

Taking an Alcohol Free Childhood approach to licensing: A toolkit May 2022

This toolkit is for public health colleagues and others engaged in licensing

The toolkit has been developed for local authority public health colleagues within the seven local authorities that commission the Balance programme who engage in local processes relating to the alcohol elements of the Licensing Act 2003.

Licensing colleagues who are engaging with public health on discussions, as well as Responsible Authorities including the police, fire service, planning, environmental health and children's services will also find the toolkit helpful.

The toolkit was updated in May 2022.

Alcohol use is harmful, particularly to children

Alcohol use is harmful and is a significant cause of health inequalities. In the short term, the risks of alcohol use include accidents and injuries, violent behaviour, risk-taking behaviour and alcohol poisoning. In the long term, alcohol use increases the risk of serious health conditions including heart disease, stroke, liver disease and a number of cancers including liver, bowel and breast cancers.

The North East of England region suffers disproportionately. We have the highest rates of alcohol-related hospital admissions in the country and alcohol-specific deaths hit record levels in 2020 during the Covid pandemic, with the North East suffering from the worst rates. Alcohol use is the leading risk factor for death and illness among 15-49-year-olds in England and more working years of life are lost in England because of alcohol-related deaths than from the ten most prevalent cancers combined.¹

The consumption of alcohol by children can be particularly hazardous to health. Children who drink increase their risk of involvement in a wide range of health and social problems. Alcohol can affect the entire body and, given that children's organs are still developing, they can be particularly vulnerable. Children are smaller, which means alcohol's effects work more quickly on them in the short-term. Alcohol poisoning can result in young people being admitted to hospital or worse. Other impacts include increased feelings of depression, mental health problems, an increased likelihood to smoke and take illegal drugs, have accidents and be involved in risk taking behaviours.

Recent survey data suggests that around 1 in 3 North East children who drink (36%)

drink. For children who drink, parents or older family members are the main source of alcohol for nearly 4 in 10 children.

There are synergies between the Licensing Act 2003 and the Alcohol Free Childhood vision

The North East of England has adopted a collective vision of working towards an alcohol free childhood for every child growing up in the region to help de-normalise alcohol in families and communities. This is a vision that every child can grow up:

- free from the impact of other peoples' drinking
- free from commercial, social and environmental pressure to drink
- free from health and social harms caused by drinking alcohol themselves
- supported and encouraged to make healthy positive lifestyle choices as they enter adulthood.

The Licensing Act 2003 identifies 'the protection of children from harm' within its four licensing objectives and several sections of the Act relate to children and alcohol including sales, proxy purchasing, consumption, delivery and sending a child to obtain alcohol. These are all essential policy areas where compliance is non-negotiable. While local authorities are permitted only to make licensing decisions within the scope of the Act, there may be ways in which local licensing processes can reflect the commitment from each local authority to the promotion of an Alcohol Free Childhood.

This toolkit provides advice and guidance on the integration of the Alcohol Free Childhood vision within local licensing frameworks.

The toolkit was developed collaboratively

Engagement with public health and licensing colleagues has been key in the development of this toolkit. Balance regularly meets with local authority licensing leads to gain an up-to-date understanding of local processes and how public health and licensing colleagues work together. Given the importance of the Alcohol Free Childhood vision, Balance started to explore how the vision could be supported by local licensing processes. A commitment was made by Balance to produce a toolkit on what an Alcohol Free Childhood approach to licensing might look like, with a particular focus on embedding issues linked to AFC within local statements of licensing policy. This was placed within the broader context of supporting the seven local authorities in delivering effective and innovative approaches to alcohol licensing.

Balance engaged with each of the seven local authorities' public health and licensing colleagues to ask:

1. Are there ways in which your local approach to alcohol licensing currently supports the priorities of an alcohol free childhood?
2. Are there additional ways in which an alcohol free childhood could be supported during your local licensing process?

We are grateful to those who were able to respond. The development of the toolkit has also been raised at key Balance forums – the Crime and Disorder Forum, the Champions meeting and the Alcohol Free Childhood steering group.

It was clear that there was already a good awareness and good levels of support for AFC as well as an appetite among public health in particular to embed AFC messages into the local licensing process and there are already some excellent examples of practice in place where public health and licensing work together including the establishment of a systematic approach to responding to licensing applications, variations and reviews. In relation to AFC in particular, key messages from the vision have already begun to be embedded in recently-reviewed statements of licensing policy.

The resources available in this toolkit are as follows:

- Briefing for partners
- Five recommendations for taking an alcohol free childhood approach to licensing
- Powerpoint presentation for delivery to those who are involved in the local licensing process, particularly elected members who sit on the committee
- Examples of good practice e.g. from local authorities where AFC is already embedded in local licensing frameworks.

Feedback is always welcome on the toolkit – including how it is being used – and we will keep the resources updated. Please email catherine.taylor@fresh-balance.co.uk with any comments.