

“Local partnerships
are fundamental in
tackling Britain’s
drinking culture...”

SOBERING UP

Jonathan Birdwell
Ian Wybron
Emma Vandore

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Contents

Acknowledgements	7
Executive summary	9
Introduction	19
1 The policy context	25
2 Underage drinking	31
3 Binge drinking and the night-time economy	41
4 Street drinkers and dependent drinkers	51
5 Partnerships: local shops as part of the solution	57
6 Recommendations	73
Notes	83
References	91

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Any errors and omissions are solely our own.

Jonathan Birdwell
Ian Wybron
Emma Vandore
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Executive summary

Background

Britain's relationship with alcohol is mixed. Alcohol is deeply engrained in the British economy and communal life. Evidence shows that overall we are drinking less than we were a decade ago. Yet, the harms of Britain's alcohol consumption are well known through press stories and our personal experiences. Some communities suffer from severe problems related to underage drinking, the harms of binge drinking, and dependent street drinkers.

The Government's Alcohol Strategy laid the blame on cheap high-strength alcohol, and lobbied for a minimum unit price and a ban on multi-buy promotions in off-licences.¹ Both proposals have since been shelved because of lack of evidence and the impact for those on low incomes. In the absence of a strong national policy, local authorities and health and wellbeing boards, which hold responsibility for public health, will now lead the way.

Local authorities will be able to tailor intervention strategies to the particular harms that their local areas face. To do this, it is vital that they have access to the best evidence available about the most effective approaches. This report contributes to providing that evidence.

Drawing on new research as well as previous research in this area, we looked specifically at the three core problems regarding alcohol: underage drinking, binge drinking and the night-time economy, and dependent street drinkers. Moreover, as this research was commissioned by the Association of Convenience Stores (ACS), we were particularly keen to understand what local shops are doing to mitigate alcohol-related harms and what more they could be doing.

The findings in this report are based on a background literature review as well as original primary research with local councillors, council officers, public health representatives, police, trading standards offices, alcohol support charities and shop owners and workers. Our research focused primarily on four areas: Blackpool, Ipswich, Manchester and Kent. These areas were chosen for their mix of alcohol-related problems, as well as their geographical and demographic spread. Two of the areas – Ipswich and Kent – were chosen to explore innovative partnership schemes involving local retailers. In Ipswich, this included the police-led Reducing the Strength initiative to tackle street drinking; in Kent, it included a community alcohol partnership to tackle underage drinking. The Manchester and Blackpool case studies allowed us to explore issues relating to binge drinking and the night-time economy. We interviewed a total of 50 stakeholders in these areas.

In each area, we based our research in neighbourhoods and streets that were identified to us as being common sites of particular problems. Thus, the insights from the case studies will not be representative of the country overall. To counteract this, we supplemented our case studies with approximately 20 telephone interviews with off-licence retailers across the country, including small independent shop owners and the managers of larger chain stores. We also added questions to the ACS Voice of Local Shops national survey in August 2013, which reached 1,116 shops.²

Finally, we received feedback on initial findings and policy recommendations at the three 2013 party conferences, the ACS Responsible Retail Forum and a stakeholder dinner hosted by Demos.

Key findings

Underage drinking

'Unsupervised' drinking and experience of drunkenness among underage young people should be delayed as long as possible

There is continued debate around how best to encourage

sensible drinking among young people. Some argue for a ‘continental’ approach that introduces alcohol at an earlier age, while others maintain that the current age controls are sensible. Research is inconclusive on this question, but it does show that delaying the age of unsupervised drinking or experience of drunkenness decreases the risk of alcohol problems later in life.

The most successful approaches to tackling underage drinking focus on the parents, education, and providing young people with fun and productive diversionary activities

Previous Demos research has highlighted the importance of parenting style and alcohol consumption in relation to a child’s likelihood of developing problematic drinking behaviours.³ In those reports, we recommend targeted information awareness campaigns for parents, greater use of identification and brief advice interventions, and more intensive parenting support for parents with alcohol problems. With respect to education, initiatives that focus on developing ‘character capabilities’ (such as the ability to delay gratification), or that use lessons from behavioural economics (for example, changing the perception that most people in a peer group drink), show the strongest evidence. Finally, the Kent case study provides further confirmation of the importance of fun and productive diversionary activities for young people in order to discourage problematic underage drinking.

Local shops are vigilant on ID checks, but tackling proxy purchasing requires targeting parents and adults

The evidence shows that young people are significantly more likely to get alcohol from their parents, relatives and older friends than they are from local shops. Larger retailers such as the Co-operative, and some independently owned franchises (operating in the symbol group,⁴ such as Spar), often have electronic till prompts, substantial training materials for staff, and can hire staff from private test-purchasing companies. Smaller unaffiliated independent shops are often motivated to be vigilant by a sense of social responsibility to those in their local community. There is also a considerable amount at stake for

retailers and individual employees who fail a test purchase. It is extremely difficult, however, for local shops to identify and act against proxy purchasers. More needs to be done to communicate the harms of underage drinking to parents and adults and discourage them from purchasing alcohol for young people under age.

Binge drinking and the night-time economy

Local partnerships and on-the-street support involving police, pubs and clubs, the health service and local charities are most effective in tackling alcohol harms associated with the night-time economy

Evidence suggests that local partnership schemes in the on-trade, including Pubwatch (<http://pubwatchonline.co.uk/>) and Best Bar None (www.bbnuuk.com/), can be successful in tackling crime and disorder associated with binge drinking. Other successful approaches that we came across include drunk buses and other methods of on-the-street support. In Blackpool, for example, there is local support for a Safe Haven bus that provides a respite service for late-night clubbers. Parenting and effective education programmes could also have an important impact on the culture of binge drinking.

There is no evidence of a causal link between the presence or density of off-licences and alcohol harms associated with binge drinking and the night-time economy

Cumulative impact policies, which limit the density of premises licensed to sell alcohol, are now fairly common. We found, anecdotally, that cumulative impact policies can be one useful tool in a range of measures to reduce alcohol-related crime around pubs and clubs. But there is no robust evidence for the effectiveness of cumulative impact policies in reducing alcohol-related *harms*, especially when applied to off-licences. In the context of local shops, it is unclear how retailers can be expected to tackle a preloading culture at the point of sale.

Some retailers are on the front line of alcohol-related violence and crime and need more support from police to deny sales to customers who are very drunk

Some stakeholders assumed that off-licence retailers have an ‘easy ride’ when dealing with the fallout from binge drinking compared with the on-licence trade. In reality we found that retailers need support to deal with violent and aggressive behaviour they experience as a result of binge drinking. Retailers we interviewed reported being punched, and colleagues being hospitalised, as well as having to deal with threatening gangs of youths. Smaller retailers with fewer staff are particularly vulnerable. Local shops need support and guidance on how to deal with customers who are drunk, and how drunk they have to be before they are refused a sale.

Dependent street drinking

Voluntary bans alone are not sufficient to tackle the problem of dependent street drinkers

The Reducing the Strength campaign in Ipswich is the most well-known example of attempting to tackle the problem of dependent street drinkers. Two-thirds of local shops have voluntarily removed some cheap high-strength drink products. However, one of the most significant elements of the Reducing the Strength campaign was engaging with the street drinker community and encouraging dependent drinkers into rehab. Dependent drinkers on the street are often facing a complex mix of problems including poverty, homelessness, violence, drug abuse and long-term unemployment. Approaches to tackling the problem need to be suitably comprehensive, rather than simply targeting either the price or availability of alcohol.

Shops need support and advice to deal with known customers with alcohol dependency

Many retailers spoke of their responsibility to the community in which they serve and struggling to deal with known dependent drinkers. However, unlike for underage drinking, there is no clear national message for the off-trade in how to deal with

excessive alcohol consumption. We found that there is a significant grey area, and much confusion, about the role of retailers in refusing to serve dependent drinkers. This leaves shop owners and those on the till to make decisions about how best to deal with potentially dependent customers. For example, we heard one was trying to wean a customer off high-strength alcohol, while another expressed uncertainty about whether keeping certain drinks artificially low in price was better for those with severe problems who may otherwise resort to crime or the black market. There is therefore space for greater partnerships between shops and charities that work to support dependent drinkers.

Recommendations

General

Local authorities and health and wellbeing boards must ensure that local shops are at the heart of strategic partnerships to tackle alcohol harms

Half of all local shops are either unaware of local strategies to tackle alcohol harms, or have not been contacted by local authorities. Only 1 in 10 have attended a partnership meeting. Local authorities need to tackle this issue, particularly prioritising engagement with unaffiliated independent shops.

Police and trading standards officers should proactively seek to establish contact and good relations with shops, particularly small independents

The most effective relationships between shops, police and trading standards officers are those where there is regular communication and contact between these agencies and shops. Too much emphasis on enforcement leads to fear and mistrust, especially among unaffiliated independent shops.

Shops should be incentivised to take part in local partnership schemes by offering incentives such as free support and staff training

The benefits of being involved in a partnership need to be communicated to shop keepers. Providing incentives, such as the offer of training and support, could help to inspire greater commitment. The cost of these activities could be recouped from the introduction of late-night levies, or provided by the larger retailers and supermarkets as their contribution to support small and independent businesses on diverse high streets.

Targeting underage drinking

Local authority and health experts should run information campaigns aimed at parents to shift attitudes on the dangers of underage drinking

Local authorities with high alcohol harms in their communities need to communicate the dangers of underage drinking, and particularly unsupervised drinking, to parents. This should include awareness campaigns aimed at reducing proxy purchasing, which could be run in shops, schools, at employers' premises and in GP surgeries.

Local shops should use social sanctions and make clear to customers that proxy purchasers will be banned from the shop and face the threat of prosecution

We know from behavioural economics that what people see at the point of sale can have an impact on consumer behaviour. We recommend therefore that shops put up posters at the till – within sight of customers – to make clear that proxy purchasers face a ban and potentially prosecution. These posters could include photos of adults or parents to give the impression of 'social shaming' ('your face could appear here').

Adults caught proxy purchasing should be subject to an alcohol-related community sentence

While it is difficult to catch proxy purchasers, those who are caught should be subject to a community sentence, set at the

current minimum of 40 hours unpaid work. This work should be alcohol-related, and could include participating in respite services during peak hours of the night-time economy (such as a town centre drunk bus, or street support service), or clearing up bottles and litter the following morning. There could be further provision for proxy purchasers to work with alcohol charities, or attend a course on alcohol harms.

Police and local authorities should clamp down on unsupervised drinking in public places and ensure the provision of diversionary activities for young people

Police and local authorities need to get tougher about policing public places – such as parks and car lots – where underage drinkers congregate. However, such tough enforcement measures must go hand-in-hand with ensuring that there are positive activities for young people in local areas. Evidence from the Kent case study shows that providing diversionary activities for young people is essential to reducing underage drinking.

Tackling binge drinking and the night-time economy

Police and local authorities should provide local shops with guidance on refusing sales to intoxicated customers and effective support when required

Local authorities and police should seek to spread practices and technologies within shops that help shop keepers to deal with drunk customers. Examples include panic buttons, and police contact cards. These cards can be given to the customer by the retailer to help take responsibility for the decision to refuse a sale off the person on the till.

Individuals responsible for causing trouble in the night-time economy should either pay a substantial individual levy towards policing and NHS costs, or commit to community work in the night-time economy

Currently the financial penalties incurred by drunk and disorderly individuals themselves are minimal when compared

with the costs to police and the NHS of their behaviour. The Government has recently introduced a late-night levy, where premises licensed to sell alcohol have to pay towards policing costs in the local area. But we recommend introducing a levy on individuals who are drunk and disorderly, and particularly repeat offenders, to place a far higher financial burden on those directly responsible for alcohol-related antisocial behaviour.

Police should refuse to allow very drunk individuals to enter city centres in areas with high levels of alcohol-related harms

Police and local authorities should seek to identify excessively drunk people who are entering city centres and deny them access to the city centre, issue them a warning, or require them to spend some time in a designated area sobering up. The costs and benefits of this proposal would need to be weighed and considered very carefully by local authorities.

Tackling dependent drinkers

Local schemes should be developed that make it possible for substance misuse workers and other support charities to work with local shops and provide guidance about how to identify and deal with dependent drinkers

Our research found little interaction between local shops and local charities that work to support dependent drinkers. Where appropriate (for example, in areas with high alcohol-related harms), local authorities should consider sending out substance misuse workers, or facilitating the involvement of local charities, to advise local shops on how to deal with those customers with dependency issues.

Local authorities and retailers should work together on local partnerships that take comprehensive approaches to tackle street drinking effectively

Tackling the price and availability of alcohol in isolation will not go very far in solving problems around dependent street drinking. Local authorities need to foster a multi-agency

approach that targets the kind of ‘deep exclusion’ that many of these particular drinkers face. The Ipswich initiative, which is based on effective collaboration between retailers and local agencies, and which encouraged drinkers into rehab, is an interesting model that could be examined by other areas and improved on.

Introduction

It is often argued that Britain has a drinking problem. The most frequently cited statistics to demonstrate this are a rise in hospital admissions where alcohol is the primary factor by 40 per cent since 2002/03, and a rise of alcohol-related deaths by 22 per cent since 2001.⁵ According to the National Treatment Agency, 1.6 million people in the UK have some form of alcohol dependency, though it is unclear how this figure is arrived at.⁶ Alcohol-related harms are estimated to cost the UK around £21 billion each year according to an impact assessment by the Home Office.⁷ Of this amount £11 billion is the cost of alcohol-related crime, and most of the remainder is the cost of short-term and long-term health treatments for alcohol-related illness.

However, Britain's relationship with drink is more complicated than these figures suggest. Recent stats show that alcohol consumption in the UK is actually declining overall. According to the General Lifestyle Survey (by the Office for National Statistics) the number of men who reported drinking alcohol in the last week fell from 72 per cent in 2005 to 66 per cent in 2011, while the number of women drinking in the last week fell from 57 per cent in 2005 to 54 per cent in 2011. The most dramatic decline can be seen among young men aged 16–24 for whom this proportion fell from 64 per cent in 2005 to 52 per cent in 2011.⁸ There is also evidence that there is a fall in levels of underage drinking. According to a 2010 NHS report the percentage of pupils aged between 11 and 15 who drank alcohol in the last week fell from 26 per cent in 2001 to 13 per cent in 2010.⁹ Some of this may be due to the changing demographics of the UK – including the rising percentage of young British Muslims who do not drink alcohol – but the decline is nonetheless significant.

This important decline in the numbers of people drinking in Britain too often goes unnoticed amid the headlines of binge drinking. It is also important to bear in mind that the alcohol industry generates a huge amount of consumption and export business in the UK. Alcohol is deeply ingrained in British culture as an integral part of celebration and communal life, and most people consume alcohol responsibly and in a way that enhances their quality of life.

Yet, it is clear that there are some areas of the UK that suffer from very high levels of consumption, and high levels of particular harms, such as underage drinking, alcohol-related crime and antisocial behaviour as part of the night-time economy, or chronic alcoholism. For example, the 2012 local authority profiles revealed that Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds experience the highest numbers of alcohol-related crimes in the country, while County Durham, Liverpool, Birmingham and Leeds rank the worst for the number of under 18s admitted to hospital with alcohol-specific causes.¹⁰

Frequently the issues that generate the most headlines are the harms associated with binge drinking and the night-time economy. It is often argued that the current generation of young people drinks to excess and considers the exploits of their excessive drinking as a badge of honour. A number of reasons are given for this phenomenon, from increasing numbers of women drinking to excess, to the role of social media. The Government and many in the health industry blame the easy availability and cheap price of certain alcohols. At the very least, they argue that increasing the price of some alcohols and restricting availability could help to mitigate the culture of excessive drinking. The Government also blames a preloading culture, whereby young people drink at home before going out. This is arguably reflected in the alcohol-related harms that appear to be on the rise over the past decade, including alcohol-related hospital admissions, alcohol-related crime and chronic alcoholism. In 2010/11 over 1 million alcohol-related violent crimes were recorded, and there were 1,168,300 alcohol-related hospital admissions,¹¹ although the link between the preloading phenomenon and these harms is not necessarily clear.

In the first chapter of this report, we set out the policy options under consideration by the UK Government, the Scottish Government and local authorities to tackle these alcohol-related harms. The centrepiece of the UK Government's latest national alcohol strategy was a minimum unit price for alcohol of 45p, following the Scottish example of a minimum unit price of 50p. The policy was recently put on hold amid debates over its effectiveness and the disproportionate impact it would have on those on lower incomes.

In its place, the Government is pushing for alcohol producers and retailers to make changes to the way alcohol is produced and sold. With the creation of Public Health England, the Government has also devolved alcohol policy to local authorities and local health and wellbeing boards. This raises the possibility of a diversity of different approaches, each tailored to a local area's particular issues. This makes it more important than ever that local authorities and those responsible for alcohol policy are aware of the evidence about the most effective approaches.

This report highlights the evidence of effectiveness for the three core problems cited above: underage drinking, binge drinking and the night-time economy, and dependent street drinking. We do not claim that these issues are rampant or widespread across all of the UK. Rather they can be unique and specific to certain local areas and neighbourhoods. Where these issues exist, it is important that efforts to tackle them are targeted and evidence-based as far as possible. We were also particularly interested in the role of local shops in tackling these problems. Local shops are sometimes forgotten, or considered as an afterthought, in the pitched battles of national debates over issues like minimum unit pricing, but this may be about to change as advocates on regulatory intervention shift their focus from issues of price to availability.

This report

Overall, there is very little research into the role of the off-licence trade in tackling alcohol-related harms. This report addresses this evidence gap. In addition to a detailed review of pre-existing

evidence, we undertook original primary research with local shops across the country in order to look at what local shops are doing to tackle some of these problems. As licensed retailers, local shops are required to undertake certain actions consistent with being responsible retailers. But there are very few hard data looking specifically at how well local shops adhere to and go above and beyond these commitments.

Because of the place-based nature of alcohol harms, we conducted fieldwork in four case-study locations: Ipswich, Blackpool, Manchester and Edenbridge (Kent). We interviewed a number of key stakeholders in each location, including police, trading standards officers, councillors and public health officials, as well as local shop owners. In each interview we asked a range of questions about local alcohol-related problems and initiatives to tackle them, how local shops contribute to these efforts, and what more they should be doing.

The case-study locations were chosen for their size, geographical spread, experience of specific alcohol-related problems, as well as interesting initiatives in the area involving off-licence shops that aimed to tackle a specific issue. We wanted to learn what were the driving factors behind those initiatives, and how could they be replicated elsewhere.

Ipswich is home to the campaign Reducing the Strength, where local shops are invited by Suffolk police to remove from their shelves the cheap, high-strength alcoholic drinks associated with the town's problem with dependent drinking. Areas of Ipswich suffer from high levels of deprivation, and Ipswich is the 72nd most deprived local authority out of 294. The Reducing the Strength campaign is often cited as a model for tackling what are seen as problematic alcohol products in lieu of a minimum unit price.

Blackpool was chosen because of its reputation and substantial night-time economy, often involving stag and hen parties. It also has significant issues with dependent drinking and poverty, especially in the Bloomfield ward where we concentrated our research. It has the highest alcohol-specific mortality for males and females in the UK. There are a total of

1,900 licensed premises in Blackpool, which is approximately 1 for every 72 residents.

Manchester is the largest of our case-study areas. As with any city of its size, Manchester has a mix of alcohol-related problems including those related to its vibrant night-time economy. We concentrated our research in the city centre, and also the Fallowfield ward, which has a high student population. The city ranks 9th worst for binge drinking across 326 local authorities.

Edenbridge is a small rural town in Kent with a population of less than 8,000. It served as a pilot site for a Kent Community Alcohol Partnership in response to problems of underage drinking. It has only a small number of licensed premises, and compared with our other case-study areas it has relatively low levels of alcohol-related problems.

Across our case-study areas we interviewed a total of 30 stakeholders, and 26 local shop keepers. We conducted an additional 17 telephone interviews with off-licence retailers across the country, including small independent shop owners and the managers of larger chain stores and branches of the Co-operative. We also added six questions to the ACS Voice of Local Shops national survey of August 2013, which reached 1,116 independent shops (both symbol group franchises and non-affiliated independents). These questions were on the extent to which shops experienced alcohol-related problems as well as their relationships with key stakeholders.

1 The policy context

Successive government strategies have sought to turn the tide on Britain's harmful drinking culture. The previous Labour Government relaxed licensing rules to allow for 24-hour sales in an attempt to bring Britain closer to the café culture of other European countries. It was argued that some people would binge drink because pubs and shops stopped serving at 11pm; allowing places to stay open later meant that drinking could be done at a more leisurely pace. The current Government argues that the café culture failed to materialise and, instead, some areas in Britain suffer from alcohol-related crime and other harms associated with the night-time economy. It blames the cheap cost of alcohol as the cause of Britain's drinking problems.

In this chapter we summarise the policy approaches proposed and adopted by the current Government, the Scottish Government and local authorities across the UK. Despite some differences, much of the thinking around tackling alcohol-related harms has remained relatively consistent since the first national strategy in 2004, with education of the public, localism and the ethical responsibilities of the alcohol industry being important mainstays. Two other key policy levers for reducing demand for alcohol – raising prices and limiting availability – have generated considerably more debate over the past decade.

The 2012 Alcohol Strategy

The 2012 Alcohol Strategy centred on the price of alcohol, proposing to introduce a minimum unit price, and a ban on multi-buy promotions in the off-trade.¹² The Government argued that these measures would target the cheap high-strength alcoholic drinks that ministers concluded fuel preloading, binge drinking and alcohol-related violence. The policy of a minimum

unit price divided politicians in all three major parties, with many in support of such a move and others arguing that the evidence was inconclusive. In the end, both policies were dropped because of inconclusive evidence and the negative impact it would have on responsible drinkers who are already feeling a cost of living pinch.

In place of a minimum unit price, the Government is seeking to take action on the price of alcohol by banning sales at 'below cost' (defined as duty plus VAT), coming into effect in 2014. This policy will aim to put an end to the practice of loss-leading in shops, most often supermarkets, whereby alcohol is sold at a loss to get people in the door to buy other goods for which the price has not changed. Many supporters of the minimum unit price, however, see this policy as inadequate for tackling the problem of excessive alcohol consumption. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has estimated that the measure will only affect 1 per cent of off-licence alcohol units (the proportion that was actually sold at below cost in 2010).¹³

While dropped by the UK Government, the Scottish Government has now legislated for minimum pricing and a ban on multi-buy deals in the off-trade. The proposed minimum unit price is set at 50p, and has brought a legal challenge from the Scotch and Whisky Association, though the Scottish Government won the first court case. The UK Government and the public health lobby will no doubt be watching the experience in Scotland to determine the policy's success.

Getting tough on licensing

The 2012 Alcohol Strategy recommended that alcohol-related harm should be tackled through local licensing, which has been legislated for in the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 (PRSRA).

The PRSRA brought in measures to 'rebalance' the Licensing Act 2003 to give more powers to local communities. Under the Licensing Act 2003, decisions to grant, refuse or review licences to sell alcohol are made by local licensing authorities. Typically, these licensing authorities have a duty to

promote four licensing objectives: the prevention of crime and disorder, public safety, prevention of public nuisance, and the protection of children from harm. If the committee refuses an application for a licence, it has to provide evidence on how granting the licence would detract from the four licensing objectives. This evidence can come from responsible authorities, such as the police or the fire service, or representations from any person living in the vicinity.

Under the PRSRA there are now more opportunities for local organisations and individuals to get involved in licensing decisions. Public health bodies have become responsible authorities, and will be notified immediately of any upcoming licensing decisions. The legislation also makes it easier for licensing authorities to refuse licence applications, or to place conditions on licences. The same goes for the introduction of cumulative impact policies, which enable licensing authorities to limit the number of licensed premises they approve to sell alcohol if granting the licence would have a negative effect on the four licensing objectives.

The 2012 Alcohol Strategy sought to go further by introducing a public health objective to the licensing conditions, specifically for the purposes of cumulative impact policies. This would enable licensing authorities to restrict the number of new premises selling alcohol if there are significant alcohol-related health problems in the area. But this proposal has also been dropped for the time being, following concerns about how it could be implemented.

The PRSRA also increased the powers of licensing authorities to introduce two measures that will have greater implications for the on-trade than the off-trade: early morning restriction orders enable licensing authorities to stop the sale of alcohol between 12am and 6am, either across a whole district or specific areas; alternatively, if premises do stay open during these hours, they could face a late-night levy where premises selling alcohol pay a contribution towards policing costs. However, take-up of these two measures by licensing authorities has so far been limited. One reason for this is that the late-night levy has to be applied to every retailer in a given borough, rather than being

targeted on the high street or a particular area with high alcohol harms associated with the night-time economy.

Devolving power to local authorities

Granting new powers to local licensing authorities is part of the wider localism agenda being pursued by the Coalition Government. The new police and crime commissioners are now responsible for working collaboratively with health organisations and local authorities to tackle alcohol-related issues.

The restructuring of the health system also has significant implications for local responses to alcohol-related harm. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 created local health and wellbeing boards in each local authority, which bring together health professionals and councillors to produce joint strategic needs assessments and strategies to feed in to commissioning decisions. Each local authority additionally gets a public health grant, including funding for alcohol services, to spend as it sees fit to meet local needs. The new national body Public Health England oversees and supports these decisions, and shares evidence of best practice. The emphasis on localism is also seen in the Government's support of local voluntary initiatives to tackle alcohol-related harm such as community alcohol partnerships, and the Best Bar None scheme in the on-trade.

Encouraging industry responsibility

The 2012 Alcohol Strategy states that 'it is the ethical responsibility of the entire industry – alcohol retailers, alcohol producers and both the on-trade and off-trade – to promote, market, advertise and sell their products in a responsible way'.

The alcohol industry currently takes voluntary action to reduce alcohol-related harm through the Public Health Responsibility Deal, which has been operating under the Department of Health since 2011. The Responsibility Deal invites voluntary pledges from all sections of the alcohol industry to promote a culture of responsible drinking (drinking within NHS recommended guidelines). These commitments include:

providing clear product labelling on unit content; clear messaging on units in on-trade and off-trade premises; tackling underage sales through Challenge 21 and Challenge 25; funding the alcohol charity Drinkaware; taking action to advertise responsibly; and supporting local schemes such as community alcohol partnerships. In the latest pledge the alcohol industry will remove 1 billion units of alcohol from the market by 2015.

The Government also states in the 2012 Strategy that it will work closely with the Portman Group, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) and Ofcom to ensure that alcohol continues to be advertised responsibly, including across new media.

A period of uncertainty

The Government's strong lobbying for a minimum unit price and ban on multi-buy promotions, and its subsequent U-turn, have created a period of uncertainty with respect to alcohol policy. This confusion at the national level is compounded by the structural changes in devolving responsibility for public health down to local authorities. The absence of a national policy is creating a vacuum that is now being filled by local initiatives.

Some local authorities – including councils in Newcastle, East Cheshire and Bristol – are continuing on the path that the national government originally set and attempting to introduce minimum unit pricing in local areas. Others, such as Blackpool and Manchester, have attempted to do so but failed. There have also been schemes such as Reducing the Strength in Ipswich that are seeking to enact voluntary bans of super-strength alcohol in lieu of minimum pricing. In addition to considering a similar voluntary ban, Nottingham Council has gone on to ban street drinking in some areas, and possibly throughout the entire city.

In other words, either by accident or design national policy is being superseded by local initiative. With new police crime commissioners also being held responsible for tackling alcohol-related issues, it is clear that local authorities and other local stakeholders are due to receive a new prominence on the issue. Driven not only by the harms that public health advocates identify, but also sensitivity to the media, it is clear that many

local authorities aim to tackle underage drinking, the harms of binge drinking and the night-time economy, and dependent street drinkers.

In the next three chapters we present the evidence of the trends and most effective approaches for each of these three problems. We also highlight the findings from our interviews with local shop owners to show what they are doing on these issues, and what they could be doing more of. In chapter 5, we look at examples of the best partnerships to tackle harms, to highlight to decision-makers how to draw up and implement the right partnership between the ‘regulators’ and the ‘regulated’.

Having a licence to sell alcohol, rightly, comes with significant responsibilities. Too often, the public and those in public health are unaware of many of the actions that shops are already taking to be responsible alcohol retailers. While the likes of big brands like the Co-operative Group have good training and clear guidelines, there is a common perception that small and independent shops are less likely to be as conscientious. Our research finds that, on the whole, small and independent shops are already taking a number of steps to mitigate alcohol harms but are often forced to contend with a lack of resources.

2 Underage drinking

When you hear about ‘high-strength alcohol at pocket money prices’ the inference is that young people are buying it.

Debate continues about the best approach to introducing young people to alcohol. Proponents of the ‘continental approach’ argue that when parents introduce alcohol to their children in family settings and in moderate amounts it helps to normalise alcohol and reduces the likelihood of young people developing problems later in life. On the other hand, research has shown that drinking at a younger age increases one’s risk of developing alcohol-related problems later in life.¹⁴

Underage drinking is on the decline

There has been a significant improvement in overall levels of underage drinking in the last decade. In 2012, one in ten pupils reported drinking alcohol in the last week, compared with one in four who reported drinking alcohol in the last week in 2003. Attitudes among pupils about whether it is OK for someone their age to drink have also shifted significantly: 28 per cent of pupils in 2012 thought it was OK for someone their age to drink alcohol compared with 46 per cent in 2003.¹⁵ Some of these declines are attributable to demographic changes, as there are increasing numbers of young British Muslims, who abstain from alcohol for religious reasons. However, it is unclear and unlikely that all of these declines can be attributed to this factor.

Despite these overall positive declines, there are still worryingly high numbers of very young people who report drinking alcohol. In 2012, 12 per cent of 11 year olds and 38 per cent of 13 year olds claimed to have drunk alcohol. Of children aged 11–13 who had drunk alcohol in the last month, 48 per

cent had deliberately tried to get drunk, demonstrating the close correlation between drinking and drunkenness at this age.¹⁶

Moreover, those who are drinking appear to be drinking higher quantities than previous generations; this is significantly more of an issue in some places in the UK than others – primarily the north of England. For example, data from local alcohol profiles for England show that the number of under 18s admitted to hospital for alcohol-specific conditions is highest in Isle of Wight, Copeland, Burnley, Liverpool, Allerdale and Salford.¹⁷

What are the best approaches to prevent underage drinking?

Of course, preventing underage young people from purchasing alcohol in off-licences and pubs and clubs is essential. Shops are required to ask for the ID of people purchasing alcohol who look underage through Challenge 25 and other ID-checking schemes. To encourage shops to be vigilant, the Government recently doubled the fine that shops could face, which is now up to £20,000 for those where staff have frequently been caught selling to underage young people.¹⁸

Yet, research suggests that only a tiny percentage of the alcohol consumed by underage young people comes from local shops failing to ask for ID. A survey of 11–15-year-old students published by the Health and Social Care Information Centre in 2012 found that only 3 per cent of those who had obtained alcohol in the last 4 weeks had obtained it directly from an off-licence. Approximately one in five received alcohol from parents and friends, a further 13 per cent report taking it from their home, and another 13 per cent said they had obtained it through ‘proxy purchasing’.¹⁹ As one stakeholder in our research put it: ‘You can shut all the off-licences in the world, and kids will still go to the park with a bottle of vodka.’

This is partly because the off-licence trade as a whole has improved over time in dealing with underage sales. Data from Serve Legal show that the proportion of alcohol retailers (in both

the on- and off-trade) failing a test purchase for Challenge 25 has fallen dramatically in recent years – from 45 per cent in 2007 to 24 per cent in 2010. The latest figures from Serve Legal²⁰ also suggest that the off-trade is doing better than the on-trade, with a 79 per cent pass rate for off-trade premises, compared with a 69 per cent pass rate for the on-trade.

Reducing underage drinking thus requires targeting parents and adults on the issue of proxy purchasing, as we argue further below. Research also suggests that the most successful approaches to tackling underage drinking are to focus on parenting more generally, implementing effective education programmes and providing young people with fun and productive diversionary activities.

Targeting parents

As cited above, previous Demos research has demonstrated a link between parenting style and parental alcohol consumption, and a child's likelihood of developing problematic drinking habits by the time they are 16 (and even later in life as adults). Specifically we found that – controlling for all other potentially influential factors – high levels of parental warmth when the child is under 5 significantly reduce the chances the child will drink excessively at 16. We also found that disengaged parenting at 16 makes a child over eight times more likely to drink excessively at that age.²¹ Based on these findings, we previously argued for information awareness campaigns communicating these findings to parents, as well as more intensive support for those parents who have alcohol problems or whose children may be at risk. Thus, supporting parents to be effective in monitoring their children's consumption of alcohol could reduce the likelihood of problematic underage drinking.

Furthermore, the research on where young people now tend to get their alcohol suggests that there need to be targeted information campaigns aimed at parents on the harms of underage drinking and the problem of proxy purchasing. As we argue below, additional pressures and social sanctions need to be considered to discourage parents and older adults from

purchasing alcohol for underage young people and allowing them to drink it unsupervised.

Effective education programmes

Another important element in targeting underage drinking is to introduce effective, evidence-based educational initiatives.

Research suggests that the standard alcohol awareness programmes are inadequate, but that other initiatives have more success by focusing on developing ‘character’ capabilities (such as the ability to delay gratification) or through using the insights of behavioural economics (for example, by challenging peer perceptions that most young people drink, and thereby undercutting peer pressure).²²

Diversionsary activities

Our case study in Edenbridge, Kent, in particular highlighted the importance of diversionsary activities for young people to reduce underage drinking. A community alcohol partnership was established in order to tackle problems with underage drinking. Its purpose was to get large chains and small and independent shops to work together with other stakeholders in order to present a coordinated approach. According to several of the key stakeholders whom we spoke to, the success of the community alcohol partnerships – which led to reductions in total recorded crime of 46 per cent – was attributed to the implementation of diversionsary youth activities in Edenbridge, including recreational and educational activities.

In another example, there was a drop in antisocial behaviour and youth nuisance by half in Haslingden, Lancashire, and all crime fell by 39 per cent after major diversion projects were introduced.²³

What shops can do to prevent underage drinking

Our research with shop keepers suggests that most shops are vigilant when it comes to ID checks. All shop owners we

interviewed had a zero tolerance line with a ‘no ID, no sale’ policy in store. Most shops claimed to have at least some level of staff training on refusing underage sales, and many kept a refusals book to show authorities.

Larger retailers often have the capacity to go above and beyond the minimum requirements. Stores such as the Co-operative, and some of the larger symbol group franchise brands such as Spar, have electronic till prompts and substantial training materials, including DVDs and online quizzes, for all staff on underage sales. Some have tried introducing fingerprint technology at the point of sale. Several shops we interviewed also hire private test-purchasing companies such as Serve Legal to ensure that standards on underage sales are being met (often to prove to trading standards officers that they are taking the issue seriously).

Smaller independents often lack the resources to take these additional steps to prevent underage and proxy sales. For example, an unaffiliated independent with only a few staff and operating on a tight budget is less likely to be able to afford to pay a private test-purchasing company. Small shops are also less likely to have the same amount of time and resources for training staff. Nonetheless, as our research highlighted, there is a huge incentive for all local shops to make an effort to prevent selling alcohol to underage people – both for individual staff members at risk of fines and prosecution, and for the success of the business.

Moreover, from the Voice of Local Shops survey, we know that the numbers of shops reporting problems with underage drinking is actually very low. Approximately half of the sample (47 per cent) report ‘never’ experiencing problems with underage drinking, with only 5 per cent experiencing it ‘constantly’.

A lot is at stake for shops selling alcohol to underage people

There is a considerable amount at stake for retailers who are caught selling alcohol to underage customers. Shop managers

whose staff sell alcohol to children can receive a fine of up to £5,000, while those who are persistently caught selling to underage people can face a fine of up to £20,000 and the loss of their licence.²⁴ The loss of a licence can make business unviable for smaller shops, and can bring heavy losses and damage corporate reputation for larger retailers.

The individuals working on the till can also be subjected to a fine. In serious circumstances, they can even be taken to court and prosecuted, although this occurs rarely and is only likely to apply to repeat offenders. Most commonly, individuals receive a caution or a fixed penalty notice. There is also a significant amount of cultural shame and opprobrium directed towards those who sold young people alcohol or failed a test purchase.

Some of the retailers we interviewed felt that shop staff were 'turned into criminals over night' for failing a test purchase. One worker described it in the following way:

You can have something on your mind, like I did, and it would just be that slip of that customer. And that's it... I'll tell you what, it can wreck your life.

They also pointed out that sometimes those failing test purchases are young staff on the minimum wage, whose future career might be ruined if they are given a criminal record. In one extreme example, a shop worker we interviewed had attempted suicide, saying she had 'never been so ashamed' and struggled to face people at work. This level of blame and opprobrium seems unjustified, particularly in light of the evidence that young people tend to obtain alcohol from their parents rather than purchase it and our ambivalent social norms around parents giving alcohol to their children. As one shop owner put it:

The general public do not thoroughly understand the laws. We're employing people not much above the minimum wage and they're expected to do the job of policemen.

In general, shop owners of both large and small shops believed that the requirements placed on them by licensing authorities are justified, but it was also felt that it is unfair that

the punishments for underage sales were directed more towards the seller rather than the purchaser. While the Licensing Act 2003 makes it an offence to purchase, or attempt to purchase, alcohol underage, data released by the Ministry of Justice show that in 2012 only two cases of underage purchasing of alcohol appeared before a magistrate's court. In addition, between March 2012 and March 2013 only 17 penalty notices for disorder were issued for the offence, for on-trade and off-trade sales. Proxy purchasing is also an offence punishable by a penalty notice, though over the same period only 142 were issued. This is compared with 1,304 issued to retailers for selling alcohol to an underage person.²⁵

Challenging and policing proxy sales is incredibly difficult for retailers

The most difficult issue relating to underage drinking facing local shop keepers was identifying and clamping down on proxy purchasing. Some of the larger stores whose staff we interviewed included guidance on proxy sales in staff training materials. One store had hired a test-purchasing company specifically for that purpose, where an underage person would ask an adult to buy alcohol within earshot of checkout staff. Smaller independent stores without the same capacity were confined to more ad-hoc actions – such as checking security cameras outside the store, and refusing sales when they realised what was going on.

It is difficult to know what more local shops can do to avoid proxy selling. Overly aggressive efforts to prevent it can lead to frustrating experiences for customers. We heard from our retailer interviews that refusing a sale to parents for proxy purchasing can quickly become unpleasant. One retailer described an incident where a cashier had been 'completely brow-beaten' by a parent who did not understand why they could not buy alcohol for their child. A queue quickly formed, with other customers contributing their views. The shop workers we spoke to felt that the majority of customers are unclear about the law on proxy purchasing, especially in the context of a parent buying for a child. To some extent this is understandable, given

that it is not illegal for parents to supply alcohol to their children in the home. Under stress from this particular incident, the cashier had the misfortune of selling to a test-purchaser immediately afterwards, and none of the above counted as mitigating circumstances.

Another problem is that proxy purchasers can claim adamantly that they are buying the alcohol for themselves. It then becomes very difficult for a cashier to call that person a liar and refuse the sale. These examples demonstrate the limits of asking retailers to assume most of the burden in tackling proxy purchasing.

As mentioned above and later in the recommendations, local authorities need to focus on communicating to parents and other adults the harms and increased risk that young people face if they consume alcohol underage. Portsmouth was the first local authority to introduce a scheme called Proxy Watch, which is a 24-hour hotline for members of the public and shop staff to report incidences of proxy purchasing. An important part of this campaign is raising awareness, and retailers who have signed up to the scheme are given posters and t-shirts. As a result of the initiative, the test purchase failure rate for alcohol and tobacco has fallen from 33 per cent to 2.5 per cent over the last four years.²⁶

In addition to these kinds of campaigns, the penalties facing adults for proxy purchasing should be tougher and designed to encourage social shaming. At the moment, the punishment for adults is usually a £90 fine, although in very extreme cases they can be liable for a maximum £5,000 fine. These are fairly insignificant penalties compared with other countries, such as the US. In the US, where penalties are set at state level, proxy purchasers can face substantially higher penalties, arrest and possibly jail, and compulsory community service. Table 1 shows the penalties for proxy purchasing in the UK and the US.

Table 1 **Punishments for proxy purchasing in the UK, three states in the US, and Washington DC**

	Minimum penalty	Maximum penalty
UK	£90 fine	£5,000
US (California)	\$1,000 fine and 24 hours community service	\$1,000 fine, or 6 months to 1 year imprisonment, or both, if the minor provided with alcohol suffers significant bodily injury or dies
US (Pennsylvania)	Between \$1,000 and \$2,500 fine, up to 1 year imprisonment	\$2,500 fine, up to 1 year imprisonment
US (Texas)	Up to \$4,000 fine, up to 1 year imprisonment If offence committed where minors engaged in binge drinking, 20-40 hours community service, an alcohol awareness programme, and 180 days driving licence suspension (NB It is legal for a minor's parent or guardian to purchase alcohol for them in Texas)	\$4,000 fine, 1 year imprisonment
US (Washington DC)	Up to \$1,000 fine, or up to 180 days imprisonment (or both)	\$5,000 fine and/or 1 year imprisonment

3 Binge drinking and the night-time economy

I feel sorry for the pubs and clubs, because to some extent they haven't created the problem... People have probably gone to Aldi, the Co-op or Tesco, and they've got the booze from there.

The second issue that we explore is harms associated with binge drinking and the night-time economy. These were particular issues in two of our case-study areas, Blackpool and Manchester.

Blackpool is well known for its booze culture and night-time economy. Over 15,000 people descend on its various pubs and clubs on peak nights at weekends. We heard accounts from local stakeholders about an all-night drinking culture, often spilling over into violence, with some referring to it as the 'capital of binge'. The fallout from the night-time economy takes its toll on the town: 15 per cent of all crime in Blackpool is alcohol-related, rising to 37 per cent of all violent crime; and alcohol is a factor in 76 per cent of all domestic abuse cases.²⁷

Manchester has its own vibrant night-time economy and issues with binge drinking. Nearly one-third (29 per cent) of the population aged 16 years and over report engaging in binge drinking – 9th highest of 326 local authorities, and the highest of our case-study areas. Statistics also show that 11.25 alcohol-related crimes are recorded per 1,000 of the population.²⁸ Authorities in Manchester are considering the use of licensing measures to try to tackle the problems associated with binge drinking. Manchester City Council is currently planning to implement a cumulative impact policy covering licensed premises in Fallowfield, Withington and Wilmslow Road, identified as areas with high levels of crime and disorder, and public nuisance. The council had consulted on whether to introduce an early morning restriction order, but the proposal

has now been dropped following concerns it would be unworkable. Across the city there are 16 designated public place orders.

The most effective ways of tackling binge drinking and the harms associated with the night-time economy

As argued in chapter 1, the Government and public health advocates argue that cheap, strong and easily accessible alcohol are driving the so-called ‘binge drinking’ culture. The Government also blames preloading, whereby primarily young people tend to drink at home before going out to pubs and clubs. As a result, many are already drunk by the time they go out, and are thus may be more likely to drink more alcohol overall in the course of an evening.

The main reason for preloading among young people is said to be the cost of alcohol, which is significantly higher in pubs and clubs than it is in off-licences and supermarkets. However, the evidence around the impact of pricing on binge drinking is inconclusive as a number of additional cultural factors have to be taken into account. These include a youth culture that considers drunken exploits as a badge of honour, and the rise of social media allowing for the presentation of a wild, carefree and partying image. Moreover, the rise of drinking in homes is part of an increasing tendency in our society overall to stay at home, entertained by television, video games and the internet.

Parenting and education

As with underage drinking, previous Demos research and research from elsewhere suggests that parenting and effective education programmes could have an impact on curbing binge drinking.²⁹ Peer influence and shifts in cultural norms – as we have seen with respect to drinking and driving, as well as smoking – would have the most significant impact. This is the basis behind initiatives like Drinkaware’s marketing campaign

‘Why let good times go bad?’³⁰ The psychology behind binge drinking, for many people, is the desire to have a good night out. Many can recognise that there is a certain limit whereby excessive drinking turns into regretful behaviour. Techniques to pace drinking through alternating drinks and sitting out of rounds can help to prevent some people from binge drinking to the point of excess. Public health authorities in Blackpool are working with Pubwatch on campaigns such as Altn8, which encourage drinkers to switch between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.

Drunk buses and street interventions

Drunk buses and other methods of on-the-street support have also become popular. For example, in Blackpool there is significant local support for a ‘Safe Haven’ bus, which provides a respite service for late-night clubbers. This is a joint initiative involving St John’s Ambulance Service, NHS nurses, police and the Drug and Alcohol Service, as well as local bar staff. Typically, those who are picked up by drunk buses do not have to pay for the service, and are not subject to fines. Demos has argued in the past that requiring individuals who have to use drunk buses due to excessive alcohol consumption should have to pay a fine.³¹ This would not only help pay for the service, but also force the individuals to assume greater responsibility for their actions and possibly moderate their alcohol intake in the future.

Effective local partnership schemes

The Government has highlighted the success of a number of partnership schemes in the on-trade in tackling problems associated with binge drinking. Pubwatch is a national voluntary scheme, which sets up communication links in local areas between pubs and the police. Pubs get a quicker response from police when there are violent incidents, and pubs can warn each other about troublemakers moving their way. The Metropolitan Police refers to statistics showing a decrease in violent offences across the areas where a Pubwatch scheme is in operation.

Another example of a successful local partnership scheme for the on-trade is Best Bar None, a local accreditation scheme where pubs, bars and clubs are judged according to criteria such as having crime reduction measures in place, discouraging binge drinking, and having CCTV coverage. The schemes are coordinated by various partners including the police, local authorities and NHS. The Government quotes statistics showing the success of the scheme in Doncaster and Durham in particular. In Doncaster, violent crime has reduced in the town centre by 49.1 per cent since the introduction of the scheme in 2006. In Durham, violent crimes against the person fell by 57.6 per cent between 2006/07 and 2012.³²

Are cumulative impact zones effective?

As noted above, there have been efforts in Blackpool and Manchester to restrict the availability of alcohol, through limiting the number of premises licensed to sell alcohol, and the time over which it can be sold. In Blackpool, there are cumulative impact zones in place for on-trade premises in the city centre, and for off-trade premises in four wards. Police have requested that an early morning restriction order be put in place to cover 14 streets with high levels of crime, so affected premises will be unable to sell alcohol after 3am. Another measure is the designated public place order in effect in since 2001, which gives police the right to restrict public consumption in the area. The justification for introducing cumulative impact policies and an early morning restriction order in Blackpool focus on the level of crime rather than evidence for the effectiveness of these particular measures in reducing binge drinking in particular, as we discuss below.

Overall, across the UK, the latest data available suggest that 93 licensing authorities have now adopted a cumulative impact policy in their area.³³ Most cumulative impact policies apply exclusively to the on-trade, where, anecdotally, they are effective in tackling levels of antisocial behaviour outside pubs and clubs. A public health official we spoke to in Blackpool claimed that the cumulative impact policy for the on-trade had

been effective as one tool in a package of measures that have led to a reduction in crime rates and hospital admissions related to the town's night-time economy.

Cumulative impact policies can also apply to the off-trade, though take-up of the measure has been limited. Former guidance under the Licensing Act 2003 stated that it would normally not be justifiable to adopt a cumulative impact policy in the case of the off-trade, but as part of the 2012 Alcohol Strategy the Government made clear that they can apply to the off-trade as well. Blackpool was apparently the first local authority to enact a cumulative impact policy that applied exclusively to the off-trade and it was introduced in 2008 in order to tackle violent crime and domestic abuse. However, there is no robust evidence of its effectiveness to date.

The role of local shops in preventing harms of night-time economy

Our research suggests that local shops are already playing a role in preventing binge drinking and the harms of the night-time economy. But we also argue that, with support, local shops could be doing more.

The first point to consider is whether the mere presence of local shops is linked with the harms associated with binge drinking. While some academic research has sought to explore this relationship, there is very limited hard evidence that shows a causal link between limiting the number of off-licences and a reduction the harms associated with binge drinking or other alcohol-related problems. There is some academic evidence linking the density of off-licences to overall levels of alcohol consumption, but not specifically to levels of alcohol-related harm.

The most widely cited report is a 2009 review of international evidence by the University of Sheffield, commissioned by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence, which concludes that there is a positive relationship between increased outlet density and alcohol consumption.³⁴ However, the research does not show why this is: whether more off-licences

generate more demand for alcohol, or whether there are more off-licences to meet demand that already exists.

Alcohol Concern has also tried to draw a link between off-licence density and alcohol harms directly, claiming in a 2011 report entitled 'One on every corner' that 10 per cent of all alcohol-specific hospital admissions for under-18s (excluding London) are directly attributable to off-licence density. But the report admitted that its methods still only establish a correlation.³⁵

It is clear that more research needs to be done specifically regarding off-licences and alcohol-related harms. A public health official we spoke to in Blackpool said that although he believed that the off-licence cumulative impact policy was having a positive effect, it is difficult to quantify this given that a lot of the related harms go on 'behind closed doors'.

It is also clearly difficult to estimate the impact of a cumulative impact policy for off-licences in reducing alcohol-related harm when treated in isolation. Research at Glasgow University found that deprivation is a greater predictor of alcohol disruption in residential neighbourhoods than the presence of off-trade premises. This shows how multiple factors are often involved.

Moreover, we heard from local stakeholders in Blackpool that in many areas an off-licence was better than the alternative, an empty shop. Indeed, if there were no demand for the off-licence, then shops would not open – or if they did, they would not last long. A cumulative impact policy seeks to manipulate the normal local economy without compelling evidence that there is a strong link between off-licence density and alcohol harms. While some small and large retailers believed that controlling the number of licences was sensible, several believed that even if cumulative impact policies are good in principle, they are often procedurally unfair, favouring the bigger chain stores over smaller independents, or larger independents over smaller ones. One retailer reiterated concerns that cumulative impact policies would have the unintended consequence of being a barrier to new businesses.

It is unclear how local shops can tackle a culture of preloading at the point of sale

Local shops are sometimes blamed for fuelling trouble for the on-trade by selling alcohol to people who preload at home before they go out. It is unclear how local shops can prevent people from doing this while maintaining a viable business. It would be unfair, and certainly unrealistic, to demand that shops stop selling to people who they suspect will binge drink at home.

Most of the shop keepers we interviewed run promotions on alcohol, which may have the unintended consequence of encouraging preloading. However, the cheapest deals tend to be available not in local shops, but in supermarkets, where until recently stores have been able to sell at below cost price. As discussed in chapter 2, the Government considered banning promotions altogether in the off-trade, but decided against it because of a lack of evidence on its effectiveness.

One Co-op store spokesperson we spoke to said that the store did put in place a policy to limit the amount of alcohol purchased during promotional offers. But, as we argue in our recommendations, there need to be other incentives in place to stop young people drinking to excess before they enter the night-time economy if this is a concern for a particular local area. For example, we argue below that in areas with very high levels of alcohol-fuelled violence and crime, local authorities could consider banning individuals who are very obviously excessively drunk from entering city centres. This has been trialled in Watford, where police target very drunk individuals at train stations and getting out of taxis. Clubs and pubs should also be stricter about refusing entry to people who have clearly drunk to excess before they arrive. However, these initiatives would have to be preceded by widespread information awareness campaigns, and would require close monitoring to ensure that people were not unduly targeted based on ethnicity (as was the case with stop and search).

Retailers need support to deal with violent and aggressive behaviour

The argument that off-licences fuel trouble for the on-trade suggests that off-licences themselves have an easy ride. Yet, accounts from our fieldwork and interviews brought out the violence and abuse that some local shop workers experience frequently – even daily – because of alcohol. In fact, off-licence shops would be highly motivated to assist in efforts to mitigate the harms of binge drinking and the night-time economy.

In Blackpool, we interviewed one member of staff who had been punched by a drunk person in the shop; another reported a violent incident with a brick; and one member of staff was hospitalised by confronting someone over a theft. In Manchester, several retailers we interviewed have to deal with gangs of threatening youths. Smaller, isolated retailers, who may have less well-established links with police, can sometimes be particularly vulnerable. Larger retailers often have security personnel who act as a deterrent, but many unaffiliated independent shop owners are on their own – and sometimes there is only one person in smaller stores. Several managers of larger stores expressed sadness that most of their staff expected to receive some kind of abuse relating to alcohol as just part of the job. The shop worker who had been punched said: ‘You just deal with it.’

The same difficulties can be experienced by retailers who serve people who are drunk. The Licensing Act 2003 prohibits the sale of alcohol to somebody who is drunk, and the vast majority of retailers we interviewed said they comply, but some raised the question of how drunk somebody has to be before they are refused. It is also difficult to enforce. Although serving a drunk person is illegal, there were only ten convictions for this offence in 2012.³⁶

There is also a question of staff safety. Most managers we spoke to were clear that staff should not put themselves ‘at risk’. This was most clear, though, in the context of going outside the store to deal with antisocial behaviour. How to deal with drunk and disorderly behaviour inside the premises is more of a grey area, with less guidance for staff. Again, there is considerable discrepancy in the sector about this, and there needs to be much more clarity on what retailers can reasonably be expected to do

in relation to these difficult situations. As one Manchester councillor put it:

There is training on Challenge 25 and so on, but there is no training on how to deal with a person who is intoxicated or drunk. It must be very intimidating.

4 Street drinkers and dependent drinkers

He's pretty much an alcoholic until we can get him off, and the only other thing we can do is throw him to the wolves, and that's not something I or my staff would want to do.

The third issue we explore is dependent drinking, and in particular street drinking. The results of the national ACS survey from August show that, in general, most local shops do not report problems with dependent drinkers (about half say they have 'never' experienced a problem), or street drinkers (59 per cent say 'never').³⁷ But there are significant numbers of dependent drinkers in some areas of the UK – particularly deprived areas – including so-called 'street drinkers', a term typically used for homeless people with alcohol problems.

Historically, homeless street drinkers have always gravitated towards high-strength, low-cost products such as cheap sherry, and are now commonly thought to drink a range of white ciders. The Government and public health authorities argue that the easy availability of such alcohol products perpetuates street drinkers' addiction and can lead to antisocial behaviour, intimidation and alcohol-related crime in local areas. Others maintain chronic alcohol dependency but are not homeless and instead drink almost exclusively in their homes. Many in this group also rely on cheap, high-strength alcohol purchased from local shops, where many are regular customers.

Our research shows that many retailers have voluntarily chosen not to stock certain 'problem' drinks, for example, while others work with their customers to reduce their intake. However, there is little guidance provided to shop keepers about what is the best way to engage with known dependent drinkers. Moreover, shops tend to view a customer's decision to buy

alcohol as the buyer's 'human right', and one they have no power to restrict or comment on.

Issues relating to street drinking and dependent drinking were analysed primarily in our Blackpool and Ipswich case studies.

Ipswich is the 72nd most deprived local authority out of 294, and nine of the town's areas are in the top 10 per cent of deprived areas nationally. In 2009, 23.1 per cent of the 16+ population of Suffolk as a whole was classed as increasing and higher risk drinkers.³⁸ The high number of street drinkers in Ipswich led to the campaign Reducing the Strength, which is discussed below and in the next chapter. Ipswich also has a very high homeless population: 0.75 households per 1,000 are homeless, exceeding the national average of 0.60 and far exceeding the South East average of 0.37.³⁹ Research links street drinking with homelessness, and it is likely a very significant portion of Ipswich's street drinking community is homeless.

Blackpool also has more dependent drinkers than average. It has both the highest number of months of life lost attributable to alcohol in the UK and the highest rate of mortality from chronic liver disease. It has high levels of alcohol dependency. 45,700 people in Blackpool have an 'alcohol use disorder', 13 per cent above the national average, and between 7,000 and 9,000 residents are classified as dependent drinkers.⁴⁰ Stakeholders often attribute this to local deprivation, and dependent drinkers are particularly concentrated in deprived wards such as Bloomfield and Claremont where we focused our research. Local stakeholders told us that Bloomfield was the worst area in Blackpool for liver disease and hospital admissions.

Tackling street drinking and alcohol dependency

Dependent street drinking is a complex phenomenon that requires a suitably complex response from policy-makers. Dependent drinkers on the street often face a version of 'deep exclusion' – likely a complex mix of problems including poverty, homelessness, violence, drug abuse and long-term unemployment. Research suggests that tackling the price and

availability of alcohol would only scratch the surface of the problem, and could have negative unintended consequences. A representative from Addaction spoke to us of the importance of providing dependent drinkers with opportunities to partake in meaningful activities alongside conventional dependency treatments.

In its response to the Government's alcohol strategies in 2011, St Mungo's stated that over 44 per cent of its clients are dependent drinkers, whose most common drink is white cider, which contains 22.5 units of alcohol in a three litre bottle.⁴¹ While St Mungo's supported a minimum unit price, the report pointed out the limitations to a price-based approach:

*We do not believe that a minimum price would stop dependent users of alcohol from drinking, but do believe it would encourage them to reduce the amount of strong alcohol that they drink or switch to weaker drinks, reducing the harm caused.*⁴²

In the absence of a minimum unit price, some shops are removing 'problem' drinks from their shops and should be commended for their initiative. However, the evidence suggests that such approaches are not a magic bullet for solving problems around dependent and street drinking. Removing product lines or making them more expensive may just lead to some drinkers switching to a different product, having little overall effect on the level of consumption.⁴³ An additional concern expressed by stakeholders and retailers in Blackpool was that introducing a minimum price for alcohol would have the unintended consequence of expanding a black market for alcohol, which is already a concern for authorities. St Mungo's cited this in its response to the Government's Alcohol Strategy.

How local shops are tackling street drinking and alcohol dependency

The most discussed action that local shops can take to prevent street drinking and alcohol dependency is leading or participating in initiatives that seek to remove problematic

‘super-strength’ products. For example, the campaign Reducing the Strength is a joint initiative, led by Suffolk police and involving councillors and the East of England Co-operative Society, to tackle Ipswich’s problem with street drinking. Two-thirds of the town’s shops have voluntarily removed lines of cheap high-strength lagers and ciders. The initiative has brought a reduction in ‘street drinker events’ of around 50 per cent. These are instances reported by the public – often intimidating behaviour, shouting and swearing, or urinating in public.

Indeed, the local stakeholders we spoke to believed the scourge of street drinking was primarily driven by certain very cheap, high-strength products available in off-licence shops. The following quotation is indicative:

I can’t understand why anyone would drink cheap super-strength alcohol other than to become blotto. It wouldn’t be for the taste. People buy it to get off their brains. That’s why it’s dangerous.

Several of the smaller independent retailers whom we interviewed also made an explicit link between white ciders and problematic customers. In some instances these shop owners had stopped selling those products altogether. In others, stores had placed their own premium on the price of those products in an attempt to reduce demand.

In some areas, product bans will be compulsory. For example, in Blackpool, we heard that the licensing authority is placing a condition on new licences that retailers do not sell ciders and lagers stronger than 5.5 per cent alcohol by volume (ABV).

However, some independent shop owners whom we spoke to said they would continue to stock cheap high-strength alcohol because there is ‘legitimate demand’ for those products in their communities (from people who do not have problems with excessive alcohol consumption). One shop owner in Blackpool actually kept certain high-strength lines ‘artificially low’ in price, because he ‘knew how much it meant’ to dependent drinkers.

The action of the Blackpool retailer is not entirely surprising and demonstrates a bigger problem for the sector,

which is that there is no clear national message for the off-trade in how to deal with excessive alcohol consumption, as there is for underage drinking. The Blackpool retailer felt that providing cheap alcohol to dependent drinkers was necessary because of their addiction; indeed this individual was a drugs and alcohol counsellor outside working hours.

We came across other examples of retailers trying to do the right thing by excessive drinkers. One retailer in a small rural shop was trying to wean one of his customers off high-strength alcohol. He argued that if he stopped selling those drinks to him, the customer would simply go elsewhere, and this would be like ‘sending him to the wolves’. There is therefore a sense in which ‘the right thing’ to do in these types of circumstances is very much down to the individual seller.

These issues highlight the shortcomings of voluntary bans. Moreover, the success of the Ipswich initiative was the fact that coordinated product bans were supplemented through targeted and intensive action to get street drinkers to go into rehab. But designing suitable interventions can itself prove incredibly difficult. One stakeholder in Ipswich said that of 12 street drinkers persuaded into rehab in the last year, all had relapsed. Part of the problem was that the street drinker community had become like a family, and going to see old friends had caused a relapse. Outreach workers trying to help dependent street drinkers face the challenge that alcohol makes those people much less responsive to people trying to help. Thus, tackling street drinking requires a comprehensive approach. As one retailer from Ipswich put it: ‘Just withdrawing the product is not enough.’

Shops need support and advice to determine when not to serve somebody alcohol

Our research suggests that there is a significant grey area and general confusion about the whether or not retailers should refuse to serve dependent drinkers. These drinkers are frequently described as non-offensive when they are in store – not drunk and disorderly. The key question posed by retailers is therefore

‘on what grounds do they refuse the sale?’ Most retailers who reported issues with dependent drinkers believed that individuals have the right to buy alcohol so long as they are not drunk at the point of sale. In some instances, this right would even trump the protests of family members who visit the shop to ask that their relative not be served. At the very least, in the absence of guidance or instruction from authorities, shop keepers have little reason to refuse sales.

Similarly, there is confusion around the role of retailers in promoting public health campaigns. Some stakeholders argue that the point of sale is potentially an important time to intervene in order to promote ‘sensible drinking’. Our research found that some of the larger retailers from the ACS participate through funding Drinkaware campaigns, and some use posters and digital displays to display messages, while one retailer is considering putting ABV content on shelves. Smaller independent retailers often have less of a role, perhaps because they lack resources or have a different relationship with customers. A representative from Drinkaware spoke to us about the need to sell the benefits to all retailers of participating in their work.

Many retailers also spoke to us of their responsibility to the community in which they serve, and said this was an equally strong motivation to making a profit. This sense of responsibility among retailers tends to be more common in tight-knit rural communities where small local shop keepers often know most of their customers, rather than among staff working in larger urban stores. Thus there is potentially space for greater partnerships between the charities that work to support dependent drinkers, and those shops that are at the heart of tight-knit rural communities with high levels of alcohol-related harm.

5 Partnerships: local shops as part of the solution

Across the country, local strategic partnerships have become standard practice to tackle a huge variety of social problems. In some local areas, partnership working has been particularly effective, and these areas often serve as best practice examples to others. Partnership working has also been a key feature of tackling alcohol-related harms – particularly with respect to public order – and will become increasingly so with the devolution of responsibility to local health and wellbeing boards.

One of our research aims was to look closely at examples of effective partnerships that include local shops and retailers in tackling alcohol-related harms. This chapter analyses the relationships that exist between retailers and the various bodies involved in tackling alcohol misuse: police, trading standards officers, local council licensing authorities and health and social work authorities. We wanted to identify the drivers of these partnerships, how they operate and what makes them successful. We were also interested in the extent to which small and independent shops are involved.

While we chose two of our case studies (Kent and Ipswich) with the specific aim of analysing effective partnerships, we also offer insights from Manchester and Blackpool, and our telephone interviews. In Manchester and Blackpool we did not find any examples of formal partnerships involving retailers, although there were plenty of examples of informal contacts, particularly with police, and representatives from all these bodies shop in local convenience stores from time to time.

In Kent we explore the operation of a community alcohol partnership. These partnerships are voluntary local schemes involving retailers that are designed to reduce underage drinking and alcohol-related antisocial behaviour. In Edenbridge, Kent, the community alcohol partnership was established to help

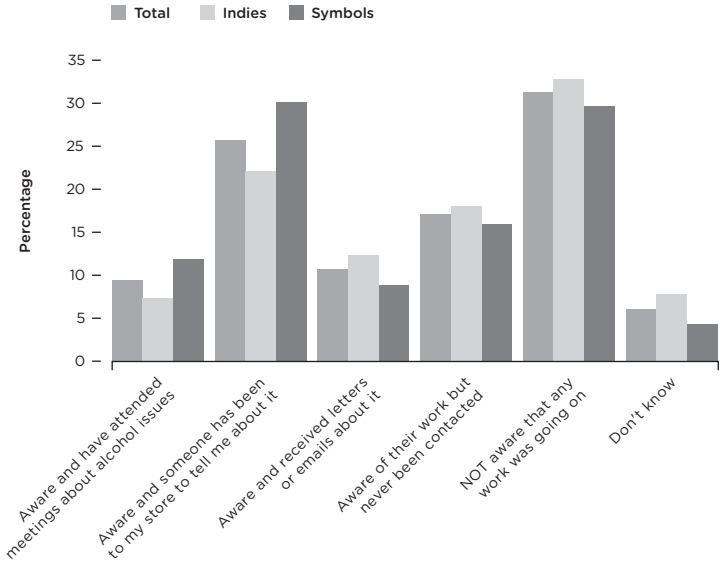
police, trading standards offices and other bodies to support retailers to enforce the law and find ways to address the problem of underage drinking. As mentioned above, in Ipswich we look at a voluntary partnership campaign known as the Reducing the Strength. The police and the East of England Co-operative Society led this scheme, with the aim of targeting chronic street drinkers by restricting sales of certain high-strength, low-cost products.

Overall, our research suggests that although there are some excellent examples of effective local partnerships, more needs to be done to involve retailers in these partnerships, particularly in information-gathering and decision-making. As a result of this communication gap, those implementing policies nationally and locally risk missing opportunities to limit and address such harms, and anecdotal evidence suggests that local shops are seen as the cause of the problem rather than part of the solution.

The involvement of local shops in strategies to tackle alcohol harms

In its Voice of Local Shops of August 2013 the ACS asked independent shop owners whether they were aware that ‘most local authorities, working with the local police, have a strategy for how they will tackle alcohol-related harms in their area’ (figure 1).⁴⁴ The survey was of both symbol group shops – stores independently run but organised by a wholesaler, such as Spar, Costcutter and Londis; and also unaffiliated independent stores (‘indies’). Approximately half of all independent shop owners (48 per cent) had either no awareness of these strategies (31 per cent) or were aware but had never been contacted about them (17 per cent). The other half of local shop owners were aware and had had various levels of contact: while one in four said that someone had been to the store to tell them about the local strategy only one in ten said that they had attended meetings about alcohol issues. A further 11 per cent said that they had received a letter or email about the local strategy.

Figure 1 **The statements that best describe respondents' awareness of the local authority's strategy to tackle alcohol-related harm in their area**

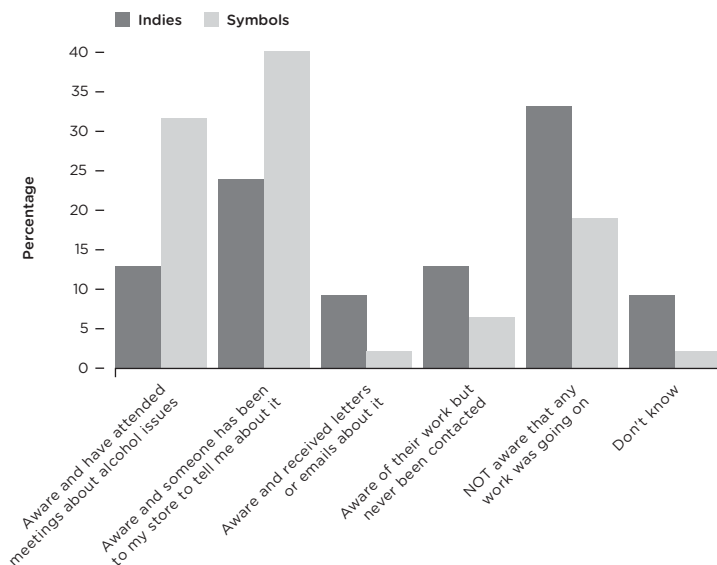


Source: Voice of Local Shops survey⁴⁵

Staff in symbol group shops were more likely to be aware of local authority efforts to tackle alcohol issues, and be in contact with local authorities and police than the unaffiliated independents. Symbol group shop keepers were more likely to have attended a local meeting (12 per cent vs 7 per cent) and to have had someone visit their shop to tell them about a local strategy (30 per cent vs 22 per cent). Unaffiliated independent store keepers were slightly more likely to say that they had received a letter or email about local schemes (12 per cent vs 9 per cent).

While these differences are not hugely significant, they still suggest that more needs to be done to ensure that unaffiliated

Figure 2 **The difference between unaffiliated independents and symbol group shops in Wales**



Source: Voice of Local Shops survey⁴⁶

independent storekeepers are aware of local alcohol strategies and regularly contacted about that work. This is particularly true in Wales, where there was a substantial gap between unaffiliated independents and symbol group stores, as seen in figure 2.

Overall, 79 per cent of representatives from symbol group shops had at least some awareness of local strategies compared with 59 per cent of those from unaffiliated independents. Moreover, face-to-face contact was more common among symbol group shop keepers in Wales. Just under one in three symbol group shop keepers had attended a meeting compared with one in eight unaffiliated independent retailers, while 40 per cent of symbol group shops had been visited compared with 24 per cent of unaffiliated independents.

The survey also revealed significant regional variations that often stretched across symbol group shops and unaffiliated independents. The least likely groups to have attended a meeting were independent shop keepers in the East, symbol group shop keepers in West Midlands (2 per cent) and symbol group stores and unaffiliated independents in the South East (4 per cent). Those most likely to have attended a meeting were shop keepers in Wales (21 per cent), and those from symbol group stores in Scotland (18 per cent) and the North East (16 per cent).

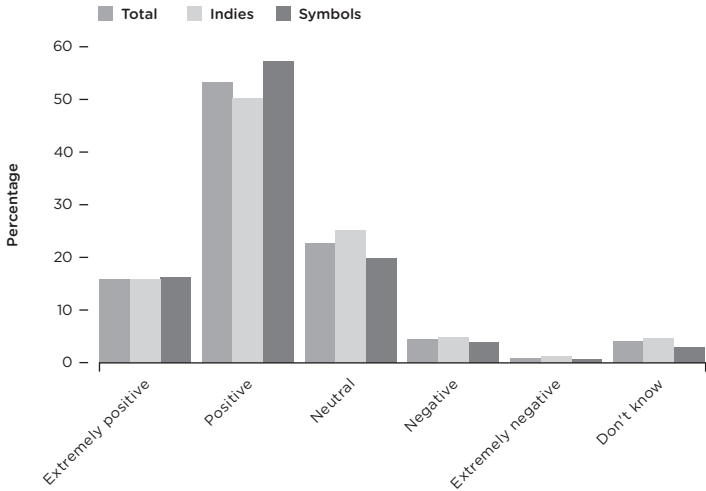
Police and retailers

In our qualitative research we asked retailers about their contact with local police, local authorities, public health organisations, trading standards offices, and any other bodies. By far the most recognised and trusted agency was the police. Most shop keepers said they are not really involved with other agencies – a very common answer was ‘we don’t bother them, they don’t bother us’.

In general, most local shop keepers we interviewed had a good relationship with police and community support officers. ‘If you have a good working relationship with them, they can tell you who [trouble-making] people are,’ said one store owner. This finding is backed up by the ACS national survey Voice of Local Shops, the results of which are presented in figure 3, which shows that more than two-thirds of shops report positive relationships with the police and/or the local licensing authority. Yet, unaffiliated independent shops were more likely to report negative relationships with police and licensing authorities.

In our qualitative sample, particularly strong relationships with police were reported in rural communities with ‘local bobbies’ or police community support officers, where police were proactive in engaging shop owners rather than visiting only when there was trouble. And contrary to the findings above, this was particularly true of the unaffiliated independent shop keepers whom we spoke to. This observation should be tempered by the fact that police in rural areas are likely to deal with a different set of problems than those that exist in tough

Figure 3 **How local shops view their relationship with police and the local licensing authority**



Source: Voice of Local Shops survey⁴⁷

urban environments. In Blackpool, police say they pay visits to stores in areas where there is a low incidence of crime to encourage retailers to adopt the right attitude rather than being punitive when problems occur. This is generally viewed in a positive way, but police in Blackpool say that resources are being stretched.

In some areas, relationships with police are mixed or strained. Some retailers in Manchester said they prefer to deal with problems themselves where possible, in part because of a fear that police may not be able to respond in time. One shop keeper said that his boss might assume a police call out would suggest he was not managing the situation, and put his employment at risk. Some stores in Blackpool and Manchester reported a level of self-policing, at least of theft, which in one instance has led to a hospitalisation. From the other side, some representatives from police whom we spoke to were wary of some

of the smaller independent retailers, who they believed were trying to ‘keep their heads below the parapet’.

Trading standards offices and retailers

Trading standards offices are the second key stakeholder to work with retailers, after the police. Our research suggests that many shop keepers are fearful of trading standards offices, primarily because they only engage with trading standards officers in punitive settings. Our case study and phone interviews with shop keepers showed that most shops have very little to do with trading standards offices other than being subject to test-purchasing, which in some cases has been scaled back for budgetary reasons.

We heard that licences are not reviewed regularly but instead when there is a serious misdemeanour – often repeat offences of selling to underage young people.⁴⁸ A few of the larger retailers and symbol group independents reported being involved with trading standards offices through attending training sessions and workshops.

Trading standards offices are perceived by many shop keepers – especially those in smaller independents – as being strictly enforcement agencies, and shop keepers would not pick up the phone to ask for advice. Changing this view of licensing agencies is a key objective of community alcohol partnerships. Our research suggests that the best relationships between police and trading standards officers and retailers are proactive, rather than reactive and purely enforcement based.

Shops rarely report having relationships with any public health agencies

Very few retailers reported having any relationship with public health authorities (only six whom we spoke to). However, one chain retailer claimed to be a ‘big supporter of public health campaigns’ such as Drinkaware’s Don’t Let Drink Sneak Up on You, which the store incorporates in digital media such as the screen display above the tills.

This retailer thought hard about the store's public health responsibility towards its clients, and the effectiveness of any intervention it could make. Generally speaking, the representative from the store believes that alcohol misuse is a societal problem not a retailer problem. Education is key to changing societal attitudes, but retailers are wary of appearing 'preachy' to customers and driving them away.

This retailer concluded that the store's most effective contribution is through making lots of little interventions, such as putting an alcohol-free option next to alcohol shelves, or offering alternatives (such as products of different ABV content) when there is a promotion of alcohol. Managers are also considering giving the ABV content on shelves with alcoholic products.

The company has signed up to the Government's Responsibility Deal with industry, which seeks voluntary pledges to tackle health issues like alcohol abuse and obesity. However, the scheme's lack of enforceability has been criticised by representatives from health organisations, who refused to participate. These include Alcohol Concern, the British Association for the Study of the Liver, the British Liver Trust, the British Medical Association, the Institute of Alcohol Studies and the Royal College of Physicians.

In general, larger retailers are more likely than the smaller independents to participate in public health campaigns, depending on the direction from the top. Unaffiliated independents often have fewer resources for such initiatives, and are more likely to develop a personal relationship with their customers for which such mass campaigns may be inappropriate.

The relationships between shops

Some shop keepers report having good informal relationships with retailers in other stores, working together for example to report antisocial behaviour, or to keep an eye out if staffing levels are reduced because someone has to make an errand, such as to the bank. In general, though, it is more usual for shops to 'keep themselves to themselves'. There is also a marked culture

of suspicion among smaller shops fearful of the bigger chains' ability to undercut them or sell below cost to drive them out of business.

There are examples of effective partnerships from our retailer interviews, particularly in smaller communities. These range from joint marketing initiatives – Facebook groups encouraging local residents to shop in their community, for example – which may involve informal information sharing and sometimes petitioning of local authorities, to real time formalised networked connections such as radio links between stores.

Formal partnerships

Formal partnerships, such as community alcohol partnerships, are designed to change informal relationships for the better and create relationships where they did not previously exist. Most local authorities now have a local partnership for tackling alcohol-related harm, but, as we noted above when discussing the ACS survey, a substantial minority of local shop keepers – 31 per cent – are completely unaware of local authority strategies or partnerships. Of those who are aware, only a very small proportion – one in ten – has attended meetings.

What leads to successful partnerships?

Our research shows that where strong and lasting bonds have emerged, it is often the result of a committed individual or group who has motivated and energised a community. While not every retailer, policeman or woman, or local councillor will have the same levels of motivation as those in our examples of best practice, there are some initiatives that merit wider adoption.

The Community Alcohol Partnership in Kent

Edenbridge in Kent is a small market town, with only six off-licence shops, and it is part of the Kent Community Alcohol Partnership (KCAP). It is held up as a best-case illustration of a well-implemented community alcohol partnership. After the

introduction of the scheme, total recorded crime fell by 46 per cent between 2008 and 2009, in comparison with an average 16 per cent fall in crime in the two other areas involved in the KCAP – Canterbury City Centre and Westwood Cross.⁴⁹

The scheme was led primarily by trading standards officers and the police, but it had good support from retailers. Some shops in Edenbridge did not have an ID policy before the community alcohol partnership was set up, but all now have strict policies to deal with underage drinking, including till prompts and staff training.

Stakeholders attribute the success of the community alcohol partnership in Edenbridge to it being a tight-knit community in a clearly defined, discrete area, and to the provision of diversionary youth activities. The Co-op, which had previously reported youths causing problems in its car park, hosted activities such as painting and badminton there. An employment minibus was also provided. One stakeholder commented: ‘I think there’s a very clear link between the level and input of youth work, and the alcohol-related issues that we experience in Edenbridge.’ Other benefits include police helping clear problem crowds from outside a store.

Reducing the Strength - Ipswich

Another example of a successful partnership is the Reducing the Strength campaign in Ipswich. Launched in September 2012, the voluntary scheme is supported by two-thirds of the 122 stores serving alcohol in the town.⁵⁰ As part of the scheme, participants agree not to sell ‘super-strength’ alcohol, defined as lager, beer and cider with an ABV of 6.5 per cent or over.

It was commonly felt in Ipswich that super-strength alcohol is bought primarily by those with alcohol-dependency problems, or young or underage people, and policy and health workers and the police typically associate those products with health problems for the individual, and crime and antisocial behaviour. The campaign was designed with dependent street drinkers in mind, which is ‘at the heart of the problems in Ipswich’, according to one stakeholder.

There was a large number of street drinkers in Ipswich, and police received a lot of complaints from local businesses whose customers were put off by what they perceived to be aggressive behaviour and begging. The council initially responded in various ways, for example, by removing benches popular with the street drinking community from outside Marks & Spencer, but knew they had to engage with these drinkers in the longer term. The street drinking community itself was thought to be vulnerable after a number of murders took place in the community.

One of the key aims of the scheme was education, both for individuals consuming these products, and in the form of shop staff training. Estimates of the number of dependent street drinkers in Ipswich vary, but stakeholders say their number has been significantly reduced thanks to the scheme, with some persuaded to go into rehab. Retailers report a reduction in assaults on staff and thefts. For example, in the six months following the launch of the campaign (September 2012 to March 2013), 94 'street drinker events' were reported to police compared with 191 that occurred between September 2011 and March 2012 – a drop of 49.2 per cent. From February 2012 until February 2013, crime was down 14 per cent. In a survey, the number of local business representatives stating that there was a high level of street drinking on their premises was 20 per cent lower than before the start of the initiative.⁵¹

It is important to note that some claim there has been no drop off in profits or sales as retailers in Ipswich since the implementation of Reducing the Strength as shops attract different customers or customers shift their buying preferences. One stakeholder remarked that retailers do not make a great margin on a cheap can of lager (costing 60p), particularly if someone swipes a jar of coffee on the way out.

Successful ways of getting independents involved

The voluntary schemes in Edenbridge and Ipswich were agency-led in clearly defined areas with an active retailer as a core partner (the Co-operative in Edenbridge and the East of England Co-operative Society in Ipswich).

While stakeholders attribute the success of the Edenbridge experience to its size and the low density of off-licences, the London Borough of Islington, where there are 32 off-licences in a highly concentrated area, also presents a success story. Before the community alcohol partnership was in place a test purchase was carried out in all off-licences in the area, and a significant number failed. This was used as the basis of recruitment to the partnership. A positive effort was also made to engage off-licence owners through personal contact. A number of cultural and language barriers had to be overcome when trying to engage businesses in the community alcohol partnership.

The community alcohol partnership's activities included training sessions for retailers designed to promote the law, to help them develop the skills and confidence to challenge young people attempting to buy alcohol, or those they suspected were involved in proxy sales, and to provide advice on how to detect illicit alcohol.⁵²

The community alcohol partnership has led to greatly improved relationships between retailers and the police and trading standards offices. The number of young people recorded as being accused or suspected of alcohol-related offences reduced by 23.5 per cent from December 2010 to December 2011. Failed test purchases fell from 37 per cent in May 2011 to 0 per cent in January 2012.⁵³

Another successful method of recruiting retailers has been used by Brighton & Hove's Business Crime Reduction Partnership.⁵⁴ For a fee of £1 per day, retailers are given radios that they can use to communicate with each other and to access an online database, where they can report on troublesome individuals and groups. Currently, the scheme covers 250 licensed premises, as well as other venues that suffer from alcohol-related antisocial behaviours such as takeaways. If an individual is involved in two or more instances of trouble that person is banned from all premises for 12 months.

Police see their role as helping responsible retailers as much as they can, but they review the licences of retailers who cannot manage their premises. Support workers say that early identification is most effective in addressing alcohol problems,

and that retailers could play a role in helping other authorities with this, for example giving customers who are regularly drunk or buying alcohol a police or public health stamped card.

There has been a consistent decline in alcohol-related crime in Brighton over the past five years. The relationship of licensed premises with each other and with the police is a key reason for this.⁵⁵

There are similarities with the store Shopwatch scheme, an online information sharing service used across the UK by police, councils and partners to combat crime and antisocial behaviour.

Challenges remaining

Partnerships are not a panacea. Ipswich's Reducing the Strength is credited for reducing alcohol-related ills, but police say it is one tool in the toolbox. The Reducing the Strength initiative is indeed complemented by other partnership initiatives where retailers have less of a role, such as Operation Start Afresh, which focuses on rehabilitating the street drinking community, or the Best Bar None scheme among on-licence retailers to encourage best practice in bars and nightclubs. The Community Support Partnership helps vulnerable families through projects such as the Family Intervention Project, 'Parents are People' six week course for parents, or Ipswich parenting hubs.

It is often difficult to find sufficient resources to undertake and maintain initiatives like these, particularly in times of austerity. The Islington community alcohol partnership had 'run into difficulties', according to one stakeholder, largely because of funding issues. It is resource-intensive for trading standards officers to contact every off-licence owner personally and to run training workshops in different languages (not all shop owners are comfortable speaking English).

Many of those interviewed pinpoint education as key to tackling alcohol ills, both for the consumer and the retailer. Although there can be a small role for retailers in public health campaigns, the general lack of awareness in the UK about the health effects of over-consumption of alcohol is largely beyond the scope of this research. However, we believe that independent

retailers could benefit from guidance in knowing when and how to refuse alcohol sales, particularly to difficult customers. One retailer, for example, reported a ‘non-confrontation’ policy – a readiness to serve people whom staff think will otherwise cause trouble, even if they are drunk.

We should also beware thinking that an initiative that works in one place can be easily replicated elsewhere or scaled up. A representative from one large retail chain said that their stores in Nottingham would not participate in a similar Reducing the Strength scheme because staff feared that colluding with other retailers to restrict the sale of a product could infringe competition law. This retailer has independently decided to trial a ban of very similar super-strength products in a number of its own stores.

In general, there is a significant discrepancy between the capacity of large chain stores, and small independent stores to tackle alcohol-related ills. For example the East of England Co-operative Society is launching a Freedom from Fear campaign for staff, who are given cards to hand to customers who complain at refusal. The cards have contact details designed to ‘take the sting out of rejection’ and to shift responsibility of handling the problem away from the shop worker. Its stores are at least double staffed, and fitted with panic buttons and links to a 24-hour-operated control centre with audio in store, so shop workers can call in central help to deal with problems remotely.

On its own, such a system is beyond the capacity of a small independent retailer, although an extension of the scheme giving police contact details on the card or a radio network such as the one that operates in Brighton could be possible.

We found that small independent shops are less likely to be members (especially proactive members) of local alcohol partnerships and initiatives. In general, partnership schemes initially attract support from successful larger stores with larger profit margins and resources, including staff. Smaller stores can be more focused on the short-term downsides (time constraints, loss of product lines) than the long-term benefits (attracting clientele who were put off by crowds of super-strength customers). Figuring out a way for small independents to

become involved without losing business must be a key priority for a comprehensive partnership scheme. It is important to note, however, that we came across examples of small independent retailers who were highly proactive in engaging with partnerships and the local community. And although there were considerable resource constraints for unaffiliated independent shops, it does not follow that large retailers and symbol group stores are inevitably good, while unaffiliated independents are inevitably bad. In fact, there are more and less proactive and responsible retailers within all shop types.

In the rare instances where retailers behave in a manner deemed irresponsible, relations between shops and authorities may need to become more enforcement based, for example with regular visits from the police or community officers. Such arrangements are best determined locally, as blanket guidance could be wasteful and potentially counterproductive. In addition, the extent and nature of alcohol-related harms differs across the country, requiring different and individual solutions.

6 Recommendations

The aim of our research has been to show the role that local shops play in combating alcohol harms in their local communities. Below we offer recommendations on how that role can be strengthened. As we highlighted in the introduction, there are a number of reasons why local shops and the off-licence trade are currently under the spotlight. Changing trends of alcohol consumption are leading to a larger percentage of alcohol being purchased in off-licence shops and consumed at home. This presents a number of regulatory challenges to tackle the harmful aspects of excessive alcohol consumption.

Since the Coalition Government failed to bring in a minimum unit price for the sale of alcohol, it is now looking at alternative approaches to demonstrate that it is still tough on alcohol harms. Pressure is being placed on producers and retailers to take voluntary actions on the products that are thought to cause the most damage. Responsibility for making decisions about how to approach alcohol harms now rests primarily with local authorities and other local partners. This is the right approach in many ways, as the harms of alcohol consumption are by no means evenly spread throughout the country. In fact, many are concentrated in specific towns and local areas, and it is right that tough initiatives are confined to these areas in order to target the problem.

Our research attempts to help inform those strategies by highlighting the evidence of effectiveness more generally as well as the specific role that local shops can play. As we saw in the chapters above, many in the off-trade are taking steps to tackle alcohol-related harms relating to underage drinking, dependent drinking and binge drinking. Taking action on underage sales is the most ingrained response, explained in part because of clear guidelines and regulations. Tackling dependent drinking and

binge drinking brings more grey areas and questions: should all shops restrict lines of cheap, high-strength alcohol? How drunk is too drunk when it comes to refusing a sale? To what extent do local shops have public health responsibilities?

Shopkeepers have a limited – but nonetheless important – moment of contact with purchasers of alcohol. It is first important to recognise the things retailers and local shopkeepers already do. Shops are already required to undertake a number of as part of being a licensed seller of alcohol. Moreover, many shops go above and beyond their statutory requirements, both formally (with better training of staff and support) and informally (looking out for regular customers who are dependent drinkers).

Larger stores have the capacity to have more sophisticated staff training on underage sales and dealing with conflict. Larger stores also have corporate social responsibility to think about, and so are more likely to be dealt directly with public health agencies. In contrast, resource constraints can be a significant challenge for smaller independents. This is certainly not true everywhere, there are some exceptional standards in other small shops, but building the capacity of smaller independents should remain a priority.

Addressing the demand-side of alcohol consumption is vital to tackling alcohol-related harms. Given the extent and complexity of the problem of alcohol misuse, there is no silver bullet and no single solution, but there is almost universal agreement among those involved in tackling alcohol misuse that evidence-based education programmes. Moreover, as previous Demos reports *Feeling the Effects* and *Under the Influence* have demonstrated, it is essential to include parents, in order to shift the culture away from excessive drinking and reduce alcohol harms in the next generation.⁵⁶

Our research shows that the responsibilities regarding the sale of alcohol to persons already drunk or proxy sales for those underage are poorly defined. Our respondents had significantly varied views on the ability of shopkeepers to determine the intended use of alcohol once it is taken outside a shop, and the extent of their responsibility to the wider societal ills of over-

consumption. We argue that there needs to be further clarity on how retailers can be responsible.

Our recommendations are listed below.

General

Local authorities and health and wellbeing boards must ensure that local shops are at the heart of strategic partnerships to tackle alcohol harms

As we saw from the Voice of Local Shops survey, almost half of all local shops are either unaware of local strategies to tackle alcohol harms, or have not been contacted by local authorities about them. Moreover, only 1 in 10 has attended a meeting on alcohol-related issues and 1 in 4 shops have had someone visit their shop to discuss alcohol-related issues. Local authorities need to prioritise engagement with small independent shops in particular. Plus, our survey shows that some regional areas are better than others; these findings should act as a catalyst for the poor performing regions to improve their engagement.

Police and trading standards officers should proactively seek to establish contact and good relations with shops, particularly small independents

Most interactions between shops and these agencies were in response to enforcement issues. As a result, some independent retailers might be fearful or hesitant about engaging with them. The most effective relationships were those characterised by more regular communication and contact between these agencies and shops. This was often in the case of clearly defined partnerships and initiatives aimed at achieving a mutual objective, as was the case in Ipswich and Kent.

Shops should be encouraged to take part in local partnership schemes by offering financial incentives such as free support and staff training

Requiring shops to take part in such initiatives will not ensure that they have positive attitudes about them or a strong

commitment to partnership. Part of the work therefore is to sell the benefits of schemes to shop owners. All evidence from our research points to the fact that actions on alcohol-related harm can be good not only for the community but also for business, and this message needs to be communicated. Moreover, as we heard, shop keepers are often on the frontline of violent or aggressive behaviour from intoxicated customers. Offering support to shops in this regard – such as free staff training, or the provision of panic buttons – as part of the benefits of participating in a partnership scheme could help to change attitudes and inspire greater commitment on the part of shop keepers. With police budgets already stretched, the cost of these activities could be recouped from the introduction of late-night levies, or could be provided by the larger brand shops and supermarkets as their contribution to support small and independent businesses on diverse high streets.

We also specify that there need to be clearly defined limits to the burdens that can be placed on retailers in this regard. For example, there may be significant constraints on the ability of some smaller independent retailers to go along to meetings. This should be recognised, for example, by scheduling meetings infrequently (once a year, as in the case of community alcohol partnerships), giving enough notice for shop owners to make arrangements to attend them, making special visits to shop keepers who cannot attend them, and providing an online retailer forum. Otherwise, such requirements could be overly burdensome.

Targeting underage drinking

Local authority and health experts should run information campaigns aimed at parents to shift attitudes on the dangers of underage drinking

In chapter 2 we highlighted evidence showing that most alcohol consumed by underage young people comes from parents or older relatives and friends. While there remains a live debate about the best way to introduce young people to alcohol, the younger a child drinks to the point of drunkenness

the higher the risk of them developing drinking problems later in life.

Local authorities need to focus on communicating the dangers of underage drinking and particularly unsupervised drinking. This should include awareness campaigns aimed at reducing proxy purchasing by making it clear that this is illegal.

This awareness raising could be accomplished through persuasion and targeted information campaigns run in shops, schools, places of employment and GP surgeries. These campaigns need to emphasise the health harms associated with underage drinking, and the increased likelihood that children will develop alcohol problems later in life. Many parents do not see the harm in allowing their underage children to drink, but this myth needs to be robustly countered. The messages should also aim to support parents in a tough approach, even if they themselves are drinking excessive amounts: Demos research and other research suggests that some parents with alcohol issues adopt a liberal approach to their children drinking because they feel guilty about their own drinking behaviour.

Local shops should use social sanctions and make clear to customers that proxy purchasers will be banned from the shop and face the threat of prosecution

While it is important to raise the stakes for proxy purchasers through increasing penalties, the real problem remains that proxy purchasers are very difficult to identify. It is therefore crucial that action is taken to dissuade potential proxy purchasers before the event. We know from behavioural economics that what people see at the point of sale can have a dramatic impact on consumer behaviour. We recommend therefore that shops put up posters at the till – within sight of customers – to make clear that proxy purchasers face a ban and potentially prosecution. These posters could include photos of adults or parents to give the impression of ‘social shaming’ (‘your face could appear here’).

Adults caught proxy purchasing should be subject to an alcohol-related community sentence

Unless they witness money exchange in front of the shop, or youths harassing customers, it is difficult for shop owners to determine whether a proxy purchase is taking place. Local authorities need to shift the burden onto the parents and adults who are making the purchase. We recommend that adults caught proxy purchasing are subject to a community sentence, set at the current minimum of 40 hours unpaid work. This work should be alcohol-related, and could include participating in respite services during peak hours of the night-time economy (such as a town centre drunk bus, or street support service), or clearing up bottles and litter the following morning. There could be further provision for proxy purchasers to work with alcohol charities, or attend a course on alcohol harms. This needs to go alongside better enforcement of the current penalties, as statistics show that proxy purchasers are rarely being punished.

Police and local authorities should clamp down on unsupervised drinking in public places and ensure the provision of diversionary activities for young people

In addition to changing the law around underage drinking in homes, police and local authorities should get tougher about policing public places – such as parks and car lots – where underage drinkers congregate. However, such tough enforcement measures must go hand-in-hand with ensuring that there are positive activities for young people in local areas. Evidence from the Kent case study shows that providing diversionary activities for young people is essential to reducing underage drinking. This should include sports leagues and events, arts and crafts, and other extracurricular activities that are fun and appealing to young people. Government and local authorities must recognise that there is a tension between cutting youth services and reducing underage drinking.

Tackling binge drinking and the night-time economy

Police and local authorities should provide local shops with guidance on refusing sales to intoxicated customers and effective support when required

The decision of whether or not to serve a drunk person is clearly more difficult than refusing sale of alcohol to a minor. It also has consequences for other customers and the staff member refusing sale, who might feel threatened by aggressive and time-consuming behaviour, and do not have the same capacities as pubs and clubs to deal with these issues. We saw above that some larger retailers and independents with support from a symbol group have taken extra steps to deal with this issue, through better staffing, the introduction of a panic button or the provision of a card that helps take responsibility for the decision from the person on the till. Another model, used in Spar shops, provides a link to police over a tannoy system and live monitoring via a camera in the shop. This allows the police to communicate directly with unruly customers and warn them that police will be on the way. Local authorities and police should help spread these practices, particularly to small, independent shops with less capacity.

Individuals responsible for causing trouble in the night-time economy should either pay a substantial individual levy towards policing and NHS costs, or commit to community work in the night-time economy

Currently the financial penalties incurred by drunk and disorderly individuals themselves are minimal compared with the costs to police and the NHS. The Government has recently introduced the late-night levy, where premises licensed to sell alcohol have to pay towards policing costs in the local area. However, local authorities have been reluctant to implement this because they can only be implemented on a borough-wide level, rather than be targeted to specific problem areas.

We recommend introducing a levy on individuals, to place a higher financial burden on those directly responsible for alcohol-related antisocial behaviour. If high enough, such a levy should disincentivise this kind of behaviour, and potentially

reduce consumption. The principle of getting individuals to pay more and using independently operated ‘drunk tanks’ to free up police time was controversially raised by the Association of Chief Police Officers and Chief Constable Adrian Lee. While the principle is compelling, there are legal considerations when forcing someone to remain in the care of a ‘drunk tank’ if they are not under arrest.

In general, though, individuals should be required to pay towards the costs of public services that they receive as a result of irresponsible drinking. If an individual cannot afford to pay the individual levy then they could be involved in some kind of community service specifically related to the night-time economy, for example handing out leaflets outside a club on Saturday nights to promote responsible drinking, much in the same way that promoters do now. Individuals would need to be visible, and easily identifiable to enforce a sense of social shaming. A less punitive alternative could be taking part in outreach services to help vulnerable drunk people in the night-time economy, such as being part of a drunk bus service.

Police should refuse to allow very drunk individuals to enter city centres in areas with high levels of alcohol-related harms

The culture of preloading among young people before a night out is driven primarily by cost and the desire to have a great night out. However, a minimum unit price would still not prevent preloading because the purchase of a bottle of spirits to be consumed at home would still be cheaper than only drinking in pubs and clubs. One way of discouraging excessive preloading could be the threat of being sent home.

For example, police and local authorities could seek to identify excessively drunk people entering city centres and deny them access to the city centre, issue them a warning or require them to spend some time in a drunk tank sobering up. One example of this approach was the initiative All Together Watford, where police officers would challenge people who appeared drunk when entering Watford city centre. Those who were identified as drunk could have their alcohol seized, or could be

temporarily banned from the city centre through a section 27 notice. Police officers found there appeared to be a link between the initiative and a ‘significant reduction in violent crime’.⁵⁷

We would stress, however, that such an approach should only be considered in areas of very high levels of harms associated with the night-time economy, and such an initiative would need to be monitored to ensure that certain groups of citizens are not unduly targeted by police. These costs and benefits would need to be weighed and considered very carefully by local authorities. Nonetheless, the mere threat of such actions – bolstered by some initial enforcement – could have an impact on alcohol harms.

Tackling dependent drinkers

Local schemes should be developed that make it possible for substance misuse workers and other support charities to work with local shops and provide guidance about how to identify and deal with dependent drinkers

Our research found very little interaction between local shops and local charities that work to support dependent drinkers. While it is likely that, in some instances, substance misuse workers talk to local shop owners about particular people with alcohol problems, there appears to be very little guidance to shops and retailers overall. Thus, where appropriate (for example, in areas with high alcohol-related harms), local authorities should consider sending out substance misuse workers to advise local shops on how to deal with those customers with dependency issues. This would help local shops to train their staff to deal with these customers: for example, whether to deny them sales, steer them towards other less harmful products or provide them with information and engage with them in a manner that might encourage them to seek help. We heard some stories of recovering alcoholics telling local off-licences not to sell them alcohol no matter what they say.

Local authorities and retailers should work together on local partnerships that take comprehensive approaches to effectively tackle street drinking

The Ipswich initiative, which is based on effective collaboration between retailers and local agencies, is an interesting model, which could be replicated in other communities experiencing significant problems. The strength of Ipswich is its comprehensive approach achieving a significant amount through effective intervention against the individuals engaged in street drinking: the ban of certain products was combined with targeted intervention and support for those individuals who were causing problems with their street drinking. Similar schemes that focus solely on seeking voluntary agreement or imposed bans on certain products are unlikely to be effective. The role of bans generally requires further and fuller examination. Legal concerns remain and have to be resolved, as do concerns about displacement of street drinkers and non-participation by some local shops.

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Britain has a complicated relationship with alcohol. Despite the tabloid hysteria, the evidence shows that overall we are drinking less than we were a decade ago. At the same time, it is clear that some communities suffer from severe problems related to underage drinking, the harms of binge drinking and dependent street drinkers. The Government has not brought forward a strong national policy and in its absence, local authorities and Health and Wellbeing Boards who hold responsibility for public health will now lead the way.

Sobering Up investigates what is already happening in communities across the UK and highlights best practice in the hope it will become wider spread. The research looks particularly at the role of shops and incorporates the views of local councillors, council officers, public health representatives, police, trading standards, alcohol support charities and shop owners and workers. It also includes case study areas – Blackpool, Ipswich, Manchester, and Kent – chosen for their mix of alcohol-related problems, as well as their geographical and demographic range.

The report argues that each problem, in each community, is different and should be treated as such. However, some examples of best practice stand out. It recommends tackling the growing problem of proxy-purchasing through greater community policing of the offence and tougher punishments for those caught, and that city centres troubled by binge-drinking should do more to restrict access to those already very drunk. It also advocates more local partnerships to ensure local authorities, police and retailers are joined up – and that real effort is made to engage small retailers as well as the large chain retailers. Each of these measures could make a real contribution to tackling the alcohol-related harms that Britain still faces.

Jonathan Birdwell is Head of the Citizenship and Political Participation programme at Demos. Ian Wybron is a Junior Associate at Demos. Emma Vandore is a Demos Associate.

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