For many in our community alcohol is enjoyed as part of our socialising and leisure in a way that does not cause ourselves or others damage. As the English historian and politician, John Seldon, once said: ‘Tis not the drinking that is to be blamed, but the excess’. For some individuals, families and communities, alcohol related harm resulting from this excess is a very real problem. We do not want drunken violence in our neighbourhoods, vandalism in our communities or people dying prematurely.

*Safer Drinking - Safer Darlington* is Darlington’s 3-year Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy (2008-2011) and part of the wider Sustainable Community Strategy, *One Darlington: Perfectly Placed*. The strategy describes the actions in Darlington to prevent alcohol misuse, to develop treatment services and to use the enforcement measures available for community safety. The diagram below shows the structure of how this will be delivered and monitored:

![Diagram](image)

Darlington is a place with a proven track record in getting agencies to work together effectively and we endorse *Safer Drinking - Safer Darlington 2008-2011* as the new multi-agency alcohol strategy for Darlington.

*Councillor Bill Dixon, Deputy Leader of the Council & DAAT Chair*

*Alasdair MacConachie, Chairman, Darlington Local Strategic Partnership*
Aim
With the support of partners and the community, Safer Drinking - Safer Darlington aims to:

'Make Darlington a safe and healthy place to live by encouraging the safe consumption of alcohol, reducing alcohol related crime and disorder and improving the health of the people of the Borough'

A snapshot of our achievements to date
During the last year we have:

• Secured agreement to host the North East Alcohol Office – the first of its kind in the country
• Developed the Challenge 21 scheme across the Borough
• Secured the appointment of a Young People’s Brief Intervention Alcohol Worker to the young people’s substance misuse team – SWITCH
• Engaged with schools and colleges regarding alcohol
• Signed up 42 out of 44 town centre pubs to Pub Watch
• Run multi-agency, targeted Action Weeks, a media/publicity campaign and a Summer Nights Campaign to address alcohol-related disorder
• Prosecuted breaches of license
• Run a major Tackling Violent Crime Programme in the town centre
• Introduced polycarbonate glasses and bottle bins

The picture in Darlington

• During 2007-08, over 600 adults and young people in Darlington sought, and received, treatment from alcohol-specific services alone with a possible further 7000 drinking over the safe levels
• Data suggests that between 2000-3000 of these admitted to their Doctor to drinking over twice the recommended safe consumption levels. This is self-reported information only and would suggest that the actual extent of hazardous drinking in Darlington is much greater
• 15 people die as a direct result of alcohol misuse every year in Darlington - close to the regional average which is the highest in the country
• Men in Darlington have more years of life lost to alcohol-related disease than the national average and show increasing instances of chronic liver disease. The older generation is the highest risk group
• Alcohol-related hospital admissions are higher than the regional average, and rising, with girls up to 15 years of age admitted to hospital more frequently than boys. Admissions are significantly higher in the younger age groups, demonstrating the need to focus targeted health messages at our children and young people
• Binge drinking rates in Darlington are higher than the national average at around 25% of the adult population, rising to an estimated 26-50% in 4 ‘hotspot’ areas. Total alcohol-related crime rates are also higher than the regional average
• Life expectancy varies within Darlington, with men living up to 14 years, and women up to 10 years longer in the more affluent areas compared to the most deprived

• Between April 2007 and March 2008 there were 9613 reported crimes in Darlington of which 823 (9%) were recorded as having alcohol as a contributory factor, as detailed in the chart below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reported Incidents</th>
<th>Alcohol-related</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5600</td>
<td>823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10800</td>
<td>1410</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- There were 10800 Anti-Social Behaviour incidents during the period - 1410 (13%) recorded as having alcohol as a contributory factor
- Of 1644 violent crimes recorded in 2007/08, 237 (14%) were recorded as having alcohol as a contributory factor
- Of 1619 incidents of Domestic Abuse reported to police, 396 (25%) identified alcohol as a contributory factor

What local research and analysis tells us

• Health inequalities are significant with large differences within the Borough but also compared to the region and nationally

• Historically, there has been a lack of local and national funding for alcohol treatment services and an urgent need to increase investment and expand existing services to meet current and future need. A Community Alcohol Service will achieve co-ordination of treatment and development of support services such as education, training and employment and housing

• An innovative and robust approach to aftercare and relapse prevention is required to address the issue of repeated admissions to Accident and Emergency

• Treatment and support must address equality and diversity needs, taking into account disability; sexuality; race; faith; age and gender. This requires engagement of different communities and organisations across all sectors to ensure services meet user’s needs. There is a strong commitment to listening to service users and carers and involving them in service decision-making

• Older people and young girls are admitted most often to hospital for alcohol related problems. Targeted Health Promotion is required to effect cultural change to safer levels of consumption in high risk groups. Organisations and employers, as well as individuals, must take responsibility for this issue by implementing workplace policies and initiatives, such as the Investors In Health Awards Scheme
• Service provision exists for those young people who are ready, or able, to access them and works well for those engaged, but requires expansion. There is a need for more family-focused work and work in schools, such as the Healthy Schools initiatives

• There is a need to use existing resources more effectively. Staff in partner agencies e.g. Police; Youth Offending Service; Probation; Education; third sector organisations; Children’s Services and the Youth Service, require support and training to deliver early identification and prevention work to increase capacity in specialist services to deal with those with the highest risks and needs

• There is a requirement to improve data collection; collation and information sharing across the partnership and closer alignment of strategic plans and targets

• A key gap is the current lack of an A & E Liaison post for alcohol, preventing an accurate picture for alcohol-related presentations and admissions and clear and fast referrals to treatment

• The development of alcohol arrest referral schemes and provision for Alcohol Treatment Requirements to be delivered, would enhance the approach to managing those individuals who also pose a risk to the community as a result of their alcohol problems

• Co-ordination of community safety activity needs to be further developed. Partners need to identify and tackle problems e.g. street drinking, in vulnerable localities and develop action plans to deliver appropriate services, interventions and enforcement in those areas

• Robust enforcement, and the publication of results, is required to narrow the gap between the perception of crime and anti-social behaviour and the reality of Darlington as a safe place to live

Commitment

The objectives of the strategy are that the Darlington Partnership commits to:

‘Continuing to make Darlington a safer place by adopting a robust approach to alcohol related crime and disorder by maximising the use of licensing legislation and applying the full range of enforcement powers available’

We will achieve this by:

• Adopting a robust approach to enforcement, utilising a range of appropriate measures including: confiscation of alcohol; Dispersal Orders; Acceptable Behaviour Agreements and Parenting Orders

• Building on the Test Purchase programme to reduce the supply of alcohol to young people

• Building on best practice from the Tackling Violent Crime Programme to adopt a targeted approach to tackling alcohol related violent crime in the night time economy and domestic abuse

• Identifying vulnerable localities and developing individual action plans to resolve local issues

• Working with partners to manage the Town Centre effectively

• Targeting young people misusing alcohol in public places

• Raising awareness of the impact of the misuse of alcohol on individuals and communities
We will demonstrate this by:

- Reducing assault with injury crime rates
- Reducing the percentage of people who perceive Anti Social Behaviour as a problem
- Reducing the percentage of people who perceive drunk and rowdy behaviour as a problem

The Darlington Partnership commits to:

‘Ensuring Darlington is at the forefront of raising awareness locally amongst the community, partner agencies and local businesses on the harm caused by the misuse of alcohol and promoting the safe and sensible sale and consumption of alcohol’

We will achieve this by:

- Supporting schools to achieve Healthy Schools status including the adoption of evidence-based drug and alcohol policies and the delivery of associated education
- Working with employers to address issues of the effect of alcohol related harm in the workplace
- Providing support and training to embed delivery of Brief and Early Interventions into generic services for young people including establishing new posts within the Youth Service; young people’s substance misuse (SWITCH) team and Youth Offending Service
- Using the Borough’s Community Partnerships, Talking Together events and other existing forums to engage and involve residents
- Working with the Chamber of Commerce and local retailers to develop a Best Retail Practice Guide for age restricted products; promote Proof of Age Card to retailers, schools and colleges and provide joint training sessions for retailers by Police/Licensing and Trading Standards

We will demonstrate this by:

- Publicity and awareness campaigns

The Darlington Partnership commits to:

‘Reducing the harmful impact of alcohol on individuals through the provision of high quality treatment services and ensuring high risk groups, including young people and alcohol misusing offenders, engage with treatment services’

We will achieve this by:

- Using additional NHS resources to expand existing alcohol treatment and support services and create a Community Alcohol Service for Darlington
- Developing comprehensive referral pathways to treatment including the recruitment of an A & E liaison post
- Developing all levels of treatment from education/awareness and Structured Day Care provision to Detoxification and Rehabilitation
- Improving support to offenders by rolling out provision for Alcohol Treatment Requirement Orders
• Developing an Alcohol Arrest Referral service within the Prolific and other Priority Offender (PPO) Offender Management Unit in the Custody Suite at Darlington Police Station

• Continuing to develop education, prevention, treatment and support services for young people – in particular young women and young people in the criminal justice system

• Working with statutory, third sector and service user and carer organisations to ensure access for hard to reach and vulnerable groups

We will demonstrate this by:
• Reducing the number of alcohol-related admissions to hospital

The Darlington Partnership commits to:
‘Working with the partners both locally and at a national level to prevent and tackle the harms caused by the misuse of alcohol’

We will achieve this by:
• The co-ordination of all alcohol-related delivery across the Borough through one organisation, the Drug and Alcohol Action Team

• Hosting the North East Alcohol Office to lead and drive the regional alcohol agenda; run social marketing campaigns on safe consumption and health messages; ensure consistency and equity of access to, and delivery of, services

• Seeking to influence at the highest level by lobbying government leads, Ministers and MPs to change legislation on supply and availability of alcohol to address unjustifiably low price promotions in pubs, clubs and shops

• Lobbying government to review the sufficiency test around the number of outlets permitted to sell alcohol in any area

• Pressing central government to revise the Licensing Act 2003 to give powers to Licensing Authorities to make representations and call for reviews to deal swiftly with problem premises

• Improving interagency working to develop capacity; joint work with Police and Licensing e.g. to identify and compile evidence around problem premises offering irresponsible drink promotions and underage sales

• The meaningful acquisition and utilisation of Service User and Carer perspectives

• Sharing resources, linking strategic plans and improving information sharing and data recording

• Improving Case Management and co-ordination – especially around complex cases and vulnerable or high risk groups such as Prolific and other Priority Offenders

• Obtaining the Alcohol Concern kitemark for the strategy

• Highlighting the achievements and work we do to influence policy at a local, regional and national level

We will demonstrate this by:
• Increasing the numbers of staff in partner, provider and voluntary organisations trained to deliver Alcohol Brief Interventions

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Comments on the strategy are welcome via the DAAT website: www.ddaat.org

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An inclusive approach
If English is not your first language and you would like more information about this document, or if you require information in large print, Braille or on tape please contact the Policy Unit on 388017.

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Wendy was artist in residence with the Society during 2002. More of her work, including the full output from the Darlington Building Society residency, can be viewed via the society’s website at www.darlington.co.uk