a need for education and early intervention.

Further support could be obtained through the Local Strategic Partnership, Public Health and local community forums.

It is important that concentrating on young people’s drinking does not lead to neglect of wider social problems and long term health issues linked to middle aged habitual drinkers. Similarly, the focus on the town centre should not be at the expense of the wider suburban areas.

Individuals’ income has an impact on drinking. On pay days, there is a clear increase in people out drinking in town centres.

A suggestion was made that some form of control of the content of billboard advertising should be introduced. These are privately owned, and permission for advertising hoarding sites is regulated by planning. Advertisement content across all media is regulated by the Advertising Standards Authority. Concerns were raised over the image of the town and the impression given to visitors by the amount of alcohol advertising in Rugby, particularly as large numbers are expected during the Rugby World Cup in 2015. Representations for restrictions could be made to the Local Government Association.

The siting of advertising banners, but not the banners’ wording, was controlled by the council’s planning service.

A suggestion was made that parish councils could be contacted at some time in the future for their views on alcohol and health related issues in rural areas. Alcohol had not been specifically raised as an issue at the scrutiny work programming meeting with parish councils. An equal claim could be made that people living in the outer urban areas might have particular experiences to report.
Alcohol and drugs are closely linked. Legal highs are a national issue and more research should be carried out, though this was not within the brief of this task group.

10. WARWICKSHIRE ALCOHOL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The task group considered the areas of the refreshed implementation plan that fell within the scope of this review, in particular:

- establishing the priority concerns in Rugby
- action being taken locally
- whether there are any gaps that the borough council should help to address

Members agreed that publicity and promotions and the raising of awareness were all areas that would add the most value in relation to the following sections of the plan:

- B7 Raising awareness of young people’s treatment services
- B8 Promotion of adult treatment services
- C1 Rolling programme of alcohol awareness campaigns targeting key groups
- C3, C4 Promotion of healthy lifestyle messages

The task group asked the Scrutiny Officer to prepare a draft review report to be circulated to members of the group for comment prior to it being submitted to the Customer and Partnerships Committee for consideration at its meeting on 26 June 2014.

CHAIRMAN