

Minutes: Cross Party Group on Drugs & Alcohol

Date: Wednesday 24th April 2013

Time: 1.00pm – 2.30pm

Location: The Scottish Parliament

Chair: John Finnie MSP

Present:

Jayne Baxter MSP
Kezia Dugdale MSP
John Finnie MSP
Anne McTaggart MSP
Dr Richard Simpson MSP

Dr A-M Barry	Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems
Connie Bennett	Former Youth Commissioner on Alcohol (speaker)
Narek Bido	Addiction Support & Counselling - Forth Valley
Gemma Burns	Fast Forward
Dave Carson	NHS Lothian
Hannah Carver	Edinburgh and West Lothian ADP
Scott Clements	Scottish Families Affected By Drugs
Max Cruickshank	Individual
Jennifer Curran	Alcohol Focus Scotland
Sarah Currie	Alcohol Focus Scotland
Martin Dewar	Young Scot (speaker)
Alison Ferguson	Scottish Government
Jacquie Forde	The Wellbeing Alliance
Evelyn Lang	Greater Easterhouse Alcohol Awareness and Prevention Project
Gail Grant	British Medical Association
Alison Hardie	Young Scot
Paul Hunter	Midlothian Young People's Advice Service
Iain Macnab	HART
Laura McFadzen	Alcohol Focus Scotland
Beatrice Morrice	Scotch Whisky Association
Dr James Nicholls	Alcohol Research UK (speaker)
Kathy Owens	North and South Ayrshire ADP
Sonal Raithatha	Fast Forward
Christopher Russell	Scottish Government
Diane Thomson	Alcohol Focus Scotland
Paul Waterson	Scottish Licensed Trade Association

Apologies:

Willie Rennie MSP

Kenny Harrison

Dave Liddell

Jane Wilson

Argyll & Bute Licensing Forum

Scottish Drugs Forum

Alcohol Focus Scotland

Welcome and minutes of previous meeting

John Finnie MSP welcomed everyone to the meeting of the CPG on Drugs and Alcohol.

The topic for discussion at the meeting was alcohol marketing and the use of social media. The meeting heard from 3 speakers:

- **Martin Dewar from Young Scot: *Young people and their use of social media***

Martin gave an overview of how young people engage with social media and explained that the use of the internet as a whole is now considered as social media due to the interactive nature of websites e.g. looking for feedback, reviews etc. Martin explained that the use of mobile phones is now higher than the use of laptops/PCs and that the use of Twitter is now more commonplace than Facebook. Martin stressed that due to the fast moving and interactive nature of social media, information posted has to be responsive and relevant. Martin highlighted that Young Scot have a direct reach via Twitter to over 15,000 young people.

- **Dr James Nicholls, Research Manager, Alcohol Research UK: *Everyday, Everywhere – alcohol marketing and social media***

Dr Nicholls explained that his talk today would give an overview of the findings from a study he carried out last year (funded by the British Academy) when he worked as an academic researcher at Bath Spa University.

Dr Nicholls began by outlining the key issues which require to be considered when looking at the impact of alcohol marketing via social media on young people. This included the differences between social media marketing and conventional marketing; regulatory gaps; the reach of social media; the exposure of underage audiences.

Dr Nicholls explained that social media is the future of marketing and in recent years the alcohol industry have made a significant shift from conventional marketing to using in social media marketing via platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. The alcohol industry is the leading industry which uses social media engage with customers to create 'conversation' marketing which results in the weaving of branded conversations into people's lives (source socialbakers.com).

Dr Nicholls explained that due to these engagement and conversational marketing techniques, user generated content is becoming as commonplace as industry generated material.

Dr Nicholls then discussed some of the key challenges within the current regulatory system in terms of responding to content communicated via social media platforms, including:

- The effectiveness of the process of voluntary self-regulation by the alcohol industry as is currently in place (via the Portman Group).
- The capacity and speed to respond to complaints about inappropriate content due to the speed of social media communications – currently the complaints process can take weeks or months – social media works in minutes and hours.
- The issue of responsibility for user-generated content.
- The exposure of underage audiences due to the ineffective 'age gate' system as anyone wishing to enter a site can simply enter a fictitious date of birth.

Dr Nicholls concluded by outlining the key issues which resulted from his study:

- Social media is at the heart of multiplatform alcohol marketing strategies.
 - The line between brand and user-generated content is becoming increasingly blurred.
 - The self-regulation currently in place works to entirely different time-frame and cannot respond to the challenges of social media marketing.
 - The marketing on social media simply provides an inducement to drink with the message that drinking every day is normal.
 - Whilst, the promotion of explicit underage appeal and/or drunkenness is prohibited by the current regulatory codes, the promotion of alcohol as a part of everyday life is not. The continuous promotion of alcohol as part of every social celebration, or the constant reinforcement of alcohol being central to everyday life, such as is created through branded online engagement and conversations is currently not regulated in any way.
 - There is currently no known way of reliably preventing underage access to messages.
- **Connie Bennett – former Youth Commissioner on Alcohol:**
Recommendations on social marketing of alcohol from the Youth Commission on Alcohol

Connie outlined the work which the Scottish Youth Commission on Alcohol had undertaken to investigate the policy and action required to change Scotland's culture in relation to alcohol. The result of this investigation was a report in which the Youth Commissioners made a number of recommendations some of which

specifically related to the regulation of alcohol marketing and promotion and social marketing health campaigns.

Connie highlighted that although the recommendations were now 3 years old and would require updating in terms of social media platforms used for the analysis, many of the recommendations were still highly relevant in light of today's discussions. Some of the key recommendations were:

- Reduce the amount of alcohol advertising young people are exposed to.
- Regulation of all alcohol marketing and promotion should be carried out by a body completely independent of the alcohol and advertising industries.
- Devise stricter regulation of digital promotion and advertising.
- Restrict alcohol industry involvement in the design of health promotion social marketing campaigns.
- Involve young people as co-producers of social marketing campaigns.
- Maximise the use of innovative approaches to social marketing.
- Involve social networking sites as key partners in the development of campaigns.
- Commission a study on the development of a campaign which would promote a national conversation about Scotland's relationship with alcohol.

Connie went on to explain that overall the Youth Commissioners felt that it was critical not just to consider the content of alcohol marketing but to consider how best to reduce exposure of young people to the overall quantity of advertising. The Commissioners felt that young people should be involved as co-producers of social media health campaigns, which should be free from alcohol industry involvement, as they strongly felt that culture change is influenced by the kinds of messages young people are exposed to.

Group Discussion

The meeting discussed the complexities and challenges of this issue but there was agreement that it was critical action was taken to ensure children and young people were protected from alcohol marketing.

It was noted that the recommendations made by the Youth Commissioners were now three years old and were still highly relevant, however it was unclear how much progress has been made against the recommendations to date.

It was discussed that it was critical that the Scottish Government continue to lobby the Westminster Government for changes to legislation to ensure children and young people are protected from exposure to alcohol marketing.

Action points

Dr Simpson suggested that the CPG write to the Portman Group to ask what steps they are taking to regulate social media.

That the CPG write to the Scottish Government to ask for an update on action against the recommendations within the Youth Commissioners report.

AOB and date of next meeting

Notice was given of an event on 15th May which will consider the topic of Alcohol Dependence in Scotland, sponsored by Jackie Baillie MSP. The event is being organised by The Wellbeing Alliance who will circulate an e-mail invitation.

A request was made that a future meeting of the CPG consider the information distributed by ISD (Dec 2012 and March 28 March 2013) on treatment services. This was noted.

This meeting is the final of the CPG on Drugs and Alcohol before the summer recess. Dates of meetings beyond the summer break will follow in due course.