

EAST LoTHIAN LICENSING FORUM

Meeting: 5th December 2012

REPORT BY THE CHAIR AND SECRETARY ON THE ALCOHOL FOCUS SCOTLAND 'NATIONAL LICENSING CONFERENCE 2012'

1. The Conference was held in Glasgow on 12th September 2012. There was a total attendance of about 150 people, of which only about 10 were from Licensing Forums (a mix of Convenors, Secretaries and ordinary Forum members). The Conference was chaired by Lesley Riddoch, who generally intervened with her own views and questions rather excessively.
2. East Lothian was well represented, with attendees from the Licensing Board, East Lothian Council and the police as well as ourselves.
3. Following an introduction by Dr Evelyn Gillan, the Chief Executive of Alcohol Focus Scotland, the keynote address was given by Kenny MacAskill MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Justice (and also Minister for Licensing as part of his remit). His was a more balanced approach than Alcohol Focus Scotland's, emphasizing the role of licensed (on-sale) premises in providing a community focus and bringing people together. Mr MacAskill also talked about the affordability of off-sales – hence the Scottish Government's drive to implement minimum unit pricing. He also referred to the issue of retraining for personal licence holders. The type and detail of this was unresolved and was currently under review.
4. The eminent lawyer Sir Crispin Agnew then gave an interesting overview of the role of Licensing Boards, particularly as interpreted through recent (and not so recent) case law. He also stressed the importance of stakeholders (such as Licensing Forums) having a proper input into Licensing Boards' reviews of their Statements of Licensing Policy. This presentation, as with the next two, was followed by a panel discussion with good audience participation.
5. After lunch Ian Grant from Information Services Division (ISD) Scotland spoke about accessing and collecting data on alcohol use and abuse and associated matters. ISD was responsible for publishing Alcohol Statistics Scotland and was establishing adult alcohol consumption figures for the first time in late 2012. A participant in the discussion mentioned the role of Local Licensing Forums in assisting cross-agency approaches to reducing alcohol harm locally.
6. The final conference session featured Jon Bannister from the University of Glasgow. He discussed new research on the link between the number of alcohol

outlets and violence (in a Strathclyde setting). He described the relationship as a 'smooth curve', which seemed unlikely given the widely differing areas studied, but provided no firm data to back up this assertion. In the discussion Chief Superintendent Grant Manders from Strathclyde Police gave a particularly good analysis of the problems facing Licensing Boards - he felt that they really needed to concentrate on off-sales premises because of the increasing professionalism evident in the on-sale trade.

7. Dr Gillan, in closing, once more referred to a series of papers published by Alcohol Focus Scotland to coincide with the Conference. These included analyses of the 'cost of alcohol-related harm' in each local authority in Scotland (a separate Agenda item refers to the East Lothian paper).
8. On the whole this was an interesting and thought-provoking Conference and we are very grateful to East Lothian Council for making it possible for us to attend.

Dave Dickson

Pat Hanson