

**Stag & Hen Parties Scrutiny Review – Interim Report**

**Summary**

1. This report presents the findings of the Stag & Hen Parties Scrutiny Review Task Group to date, together with a draft review remit for this Committee's consideration.

**Background**

2. In September 2015 the Communities & Environment Policy & Scrutiny Committee met to consider a number of possible topics for scrutiny review during the 2015/16 municipal year.
3. Discussion took place regarding a proposed topic on Stag & Hen Parties. Members were made aware that a considerable amount of partnership working was ongoing to tackle alcohol related issues in the city on a Saturday and that stag and hen parties were only one element of a much wider issue. It was suggested that it may be difficult to separate the problems caused by stag and hen parties from those caused by other groups, so it may be useful for scrutiny review to look at the wider issues. Members commented on specific problems such as the offensive dress sometimes worn by stag and hen parties and boisterous behaviour which was upsetting to families. All agreed that there was a perception by some residents and visitors that York city centre was not the place to be on a Saturday afternoon or weekend evening.
4. In coming to a decision to review the topic, the Scrutiny Committee set up a Task Group to carry out the review on their behalf, made up of Councillors Mason, Kramm & Myers.
5. It was also agreed that some further investigation was required to identify an appropriate remit for the review, so it was requested that the Task Group undertake some initial work and report back to this meeting.

## Information Gathered to Date

6. At their first meeting held on 15 October 2015 the Task Group received information on:
  - The scale of the city's alcohol restriction zone – see Annex A
  - A recent meeting of Licensees, at which they signed up to a Code of Conduct for entry into licensed premises in York – see Annex B
  - The updated action plan from the Operation Erase Working Group<sup>1</sup> as agreed at its last meeting on 17 August 2015
7. The Task Group were made aware of a further meeting of the Working Group scheduled for 20 October 2015 and agreed it would be useful to attend to hear first hand the feedback from each organisation.
8. At that meeting, the Task Group learnt that a marketing campaign and other actions (agreed at the previous meeting of the Group in August 2015) were run as a pilot/trial throughout September. Prior to those actions being agreed, other measures had been in place and monitored. As a result it had become apparent that new actions were needed and that they needed to be more hard-hitting. The Group members prepared their ideas for new actions throughout the earlier part of this season (May-July), with the intention of piloting their new approach at the end of the summer 2015 season (when the numbers of visiting drinkers would be reducing), in order to help them assess their effectiveness - the photos that appeared in the Press in September were part of the publicity for the start of the pilot. The October meeting of the Working Group was specifically to review how effective the new set of actions had been, what had worked well, and any problems/issues arising etc, in order to agree a new action plan ready to go for the start of next year's season.
9. Whilst North Yorkshire Police were unable to report a notable rise in arrests as a result of the Saturday daytime drinking culture, they were very aware of the negative perception of residents and tourists visiting York city centre on a Saturday afternoon. British Transport Police were able to report on arrests they had made directly related to those travelling by train to and from York on a Saturday.
10. The Train Companies reported on the successful use of temporary daytime barriers to deter those using the trains without buying a ticket,

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<sup>1</sup> Operation Erase Working Group set up by the Alcohol, Violence & Night Time Economy Group (AVANTE) to tackle York's alcohol related Saturday daytime city centre anti-social behaviour.

with the additional revenue far outweighing the costs of supplying and manning those barriers.

11. The reinstatement of the Pub Watch Group initiated by the new NYP Licensing Officer had improved the level of engagement by Licensees with a rising number attending Pub Watch meetings, signing up to the new Licensee Code of Conduct, and displaying the campaign posters in prominent places in their premises. There was also feedback from the NYP that many pubs were now turning away large groups of drinkers which was having the desired effect of making York a less desirable place for them to visit.
12. Other issues that came to light specific to stag and hen parties were:
  - There are more hen parties than stag parties visiting York
  - NYP speaks to anyone seen with an inflatable and there have been no instances of people refusing to deflate them.
13. Overall, the Task Group members were pleased to note all of the work undertaken by the Working Group partners as part of the pilot/trial. However, there were a number of points raised that the Task Group considered required further consideration:
  - NYP reported that until sufficient public toilets were made available in the city centre, it would remain difficult to deter the ongoing problem of drinkers urinating in the streets. It was reported that other cities were experiencing the same problem and that work was ongoing to investigate the use of temporary toilets which could be installed early evening and removed first thing the following morning. The Task Group queried the expense of that approach compared to the cost of allowing the use of the existing permanent public toilets with added security attendants.
  - A Code of Conduct for Visitors had previously been developed to be distributed to those travelling into York by train by BTP and by NYP. The Task Group noted that the cards had not been received by BTP or NYP so the action had not been progressed. Whilst the Task Group thought it was a worthwhile action, it was not clear whether it would be progressed.
  - It was also not clear whether Visit York or the Racecourse had incorporated either the Licensees Code of Conduct or the Visitors Code of Conduct on to their websites and it was agreed that this needed to happen, and that hoteliers needed to be encouraged to

display them as well. It was agreed at the meeting that this would be picked up by Safer York Partnership.

- Those of the Working Group at the meeting all agreed the city would benefit from having an agreed Alcohol Strategy in place as it would ensure a common vision, help with initiating an agreed approach, and act as the glue to much of the partnership work being undertaken. However, the Task Group noted that the work to draft an Alcohol Strategy had stalled.

14. Following the meeting, feedback from CYC officers suggested the work required to progress the stalled Alcohol Strategy would be reasonably quick to undertake and would lead to a long term positive outcome for the city. Recognising that the benefits arising from having a strategy in place would be measurable, the Task Group agreed this could be suitable for scrutiny to review and progress.
15. Having considered all of the information provided by the Operation Erase Working Group, and having understood the impact of Saturday daytime drinking on the city, its residents and visitors, the Task Group agreed the focus of their review should centre on that rather than stag and hen parties. They also agreed a more specific focus of achieving an Alcohol Strategy for the city, and with this in mind agreed the following review remit for this Committee's consideration:

Aim: To provide a framework under which CYC and its partners can work together by establishing a recognised city wide approach which addresses alcohol related issues and protects York's reputation as a safe city.

Objectives:

- i. Understand work to date on developing an Alcohol Strategy for the city and appreciate the context under which the process has stalled
- ii. Bring together and consult all relevant parties including Public Health colleagues, Safer York Partnership, North Yorkshire Police etc to establish some guiding principles and remove any perceived barriers
- iii. Facilitate the delivery of an agreed strategy by:
  - a) Identifying the appropriate body to complete the draft strategy

- b) Securing long term engagement and commitment from relevant parties

### **Consultation on Draft Remit**

16. City of York Council's Community Safety Manager has confirmed that members of Safer York Partnership would welcome the progression of the work on the Alcohol Strategy. However, feedback from the Interim Director of Public Health has highlighted that Public Health has been acting as lead author for the strategy and the reason the work has stalled is due to a lack of resources in Public Health. This has been compounded by a reorganisation of the team which has led to a change in roles and responsibilities. It has been further complicated by the departure of the previous acting Director of Public Health and appointment of the new interim.
17. The Interim Director of Public Health has confirmed that the draft alcohol strategy for York does require some further work, and once completed it will be presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board for approval. It is on the Forward Plan for the Board and is scheduled to go to a meeting in the New Year.
18. The Assistant Director of Housing & Community Safety also shares this view and as such has confirmed that the issue would be more appropriately addressed through management rather than a scrutiny review.

### **Options**

19. Having considered the information within this report and its annexes, and taking account of the ongoing work by all the appropriate partners of the Operation Erase Working Group, Members may choose to either:
- Agree to proceed with the review based on the draft review remit laid out at paragraph 15 above;
  - Revise and agree an alternative review remit;
  - Agree not to proceed with the review

### **Implications**

20. Having an agreed Alcohol Strategy for the city will make it easier to achieve a common approach to tackling alcohol related anti social

behaviour and responding to the associated problems it creates. It will also help maintain the city's reputation as a safe place to visit.

21. If a decision is taken to proceed with the suggested review, all of the implications associated with the recommendations arising will be detailed in the review final report.

### **Recommendation**

22. Members are asked to confirm how they wish to proceed in regard to the proposed scrutiny review on 'the Impact of Stag & Hen Parties'.

Reason: To progress the work of this Policy & Scrutiny Committee in line with scrutiny procedures and protocols

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Report Approved

Date

23 October 2015

Wards Affected:

All

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

**Background Papers:** N/A

**Annexes:**

**Annex A** – Map showing York City Centre Alcohol Restriction Zone

**Annex B** – Licensees Code of Conduct

**Annex C** – Operation Erase Working