

Audit of the level and patterns of drug and alcohol misuse in Wirral 2001 - 2004

The problems of drug and alcohol misuse are complex and cannot be tackled in isolation. There is no single problem or solution.

Wirral Drug & Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) seeks to co-ordinate the efforts of agencies to balance firm enforcement with effective education, prevention and treatment programmes.

Underpinned by a thorough understanding of the problems faced locally, the future Drug Strategy for Wirral must reflect such integrated solutions and the co-ordinated delivery of local services.

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Executive summary

Aims and objectives of the audit

The Crime & Disorder Act 1998 (as amended by the Police Reform Act 2002) places a duty on responsible authorities including Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) and Drug & Alcohol Action Team (DAAT) partnerships to carry out an audit of the levels and patterns of crime and disorder and drug misuse in their area.

CDRPs and DAATs are also required to formulate and implement a local strategy that addresses problems highlighted by the audit.

In Wirral, the CDRP and DAAT have undertaken separate audits and produced individual reports focusing on specific areas of work. The two are designed to be cross-referenced and complementary.

This report has been produced by Wirral DAAT. It aims to:

- highlight the nature and scale of drug misuse in Wirral
- help identify and plan effective ways of addressing local problems and deploying resources
- inform the new three year strategy
- reflect views of local stakeholders.

Methodology

Work on the audit commenced in August 2004. A number of methods were used to gather data, including a literature review, work commissioned through an external consultant, analysis of service activity, service provider and user focus groups and a review of stakeholder/community research.

The audit has been designed to help answer the following key questions identified by the DAAT in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the nature and scale of drug and alcohol use.

- What targets are we working to?
- What is the problem?
- What are we doing about it?
- What are the local views?
- What are the gaps in provision?
- What new things do we need to do?
- What are the key findings?

The audit draws conclusions about problematic drug and alcohol misuse in Wirral, including which substances are causing the most problems, where substance misuse is occurring and the impact upon local communities, health, crime and other related areas such as housing.

The audit follows the National Drug Strategy's four target areas: treatment, young people, communities and supply.

Conclusion

In developing this audit, the DAAT has embraced the opportunity to review its activity and performance, engage with its stakeholders, particularly the local community and start to plan for change.

Problems associated with drug misuse are complex and compiling this report has been a challenge.

The report builds on earlier needs analysis undertaken by the DAAT and seeks to explore broader consequences and relationships between drugs, health, education and crime. It also explores problems associated with alcohol misuse, although available local data is limited.

In reviewing the nature and extent of drug and alcohol misuse across Wirral during the last three years (2001-2004), conclusions are drawn and key findings highlighted relating to the four key themes of the national and local drug strategy:

- drug treatment
- drug education and prevention for young people
- reducing drug related crime and disorder
- reducing supply of illicit drugs.

A section has also been included on alcohol, whilst this is not part of the statutory requirement for the DAAT, alcohol is a growing local concern.

The findings will inform future strategy formulation, investment and priorities. A summary will be produced and circulated through the community and voluntary sector as well as professional networks to ascertain stakeholder views on the findings.

Contents

1	Introduction	8
1.1	Wirral Drug & Alcohol Action Team (DAAT).....	8
1.2	Aims of the audit	9
1.3	Audit themes	10
1.4	Structure of the report	10
1.5	Audit process	11
1.6	General Wirral demographics	12
2	Treatment and harm minimisation	15
2.1	Introduction	15
2.2	The national picture.....	15
2.2.1	National Treatment Agency (NTA)	15
2.3	What targets are we working to?.....	16
2.3.1	The local picture	17
2.4	What is the problem?	18
2.4.1	The local picture	18
2.4.2	Drug type.....	20
2.4.3	Crack/cocaine.....	20
2.4.4	Drug related deaths.....	21
2.4.5	Drug use and homelessness.....	21
2.5	What are we doing about it?	22
2.5.1	Diversity	23
2.5.2	Geographical spread	25
2.5.3	Retention.....	26
2.5.4	Arrest referral	27
2.5.5	Harm reduction syringe exchange.....	28
2.5.6	GP shared care scheme.....	30
2.5.7	Waiting times.....	30
2.5.8	Workforce.....	31
2.6	What are the stakeholders' views?.....	32
2.7	What are the gaps in provision?.....	33
2.8	What new things do we need to do?	35
2.9	Key findings	36
3	Young people	40
3.1	Introduction	40
3.2	The national picture.....	41
3.3	What targets are we working to?.....	41
3.4	What is the problem?	45
3.4.1	The national picture.....	45
3.4.1.1	Illicit drug use	45
3.4.1.2	Drug use among care leavers	47
3.4.1.3	Substance use by young offenders	47
3.4.1.4	Young people and alcohol.....	48
3.4.1.5	Youth crime	49
3.4.2	The local picture	46
3.4.2.1	Young people and illicit drug use	49
3.4.2.2	General	49
3.4.2.3	Young people and alcohol use	51

	3.4.2.4 Youth crime	53
3.5	What are we doing about it?	55
	3.5.1 Universal drug education and prevention	55
	3.5.2 Drug information campaigns.....	56
	3.5.3 Targeted early intervention	57
	3.5.4 Other projects.....	58
	3.5.5 ARCH Initiatives	58
	3.5.6 Churches Action on Substance Misuse (CASM)	59
	3.5.7 Response	59
	3.5.8 Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.....	59
	3.5.9 Central government initiatives	60
	3.5.10 Wirral Local Prevention Strategy	61
	3.5.11 CDRP anti-social behaviour funding.....	61
3.6	What are the stakeholders' views?.....	62
3.7	What are the gaps in provision?.....	65
	3.7.1 Operational output 1	66
	3.7.2 Operational output 2	66
	3.7.3 Operational output 3	66
	3.7.4 Operational output 4	67
	3.7.4 Operational output 5.....	67
3.8	What new things do we need to do?	68
	3.8.1 Further priorities for 2004/05	68
3.9	Key findings	71
4	Communities – reducing drug related crime and its impact.....	74
4.1	Introduction	74
4.2	The national picture.....	74
4.3	What targets are we working to?.....	75
4.4	What is the problem?	76
	4.4.1 Drugs and crime	76
	4.4.2 Drug misuse in prisons.....	77
	4.4.3 Substance misuse in the workplace	78
	4.4.4 Alcohol misuse	79
	4.4.5 Housing	80
	4.4.6 Links to sex working	82
	4.4.7 Anti-social behaviour	82
4.5	What are we doing about it?	84
	4.5.1 Prolific offenders.....	87
4.6	What are the stakeholders' views?.....	92
4.7	What are the gaps in provision?.....	94
4.8	What new things do we need to do?	94
	4.8.1 Key priorities for 2004-2005	94
	4.8.2 Community engagement	96
	4.8.3 Restrictions on bail.....	97
	4.8.4 Setting challenging targets	97
4.9	Key findings	98

5	The supply of illegal drugs and alcohol.....	101
5.1	Introduction	101
5.2	The national picture.....	101
5.3	What targets are we working to?.....	101
	5.3.1 National context.....	103
5.4	What is the problem?	104
5.5	What are we doing about it?	108
5.6	What are the stakeholders' views?.....	117
5.7	What are the gaps in provision?.....	119
5.8	What new things do we need to do?	120
5.9	Key findings	121
Appendices	123
1	Definitions	123
	1.1 Glossary	123
	1.2 Definition of service tiers	124
2	Annex A: Data gaps	125
	2.1 Young people and drug and alcohol misuse	125
	2.2 The supply of illegal drugs and alcohol	126
	2.3 Drug and alcohol misuse and its impact on communities	130
	2.4 Treatment and harm minimisation	133
3	Annex B: Consultation fora undertaken.....	135
4	Annex C: Area forums presentation and questionnaire used	136
5	Annex D: Literature directory	137
	5.1 Young people	137
	5.2 Communities	137
	5.3 Alcohol	139
	5.4 Reducing supply.....	139
	5.5 Treatment	140
	5.6 Needs assessment.....	140
	5.7 General information	141

1 Introduction

1.1 Wirral Drug & Alcohol Action Team (DAAT)

Established in 1995, Wirral DAAT is the partnership responsible for delivering the National Drug Strategy's targets at local level. It works with a range of partners to ensure that their work in tackling drug misuse is brought together effectively and that future plans and projects are co-ordinated successfully.

The DAAT works closely with the Local Strategic Partnership and Local Authority Crime and Disorder Partnership to ensure that plans reflect communities' needs and priorities.

DAAT representatives are drawn from the community and voluntary sector, the local authority (education, social services, housing), health, probation, police and prison services.

Its overarching aim is to reduce the harm that drugs cause to communities, individuals and their families.

Thus, the DAAT's work focuses on the government's National Drug Strategy targets:

- reducing drug use and drug related offending through **treatment and support** and reducing drug related deaths through harm minimisation
- preventing today's **young people** becoming tomorrow's problematic drug users
- reducing **drug-related crime** and its effects on communities
- reducing the **availability** of illegal drugs.

In 2004, Wirral DAAT has increased its focus on the emerging problems associated with alcohol misuse. Specific targets are to be set locally to co-ordinate local action.

The DAAT reports on progress to a range of government departments and is formally accountable to the Home Secretary, Home Office Drug Strategy Directorate and the North West Region Government Office (Crime & Drugs Team).

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998, as amended by the Police Reform Act 2002, places duty on responsible authorities (including CDRP and DAAT partnerships) to tackle crime and disorder and substance misuse and to produce an audit and strategy document. Wirral's CDRP and DAAT have produced separate audits which correspond and can be cross-referenced easily. Partnerships are also asked to include issues related to anti-social behaviour in their audit and strategies in line with the National Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan.

As part of its responsibility for delivering the National Drug Strategy, the DAAT has been charged with undertaking an audit of the nature and scale of substance misuse in Wirral, due for publication in April 2005. This work will help to establish a clear picture of local substance misuse; the data gleaned from the report will form a baseline for future plans.

In addition to this audit document, a summary will be made available to key partners, including community representatives. A questionnaire will be included with the summary, inviting views and comments that will help the DAAT to gain an even more accurate picture of substance misuse in each partner's particular geographic or thematic area.

All views will be fed back into the DAAT's strategy planning procedures.

1.2 Aims of the audit

The audit aims to paint a clear picture of the extent and nature of drug and alcohol use in Wirral. It will help to identify methods of developing and implementing effective action to reduce problems and redeploy resources. It will also act as a tool for effective annual planning and the formulation and publication of a three-year strategy that responds to the communities' needs.

The audit will establish a clear baseline of drug and alcohol misuse and provide an opportunity to engage with local communities, taking into account the views, needs and issues that they raise. It will cross-reference with audit/review processes undertaken by other partnerships (i.e. Local Strategic Partnership, housing strategy, health and social care partnerships, Youth Offending Service, Crime and Disorder Partnership) to ensure that cross-cutting issues are considered. The audit will also

review links between drugs, crime and deprivation and support the formulation of appropriate responses across the range of different agencies involved.

1.3 Audit themes

In order to ensure future work focuses on key performance targets, the audit has been conducted around the four themes of the national and local drug strategies:

- reducing drug use and drug related offending through **treatment and support** and reducing drug related deaths through harm minimisation
- preventing today's **young people** becoming tomorrow's problematic drug users
- reducing **drug-related crime** and its effects on communities
- reducing the **availability** of illegal drugs.

Alcohol is a strong emerging priority for the DAAT and local targets are being developed as part of the Substance Misuse Strategy. Other cross cutting themes include crack cocaine use and ensuring that services take into account the diversity of the local population; these feature throughout the audit.

1.4 Structure of the audit report

The audit seeks to answer a series of key questions relating to each of the above themes. These questions provide the structure for this report.

- What targets are we working to?
- What is the problem?
- What are we doing about it?
- What are the stakeholders' views?
- What are the gaps in provision?
- What new things do we need to do?
- What are the key findings?

Common characteristics are found across a number of the themes.

1.5 Audit process

In August 2004, Government Office North West (GONW) published guidance setting out the required methodology for the audit (*Annex B, Audit and Strategies Toolkit update*).

The audit process comprised the following stages:

- literature review of existing material undertaken by external consultants
- analysis of reports (service activity)
- service provider and user focus group exercises
- stakeholder surveys analysis/community research.

The Wirral DAAT Research and Information Officer collated existing information from the DAAT and its partner agencies, according to the list of data requirements, and provided summaries for performance reports. This information was forwarded to an external consultancy, Crime Concern, which reviewed, analysed and presented it in the form of a draft report. Any gaps in information were highlighted and addressed. Where possible, national, regional and local comparisons have been made.

To supplement the literature and data supplied, Crime Concern conducted a two-hour focus group with representatives from partner agencies and service users. (The organisations present at the focus group are listed in *Annex B: Focus Group Participants*). Summaries of a range of community surveys are also included in the report. This provides qualitative, local and up to date perspectives to inform the audit process.

In addition, Wirral DAAT attended eight area forums in conjunction with the Community Safety Team to gain local people's views on the scale and nature of drug and alcohol misuse and crime in the area and to ascertain views on the emerging findings of the audit. This consultation process consisted of a presentation by Wirral DAAT about the audit and key findings, followed by a questionnaire. The presentation and the questionnaire can be found in *Annex C*.

Detailed reviews and research studies have been referred to during the audit process. For further information, a list of the documents supplied for the audit are listed in *Annex D: Literature Directory*.

1.6 General Wirral demographics

The Wirral peninsular (figure 1) is partly urbanised, separated from the remainder of Merseyside by the River Mersey. The north of Wirral, particularly the north-east side, is very urbanised while the southern areas are much more rural. Wirral has an overall population of 312,293, of which 47% are male and 53% female (*Census 2001*); 60% are of working age. 334,222 people, including transient residents such as students, are registered with general practitioners in the borough. There are 29,600 young people (age 13 - 19), of which 15,000 (51%) are male and 14,600 (49%) are female.

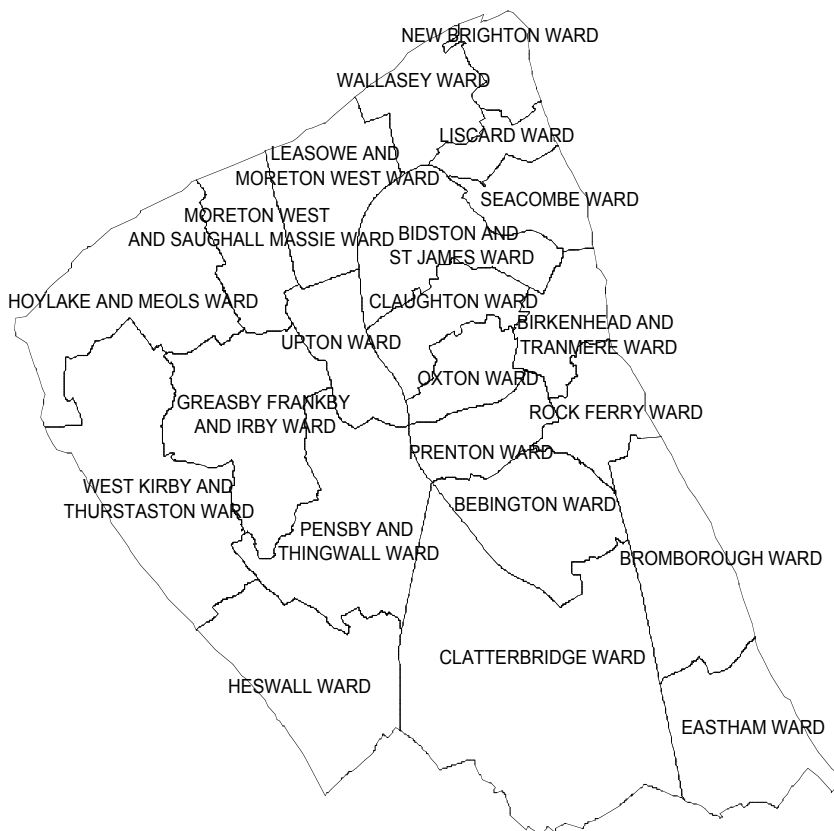
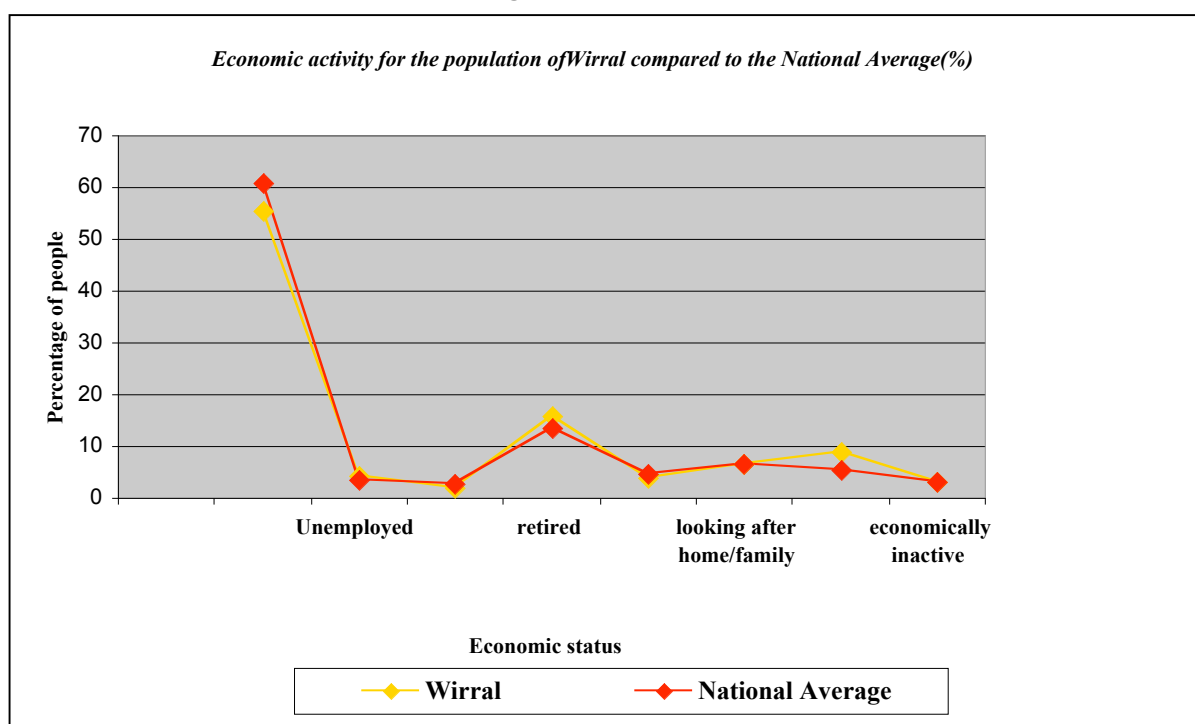


Figure 1: Wirral wards 2004

Figure 2 shows Wirral's unemployment rate, which stands at 4.3%, compared to the national average of 3.4% (*Census 2001*). Those most affected by unemployment are 16-24 year-old males, accounting for 25% of the unemployment rate. The Department of Environment, Transport and Regions indices of deprivation ranked Wirral as 14th most income deprived and 7th most employment deprived out of 354 local authorities in England (*DETR, 2000*). There is a strong contrast between areas of Wirral, with north-easterly areas such as Bidston, Birkenhead and Tranmere being significantly more deprived than the less densely populated areas in the south, such as Heswall and Clatterbridge. This is clearly illustrated by the indices of deprivation which show Bidston, Birkenhead and Tranmere rating among the 100 most deprived wards in the country, out of a total of 8,414 wards, while Heswall ranks in 6,819th place (*ONS, 2003*).

Figure 2: Line graph showing economic activity for Wirral population in comparison to the national average



Source: *Census 2001*

The 2001 Census depicted Wirral as having a largely white British population, accounting for 98% of the total. This compares to the national average of 90%. White Irish accounted for a further 1% with all other BME groups accounting for less than 1% of the population (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Table showing the ethnicity breakdown of Wirral population 2001

	Wirral (%)
White British	98.30
White Irish	1.00
Other mixed background	0.60
White and Asian	0.40
Indian	0.20
Pakistani	0.00
Bangladeshi	0.10
Other Asian background	0.10
Black or black British	0.20
Caribbean	0.00
African	0.10
Other black background	0.00
Chinese or other ethnic group	0.50

Source: Census 2001.