

Project Name Off Watch

Business Case

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Project Name:

Version No:

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Document History

Version	Author	Date	Change
1	Neil Fitzpatrick trading standards business services and underage sales manager	16/12/10	

Reviewers

Version	Reviewer	Role	Date

Approvers

Version	Approver	Role	Date

Distribution

Version	Name	Role

Author:

Date:

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Background

Pub watch schemes have been in existence throughout the UK for over 40 years and range in size from over 200 premises in cities to small rural schemes with as little as 5 premises involved.

The schemes have a proven track record in helping to reduce alcohol related crime and antisocial behaviour within the late night economy by providing a support mechanism for members to share information and problem solve as a group.

Historically these schemes have been very well received by local authorities , Police and other public bodies as the joined up approach enables businesses to make significant contributions in alcohol related crime reduction and public safety by sharing ideas, resources and easing financial burdens by achieving economies of scale.

During a recent review of Portsmouth's alcohol related hospital admissions a recommendation was made by the Alcohol Harm Reduction National Support Team to implement a similar arrangement for "**Off Licence**" premises. The suggestion is supported by trading standards the Police and the city councils substance misuse lead Alan Knobel.

Portsmouth's alcohol strategy is to prevent, treat and enforce and an "Off Watch" scheme clearly fits within this strategy.

Enforce –

- Tackle alcohol related crime and anti-social behaviour
- Prevent children from obtaining alcohol
- Manage alcohol related crime and anti-social behaviour Increase alcohol interventions for victims and offenders of alcohol related crime

(Extracted from the community safety alcohol strategy for 2009 – 2013)

Further to this I have met with senior representatives from Tesco, Morrison's, Sainsbury, Mc Colls, Southern Cooperative and Asda who also see value in creating a hub that can facilitate closer working relationships with trading standards at a local level in respect of alcohol related issues, and it was broadly agreed that an "Off Watch" scheme could provide an appropriate vehicle for this.

Discussions with the independent off licences and small chains also indicate a strong interest in becoming a part of the scheme.

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Why the project is needed and key benefits

- An Off Watch scheme could provide valuable regular contact with key agencies enabling members to tap into information and legislation that will assist them to remain compliant and help them to protect and sustain their business.
- Providing a support mechanism will help businesses trade in a responsible way and assist key areas of the city councils strategy to reduce alcohol related hospital admissions, alcohol related crime and disorder and antisocial behaviour.
- Sales of alcohol to people under the age of 18 are rarely made out of wilful neglect and normally indicate a lack of training. "Off Watch" will provide opportunities for businesses to tap in to low cost staff training; regular legislative updates from licensing and trading standards as well as allowing them seek guidance from the police in respect of local crime issues and problem individuals.
- There is currently no equivalent to pub watch to assist the off licensed trade in Portsmouth

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Costs/timescales and Logistics

Based on adopting a similar structure to Pub Watch, it is envisaged that a “Launch meeting” Could be held to which all interested parties and the local press would be invited in March 2011 The meeting would be well publicised and all local off licence retailers encouraged to attend.

The basic infrastructure to start “Off Watch” could be in place by April 2011 once a coordinator has been identified from the interested retailers attending the launch. It should be noted that “watch schemes” are neither run nor owned by local authorities or any of the supporting agencies. The successful operation of these schemes will rely on the dedication and enthusiasm of the participating retailers.

As with Pub Watch, “Off Watch” would also be owned and run by the members and trading standards role in this instance would be to instigate the launch and help form the group whilst providing support when required along with other key support agencies. Once established it is crucial that members retain ownership.

Due to the number of off licence retailers within the city it’s unlikely that one group will be able to accommodate all interested parties. This will mean that the initial launch would be a pilot covering an agreed area by the elected members based upon where the need is greatest. It is envisaged that the whole of the city could be accommodated within four groups over a period of 18 months. Unlike Pub Watch which consists of members running large premises “Off Watch” would be predominantly made up of small independent retailers and small chains making the logistics of groups squeezing into one venue very difficult. The local authority will need to consider if they are able to accommodate groups within the civic offices, Guildhall or other public buildings if other alternatives are not able to be found.

Some larger retailers do have the required space and I will be approaching them to establish if they are able to support the group in this way. Once established, the day to day running costs of the scheme will need to be absorbed by the scheme itself via a calculated member’s fee. To encourage membership, trading standards would offer staff training subsidies and encourage the group to create savings via economies of scale where they can be identified.

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I have estimated the officer time to coordinate the initial stages and the provide a "Launch Event" to kick start the process will cost circa £6,000

Unfortunately, trading standards would not be able to absorb the cost of the launch and coordination unless funding can be found. However, some larger retailers have indicated that they might be receptive to sponsoring some or all of the event and I will be contacting them in the new year to establish if this is still a possibility .

Investment appraisal

An estimated 1,916 people were admitted to Queen Alexandra Hospital in 2008/9 because of their drinking, at a cost of £9.2m.

Based on these figures, if circa 1:2 people avoided hospital as a result of implementing the scheme it would cover its own cost in the first year. With year on year savings creating further reductions in the cost of alcohol to the economy in Portsmouth.

Impacts on antisocial behaviour, vandalism and theft related to the consumption of alcohol could produce further savings.

7. Urgency

Trading standards would need to commence their activities by mid January to achieve the time lines within the document.