

EAST LOTHIAN LOCAL LICENSING FORUM

ALCOHOL FOCUS SCOTLAND 'NATIONAL LICENSING CONFERENCE 2013'

(9TH September 2013)

Report by the Secretary

1. The Conference was held at the Marriott Hotel, Glasgow. There were approximately 180 delegates, a handful of whom were Local Licensing Forum members. From East Lothian there were also two members of the Council's licensing/legal team and two members of the Licensing board in addition to myself. Dave Dickson was unfortunately unable to attend due to illness.
2. The theme of the Conference, as explained by Alcohol Focus Scotland (AFS) Chief Executive *Dr Evelyn Gillan*, was 'Developing a deeper understanding of overprovision in day-to-day decision making'. She was followed by *Kenny MacAskill MSP*, the Justice Minister. He referred to the fact that Licensing boards would currently be preparing their updated Statements of Licensing Policy and said that, although there had been some improvements, there were still serious issues to address in Scotland, with 50% of men and 40% of women regularly exceeding the recommended guidelines for alcohol consumption. He also discussed recent legislation and said that the Scottish Government would not shirk the legal processes required to get Minimum Unit Pricing off the ground.
3. As in the previous year, the Conference was being chaired by *Lesley Riddoch*, who was slightly less strident this time in putting forward her own views (although she was too fond of trying to get participation in trite 'straw polls' on a number of issues). She introduced the next speaker, who was Chief Constable *Sir Stephen House* (Police Scotland). He said that alcohol related violence was a major issue for Police Scotland, with more than 50% of homicides and more than 70% of incidents of domestic abuse having alcohol intake as a factor. Every weekend there was a number of serious incidents linked to alcohol. For the weekend just passed six of 40 incidents had taken place on licensed premises, an unusually high total. He praised the on-trade for their efforts but said there were still, in his view, issues of overprovision in some areas. There was also a need for licensees to continue upskilling bar staff and door staff.
4. *Dr Michael Livingston* talked about some of his post-doctoral research at the University of New South Wales in Australia. He did not provide many statistical details from his Australian studies, although it became clear that there was a different drinking culture there, with 'bottle shops' being popular. The data had demonstrated steady increases in all measures of alcohol-related harm, but no real trend in 'risky drinking'. As with all of

the sessions, this was followed by questions from the floor and a lunch break was then taken.

5. *Scott Blair*, an advocate with Terra Firma Chambers, started the afternoon session by looking at some notable legal cases in Scotland and elsewhere, with particular reference to overprovision. He said that much of the case law emphasized the need for Licensing boards to consider the five licensing objectives as well as overprovision issues. Boards should also utilize local knowledge when determining individual cases. Boards should uphold their policy, with applicants making a case for exception if appropriate. Some questions arose on issues like noise prevention and internet purchasing.
6. The final session was a panel discussion in which, refreshingly, five of the six panelists were women. One of them was *Michelle Ballantyne*, Convener of the Scottish Borders Local Licensing Forum and she said that they would be holding a local licensing conference in November, 2013. The panelists discussed questions from the floor on three aspects of overprovision.
7. *Dr Gillan* of AFS then summarised the proceedings and made final comments. This was again an interesting conference, in which there was a decent balance between the various interested parties in the debates on overprovision and alcohol licensing in Scotland generally. I picked up a number of interesting A5 format reports from around the country on overprovision and related issues which will be available for inspection at our Forum meeting.
8. I am grateful for the opportunity of attending the AFS National Licensing Conference 2013 and will be happy to answer questions at the Forum meeting.

Pat Hanson