



## The Wirral Alcohol Inquiry 2015/16

A citizen led deliberation on our  
relationship with alcohol



## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the members of the Citizens Inquiry, who placed their trust in the process and us as facilitators. This diverse, inspiring group of Wirral residents came together week after week to share their opinions and experiences with each other and us in the hope that their efforts, openness and commitment might make a difference to their own communities.

Thanks also go to the Inquiry commissioners from Wirral Council Public Health, all the commentators, Apex (for delivering the recruitment letters) and the Spider Project for hosting the launch event.

## About the authors

The recommendations produced by the members of the Alcohol Inquiry are reproduced here in the words of the Inquiry participants. The remaining content was written by Nick Beddow and Peter Bryant of Shared Future.

## About Shared Future

We are a community interest company primarily serving the North West of England, and with associates based across the UK.

Our aim is to provide an excellent service that makes a difference to communities and individuals and works towards a fairer, more equal society.

Our mission is to move those we engage with towards greater individual and collective authority and autonomy, by supporting their ability to act wisely, confidently and in community with others.

Since setting up Shared Future in 2009, we've built a team of experienced consultants and practitioners with a diverse range of skills. We work together on worthwhile and stimulating projects that reflect our personal values.



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# Summary

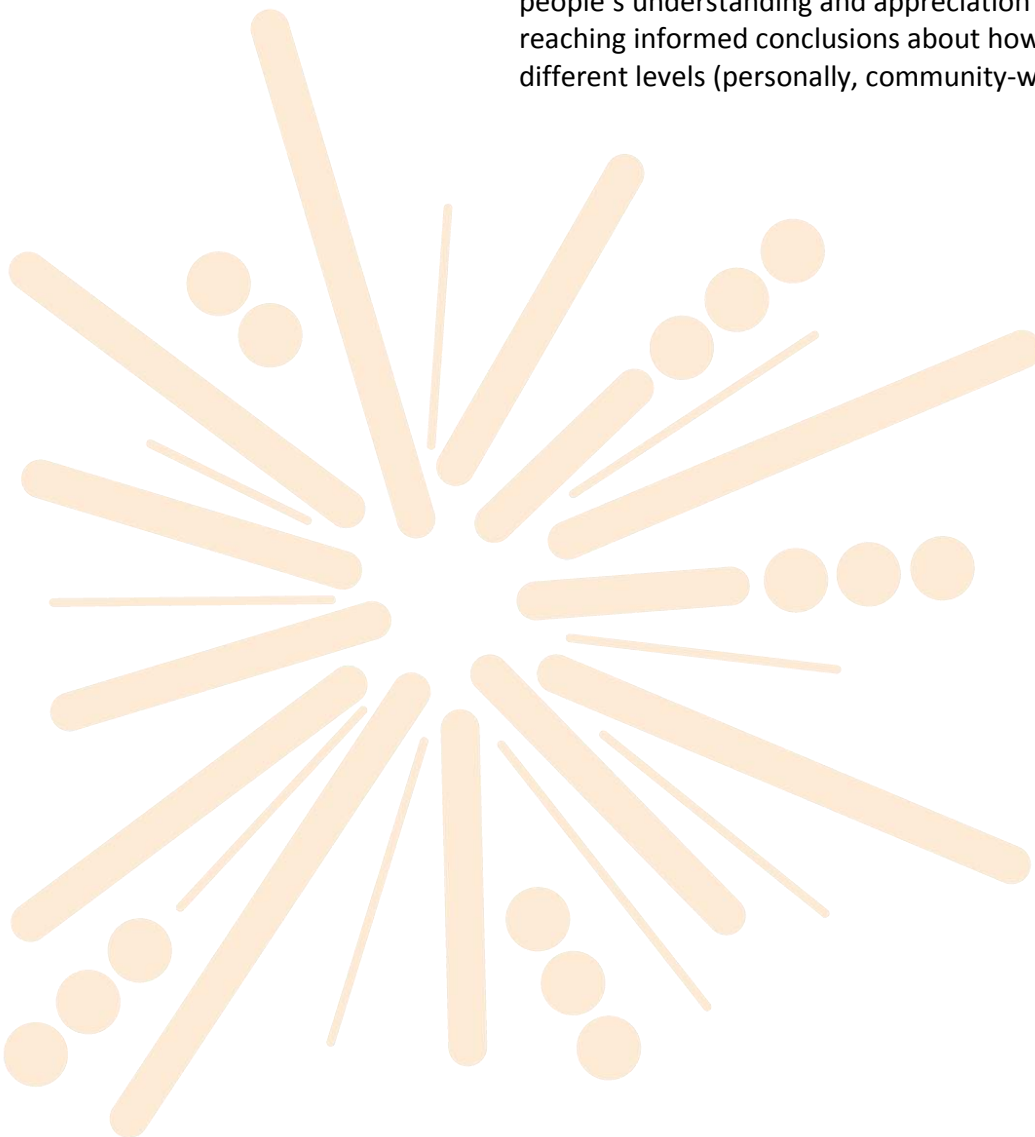
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Alcohol harm within the Wirral had been of increasing concern to communities and public services for some time and has become a high profile media issue.

The Wirral Alcohol Inquiry was commissioned by Wirral Council in September 2015 because evidence of high levels of Alcohol-related health harm necessitated the creation of a new alcohol strategy for Wirral which would include the views of a good representation of the Wirral population.

This Citizens Inquiry identified and engaged with 20 Wirral residents, with the purpose of empowering and enabling them to articulate an informed view of the actions that individuals, the community, the Council and other stakeholders should support and adopt to reduce alcohol-related harm in Wirral.

The project aimed to initiate and encourage discussion and debate about alcohol and the problems it causes, as a way of deepening people's understanding and appreciation of the issues before reaching informed conclusions about how these might be tackled at different levels (personally, community-wide and nationally).



# 1. Introduction

Following a competitive tendering process, the commission was awarded to the social enterprise Shared Future, a Community Interest Company based in the North West of England, who specialise in organising Citizens Inquiries and other participatory processes.

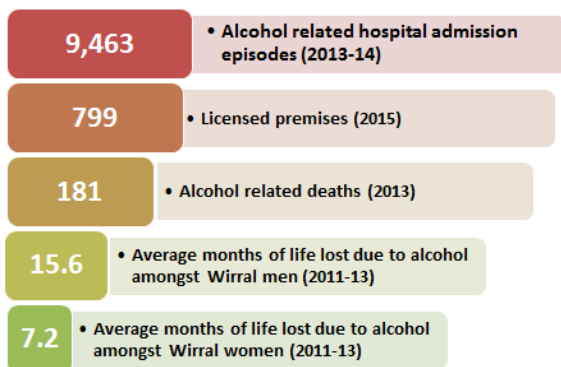
Shared Future team members have worked on some seven Alcohol Inquiries between 2012 and 2015. The Citizens Inquiry team brought together a committed community engagement team (Peter Bryant, Nick Beddow and Ali Wheeler) who had previously worked together in Our Life and Drinkwise.

## Why the Wirral Alcohol Inquiry?

Drinking alcohol has been part of British culture for hundreds of years, and it is believed that now 85% of adults drink alcohol, with probably 1 in 5 drinking what is judged to be too much.

The impact of alcohol misuse on individuals, their families and communities living on the Wirral is therefore very significant, as detailed below;

### Alcohol in Wirral



The consequence of Alcohol related harm is a significant problem in Wirral, as it is in many other parts of the country. The economic cost to Wirral arising from alcohol related problems is considerable, estimated at £127million per year.

This comprises of costs to the health and social care systems, criminal justice costs, and lost productivity. Alcohol is thought to be responsible for £25million of costs to the Wirral Healthcare

system, and 1 in 9 crimes on the Wirral are alcohol-related.

“This information is very well known to Public Health, and our other professional colleagues, and alcohol is therefore an issue of particular local focus and concern and a priority for action. However the Public Health team is very keen to bring life to the array of data that we collect and to connect it to the real experience of those living in Wirral. To this end we are committed to including in our thinking, planning and action the experiences, the views and priorities of those people who live in the diverse Wirral community. We want to do this by having close and regular dialogue with the population about what they perceive the issues to be, and the Alcohol Inquiry approach, with its use of a “Citizen’s Jury”, has offered what has proved to be one very effective way of achieving this.

The challenge that we set the Inquiry group was to consider and come up with answers to the question: ‘What can we all do to make it easier for people to have a healthier relationship with alcohol?’

They have done this very ably, and through listening, learning, discussion and debate they have produced a highly useful list of recommendations for action, including a number of practical and perceptive proposals which will be included in the development of a new alcohol Strategy for Wirral.

What has also come out of the Inquiry process for us is the realisation that this is now an informed and empowered group that offers an excellent vehicle for sustaining a route of dialogue between Public Health and the people of Wirral, and this is an asset that we very much want to maintain.”

Fiona Johnstone: Director Public Health



## Purpose

The aim of the project was to bring together a diverse group of residents in Wirral to deliberate over nine sessions and produce a set of recommendations that attempt to answer the question ‘What can we all do to make it easier for people to have a healthier relationship with alcohol?’ The Inquiry process aimed to also increase participant’s skills and capacity to take action on a personal and community level. The project strived to not impose a view of the issue or the solutions but instead to facilitate discussion that establishes which aspects of the alcohol issue citizens wish to address further.



Wirral Council and their partners wanted to have an informed awareness of the views and priorities of the local population included in the new alcohol strategy. They needed to gather evidence to support the development of this strategy and aimed to create a group with the capability to sustain itself, as part of the ABCD network, and be an ongoing source of engagement, dialogue with the population and future asset for continuing work to improve efforts to reduce the harm caused by alcohol misuse.

Locally, the project aimed to influence local strategic partners, at a senior level, and local politicians, through strongly evidenced feedback from a wide ranging profile of Wirral citizens. This communication between residents and decision-makers would also aim to establish effective channels for the two-way conveyance of messages and information between Public Health and the various communities of Wirral.

## The Process

The Inquiry took place on Mondays from November 2015-February 2016 and consisted of nine sessions for up to 20 people. During these

informal and relaxed sessions, those taking part would be encouraged to think and talk about alcohol in their own community. Shared Future invited a number of experts (‘commentators’) to come and speak to the participants on the issues they had prioritised in the first session of the Inquiry, to increase the residents understanding and help them explore how things could be changed.

Elements of the Inquiry process are based upon the model of the Citizens’ Jury. Deliberative processes such as Citizens’ Juries have been widely praised for their ability to allow citizens to question the ‘expertise’ of others, to appreciate the knowledge and opinions of others and after intense deliberation to strive towards producing agreed conclusions which are for the public good.

During the final two sessions, participants spent time reflecting on their discussions and producing a set of recommendations, before voting on the most important changes that need to happen. After the group produced their set of recommendations the Shared Future team supported them as they prepared for a public ‘Launch event’ at which the recommendations were shared with key decision makers and interested parties.



## Recruitment

Recruitment of residents aimed to ensure that a diverse group of residents from all four constituencies within the Wirral could work together. The group would include people with very different experiences of alcohol, and involve people who are usually excluded from participatory processes. The minimum age would be 16 to allow payment of participants by vouchers. Local community groups and voluntary sector organisations would be part of the recruitment process.



Shared Future received help from Constituency Managers and a Council Public Health Advisor to identify target streets within each of Wirral's four constituencies.

A recruitment letter was agreed with the Commissioners, outlining the aims of the Inquiry and the payments of vouchers and expenses available. To incentivise consistent attendance, participants received shopping vouchers at the end of the Inquiry process. There was also a

budget for participant support costs (including child care).

In the letter, residents were invited to complete a very simple one page form to register their interest in taking part, and, express their preference for afternoon or evening sessions, with the option of filling-in the form over the telephone to receive additional support. Freepost envelopes were included within the letter.

After 1000 letters were printed, the Council's Public Health Manager circulated a request to voluntary and community organisations to seek a partner who would receive payment by vouchers for folding and delivering the letters. Apex Mental Health charity volunteers decided that the task would usefully combine healthy walking and social involvement, and delivered 250 letters to each of the four constituencies. The letter was also sent to voluntary sector and community organisations by email, for wider circulation.

**'I was surprised at how varied the group was and particularly pleased to see so many young people'.**

Noted one of the Inquiry participants

Thirteen positive responses arrived in the post within a fortnight, helping Shared Future and the Commissioners to identify the remaining gaps in diversity. The following week was devoted to outreach work through community organisations and street work, talking to residents to invite them to complete the recruitment letter. The most productive contact work was with parents at school (outside at drop off and collection), a Childrens' Centre cafe and a Youth Homelessness project. It was particularly important to include young people in the Inquiry, as their behaviours are often a focal point for the discussions and the group need their perspectives to ensure that we challenge any us-and-them dynamic.

It was very important to create a group which also included people who have direct personal experience of alcohol harm to ensure that their

experiences are understood with empathy and challenge stereotyping and stigmatisation.

The residents' letters revealed that the preferred option was evening meetings for the majority of respondents. The final list of twenty participants was agreed and the most suitable venue was identified: the Old Markethouse training suite in Birkenhead provided a large room with break-out spaces, access for people with disabilities, and was close to most bus routes, with free car-parking. The selected participants were contacted to invite them to the first session of the Inquiry.

## Oversight panel

The Oversight Panel, chaired by the Director of Public Health, aimed to bring together those stakeholders most able to influence alcohol issues locally. The leverage provided by having a powerful Oversight Panel that operates in parallel to the Citizens Jury, ensures that barriers can be tackled strategically so that action can flow and momentum be developed.

The role of the Oversight Panel is to:

- Ensure that the project design is fair and rigorous;
- Suggest topics which could be considered by citizens in each session and identify commentators best able to present on these topics;
- Monitor the process of citizen selection;
- Provide assistance in following up citizen recommendations;
- Raise the profile of the Inquiry and its outcomes.

Oversight Panel members bring a diversity of experience and opinion. Past experience has shown that, although rarely a problem, it is conceivable that sometimes it can be difficult to have unanimous agreement on some thorny issues. In the spirit of transparency, the panel decision-making process was devised should such a situation arise:

- A range of perspectives and a variety of stakeholder interests are represented on the panel.
- Members of the panel are encouraged to suggest revisions to the process as it goes along.

- The Oversight Panel is designed to act as an additional safeguard of the fairness and competence of the process, which its members can communicate to wider communities.
- Those overseeing the process (and those that take part in each inquiry) will have the right to have minority or dissenting views reported alongside the recommendations that are produced.
- If any panel member feels that their views have not been sufficiently taken into account they can withdraw from the panel at any time during the process.

The work of the Oversight panel is described in more depth in Appendix 1



## 2. The Alcohol Inquiry sessions

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### Sharing experiences and ideas: sessions one and two

Previous Inquiries demonstrated how important it is to develop a warm and friendly environment from the outset, to begin the process of supporting strangers to become a high-performing team. The recruitment process enabled Shared Future workers to meet with many of the interested residents, breaking the ice before the first session.

Session One (23rd November 2015) introduced the participants to each other in a light-hearted way, using the People Bingo game to meet each other informally and find out about people's lives. Shared Future facilitators outlined the purpose of the Inquiry and emphasised that the participants set the agenda: residents are the experts, and the Inquiry would provide opportunities to talk and share experiences and opinions in an open debate about 'What can we all do to make it easier for people to have a healthier relationship with alcohol?' Initial sessions would support the group in identifying the issues which most interested them.

The second exercise divided the participants into four groups, reflecting which Wirral constituency they lived in. Each group was given a table-sized map of their constituency and asked to use it to identify 'what encourages people to drink too much (on orange post its) and what helps people not to drink too much (on green post its)?'



After the exercise was completed, participants toured the tables in turn to see what other groups had been doing and discuss their ideas and experiences.



The third exercise enabled the residents to investigate their issues in more depth, by using a Problem Tree. Everyone divided into two groups by combining two of the mapping groups. The problem was written on the trunk of the tree: "the harmful use of alcohol", and the participants were asked to consider the 'root' causes of the problem. The facilitator encouraged the group to go deeper into each issue by asking 'why is that?' in relation to each root cause. Their opinions were written on the tree roots on orange post-its, and then the group discussed the 'effects' of each cause on green post-its, which became the leaves of the tree.

Both groups reunited to share their problem trees: this was the first experience of working together as a full group and proved to be an entertaining and relaxed exercise, bringing the first session to a positive end.

Session Two took place on 7th December 2015. The group had generated a lot of alcohol-related issues in Session One, so the facilitators grouped the issues into themes, which were amended by the whole group before each participant voted on the issues which mattered most to them.





The result was a set of issues prioritised by the group themselves that then formed the agenda for the remaining Inquiry sessions.

This exercise consolidated the groups’ thinking and helped to underpin the discussions for the rest of the Inquiry. The prioritised issues are listed in the box below.

Their personal votes were recorded on confidential voting forms so no one could pressurise others.

## Barriers that make it difficult for people to have a healthier relationship with alcohol

Order	Barrier	Number of votes
1st	Nothing to do, nowhere to do it – places of entertainment are too expensive for some people. There are not enough places to socialise where there is no alcohol (only in some areas). There needs to be more supervised activities, cost effective play areas, cyber cafes, more projects, caged areas etc	12
2nd	Peer pressure (at any age). The peer pressure to drink due to people’s attitude towards alcohol. Alcohol is seen as ‘cool’. The attitude towards alcohol is to binge so you get very drunk. Adults make it look OK from a child’s perspective (monkey see, monkey do)	10
Joint 3rd	Too much availability of cheap booze e.g. cheap supermarket deals. Alcohol is very cheap in large quantities, the more you buy the cheaper it is.	9
Joint 3rd	Lack of preventative services. Not enough in schools at a young age teaching the outcome of heavy drinking. Not enough reaching out to homeless people with alcohol problems, No ‘Kontacta’ bus with youth engagement workers?	9
Joint 4th	Mental health, when a person feels that low, they resort to alcohol	7
Joint 4th	Promotion. Alcohol in shops is very attractive, packaging. Alcohol is advertised so positively whereas tobacco can’t be advertised at all. Alcohol is glamorised.	7
5th	Easy availability. It seems everywhere we go, petrol stations, corner shops, restaurants, supermarkets we are surrounded by alcohol. It is not hidden behind screens, there are multiple aisles in shops, corner shops, off licences, bars, opening times.	6
Joint 6th	Pubs. The main sports matches in pubs encourage drinking for longer periods. The pub is where you go to commiserate or to celebrate. Behaviour is passed on from generation to generation.	4
Joint 7th	Domestic abuse	3
Joint 7th	Dark areas of local parks where youths drink	3
8th	Alcohol is an easy gift for someone	1

## Deliberation and hearing from others: sessions three to seven

The Inquiry now moved into the Commentator phase: Commentators are an essential part of the Alcohol Inquiry process and are invited to speak on an issue that the participants prioritised in week two in order to further their understanding. They are able to offer new opinions to the participants and help them to reach their own conclusions about the best way for people to have a healthier relationship with alcohol.

The Alcohol Inquiry presents commentators with a rare opportunity to engage directly with local people in order to understand their realities and to share ideas about solutions that will have real benefit. Commentators have found that this exposure benefits them in their own work.

The Commentators are, in effect, the 'expert witness' who is called before the residents to give their testimony: the residents are the Jury who will decide what to accept and what to challenge.

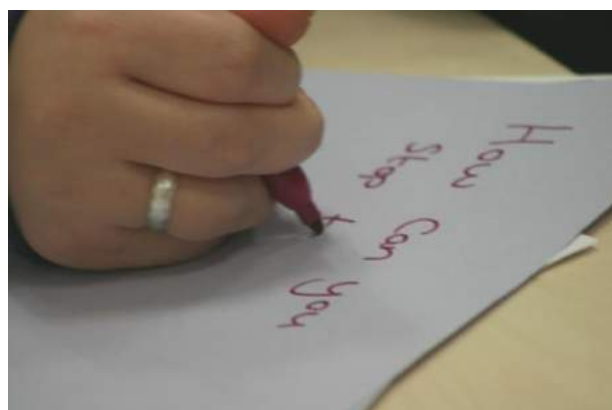
Each commentator was identified by Shared Future's Ali Wheeler, based on the issues prioritised by the residents.

The commentators were briefed in advance to guide their contributions within the ethos of community-led deliberation:

All commentators were invited to talk for up to 15 minutes on one or more of the issues prioritised by the citizens in session two. In their presentations they were encouraged to include:

- Details of who they are (and if relevant their organisation)
- An explanation what they feel the problem / issues are
- An explanation of what they feel are some of the solutions.

Essential to the success of the process is the use of clear, simple, easy to understand language. A red card system was employed whereby people are encouraged to show the red card if they are having difficulty understanding what is being said.



After each presentation, commentators are asked to leave the room to allow participants the space to talk with each other about their learning and to write any questions they may have. These questions are then shared with the facilitator. Finally in the absence of the commentator participants are asked to reflect on their learning and deliberate with each other. This helps to ensure that the conclusions reached are their own and that they feel ownership over any actions that they decide upon.

The first commentator was Andrew Taylor (currently Campaigns and Engagement Project Manager for Tobacco Free Futures, and formerly undertaking a similar role in Drinkwise). Andy talked about the impact of alcohol harm and his perception of the root causes.

The group enjoyed the question-and-answer session, delving more deeply into the issues.

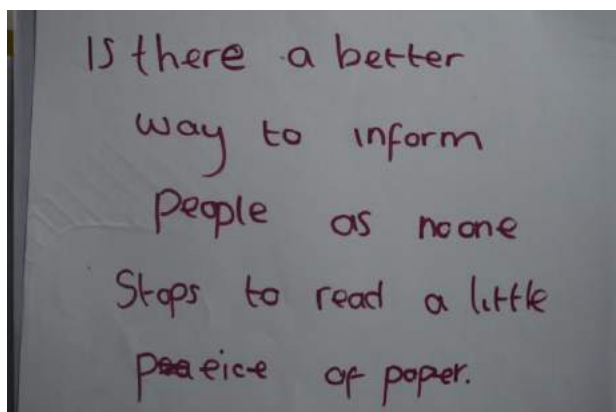
By session three, (14th December 2015) four new people had asked to join the group. At this early stage it is possible to integrate new people into



the Inquiry process as opinions are still being floated around without converging on any attempt at reaching consensus. The new participants were welcomed by the group, and the

results of last session's voting on priority issues were shared.

To help new participants catch up on the Inquiry progress, everyone was asked to share their views on the commentator session, as a prelude to a session dedicated completely to commentator/question-and-answer exercises.



The commentators at this session were two Environmental Health Officers, Jon Hardwick and Heidi Jones, followed by the Licensing Manager, Margaret O'Donnell their presentation centred upon the licensing process and the associated challenges.

The residents had started to think about how to share their ideas more widely across the Wirral communities, so session four (4th January 2016) began by developing more thinking about spreading the word: small groups discussed the range of communication methods, from word-of-mouth to online and printed media.

The commentator for the next session was Steve Morton, Public Health England. He focussed on the effects of alcohol harm and also availability.

The midpoint of the Inquiry (session five, 11th January 2016), gave everyone the opportunity to reflect on their priorities and ideas for recommendations. Groups of three people worked together to create a provisional list of recommendations which were recorded and then fed-back to the whole group.

The facilitators helped the participants to identify a number of themes which were emerging:

- Licensing
- Community facilities and activities
- Advertising, sales and availability

- Education and Awareness
- Services

Participants chose which themed group they wanted to join to talk more about the issues. These conversations consolidated the group's overall sense of direction while enabling people to air their individual priorities.

In the second half of the session, Mark Buchanan, Accident and Emergency consultant acted as the next Inquiry commentator

During Session Five, one of the themed groups had become concerned about the dilemma of 'preaching' to the public: how could the group spread the word about alcohol-related harm without being perceived as 'kill-joys' and 'anti-drink'? This dilemma provided a focus for session six (18th January 2016) where people revisited their themed group from session five to consider what issues they would like to share more widely and how to couch the issues effectively: "What could I do to start a conversation with others?". The group were creating their own communications strategy, step-by-step.



The commentators at the next session were Councillors Christine Jones and Bernadette Mooney.

## Preparing the recommendations: session eight and nine

Now that the group had a strong sense of the issues on which they were likely to develop recommendations, it was possible in session seven (25th January 2016) to start to consider how the



issues could be explored in the future Feedback Event with agencies and politicians. A Powerpoint presentation from a previous Alcohol inquiry was shared with the group to illustrate how the group might take the lead in presenting their findings at the Feedback Event. A key element in the Feedback event is the shared action-planning exercises between agencies and residents, developing ideas on how each themed recommendation could be achieved by each stakeholder. A speed-dating exercise was facilitated, with participants arranged in two rows facing each other. Using pre-created question cards from the 5 themes, they asked the partner facing them to help them consider and record:

- "what could decision makers do to take this forward?"
- "what could communities do to take this forward, with or without a bit of help".

The final commentator was David Barnicle from The Brink, Liverpool

With the commentator inputs over session eight presented the group with the opportunity to sift the wealth of ideas to and reach their own conclusions. The facilitators enabled the group to air their differences of opinion without rancour, by using a Continuum Exercise: one end of the room had a poster marked 'AGREE, and on the opposite wall a poster labelled 'DISAGREE'.



Each draft recommendation was read out in turn, and for each statement participants were asked to position themselves along the opinion lines to show literally where they stood on each issue.

The members were encouraged to talk to the whole group about how they felt and why. This exercise paved the way for a final vote on the recommendations in the next session. With the Feedback Event nearing, it was now imperative that the group began to finalise their recommendations.

The group were asked for volunteers to act as convenors of discussions on each of the five themes, and all the participants chose to join a themed group to tighten- up the format of the recommendation and make new ones. The facilitators circulated to ask probing questions, to help the group create specific statements which would be comprehensible to all.



The group then experienced a "world cafe" exercise, where the five convenors stayed at their table while everyone else rotated to other tables to look at the emerging lists of recommendations and add new thoughts.

With clearer recommendations, it was now possible for the group to create their own presentation collectively, using blank Recommendations Slides on a powerpoint projection to suggest a recommendation which could be typed immediately onto the projected slide. The participants could then discuss any improvements on the draft text, with a subsequent show of 'jazz hands' to gauge individual levels of satisfaction with the wording of the statement.



This proved to be a very entertaining, participatory way of finalising the recommendations and beginning to create a presentation. It would be revisited in the following session to add more recommendation slides.

The final session (8th February 2016) was preceded by a visit to the Spider Project on Hamilton Street Birkenhead, the venue for the Feedback Event.

The final recommendations were created in three groups, using the handouts from draft recommendations created in Session Two and the Speed date write-ups to consider any new recommendations, which were subsequently added to the slideshow with more 'jazz hands' and a lot of laughter.



During a short break, the facilitators printed the individual recommendations onto sheets, which were each given a letter of the alphabet and displayed around the meeting room walls.

Every participant was given an individual alphabetised voting sheet to confidentially choose their top seven recommendations.



All recommendations irrespective of the number of votes received are listed in the table below.

# 3. Wirral Alcohol Inquiry: Final recommendations

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
1st	10	Licensing	Limit the number of licensed premises and make it easier for the public to object to licensing applications. Educate the public that you can have a say on local licensing. Explore how we can make it easier for the public to have their say on local licensing.
2nd	9	Community facilities / activities	We need community projects for young people and adults which provide alternatives to drinking alcohol, keep people together and offer new ways to make friends, and gain life, social and work skills . Encourage brewers to fund these projects.
=3rd	8	Licensing	We need a fifth licensing objective “to protect health and reduce anti-social behaviour and domestic violence”.
=3rd	8	Education/ Awareness	Publicise the wider cost of alcohol to the people of the Wirral (A & E, policing, Fire service, Social Services, Mental health) and ask “what could we buy with this money otherwise?”
=3rd	8	Advertising, sales and availability	Make the whole of Wirral a ‘no street drinking’ zone including beaches, parks.
=4th	7	Education/ Awareness	Use a bus as a fun educational way of actively engaging young people to meet agencies and find out about services.
=4th	7	Education/ Awareness	Create a social media campaign with shocking local images so that the community of Wirral ‘takes a step back and reflects on their own relationship with alcohol’
5th	6	Education/ Awareness	Run a young people’s Inquiry about alcohol
=6th	5	Services	There needs to be more help for people with mental health problems who also have drinking problems e.g. quicker access to emergency care and fast follow-up support (this support should be geared to the person’s preference)
=6th	5	Community facilities/activities	More alcohol free venues for everyone e.g. The Brink and Spider project
=6th	5	Services	We need more up-to-date training for midwives and health visitors to recognise the signs of alcohol harm during pregnancy and post-natal , and to offer confidential support, advice, comfort and trust
=7th	4	Advertising, sales and availability	Stop impulse- buying by having special areas for alcohol in supermarkets, separated from other goods

## Final recommendations continued

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Votes</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
=7th	4	Services	More places for people coming out of detox, with more support and after care
=7th	4	Services	We need more services to help domestic abuse victims and perpetrators tackle their relationship with alcohol
=7th	4	Education/ Awareness	Publish our recommendations to create a public conversation across Wirral about how people can have a healthier relationship with alcohol e.g. Social media, vintage radio etc
=8th	3	Education/ Awareness	More interactive education for young people. Education that allows young people to discover for themselves what's involved and to then make their own decisions e.g. young people's peer guidance. Don't lecture young people.
=8th	3	Services	Explore possibility of charging prolific alcohol users for treatment (e.g. ambulance call outs)
9th	2	Advertising, sales and availability	Minimum Unit Price protects young people and heavy drinkers. Introduce a minimum unit price of alcohol across Wirral of 50p per unit. Increase the price of cheap, high strength alcohol. Stop 3 for 2 offers
=10	1	Advertising, sales and availability	Ensure No alcohol advertising at bus-stops and on billboards, especially near schools
=10	1	Advertising, sales and availability	One day a month alcohol-free days in pubs and bars
=10	1	Advertising, sales and availability	Campaign for a Watershed (e.g. 9pm) for advertising alcohol on TV
	0	Education/ Awareness	Create a public conversation on encouraging people to drink socially in regulated environments rather than in isolation (e.g. in pubs)
	0	Services	More places for homeless people in shelters/other facilities, with support from 'buddies'

# 4. The Feedback event



The Feedback Event brought together agencies and residents to hear about the ideas and recommendations which Inquiry participants believe can improve the situation around alcohol-related harm in the Wirral, and begin to identify agency response, future community action by residents' networks and greater residents' influence in policy-making. The recommendations were circulated in advance to all invitees.

The whole group worked as a team to plan their roles in the Feedback event: members of the Inquiry nominated themselves to speak on each slide, with the offer of Shared Future's support before the event to prepare content.

Following an unexpected Council meeting, the Feedback Event was postponed for a week. Fortunately all- but- one of the participants was able to attend on the hastily re-arranged date.



On February 29th the Feedback Event was hosted by the Spider Project on Hamilton Street,

Birkenhead. The Spider Project provides a creative community base for people recovering from addictions, within a warm, friendly environment.

The residents presented their work, using their Powerpoint slide show to describe why they had decided to get involved, how they had worked together and to outline their recommendations.

The recommendations were grouped into five themes:

- Licensing
- Education/Awareness
- Services
- Advertising, sales and availability
- Community facilities and activities

After the slideshow, participants were invited to pick a theme they felt they could influence and were interested in. Each theme was allocated a meeting space, with pre-agreed residents hosting each small group and recording ideas for action. After 20 minutes and 40 minutes, the agency participants were invited to rotate to other discussions, while the residents remained at their initial table to induct the new arrivals at their themed table and facilitate the discussions.

The event concluded with a brief feedback from each themed discussion, with the following ideas for action:



## Ideas for action from the Wirral Alcohol Inquiry feedback event

### Licensing

- Encourage Councillors and Voluntary Sector/ community organisations to be more pro-active in making people more aware of licence applications
- Licensing Officer to arrange for Inquiry members to meet Licensing Committee after May Elections purdah, to showcase the Inquiry recommendations.
- Inquiry members to lobby local MPs about 'Health' becoming a fifth licensing objective.

### Education/Awareness

- Fire Service 'safe & well' visits to include alcohol issues
- School discussions for age 17-18s, with young people taking the lead
- Investigate possibilities for an educational fun bus

### Services

- Train all midwives in advising pregnant women
- Take recommendations about tackling Domestic Abuse prevention to Council

### Advertising, sales and availability

- Start with alcohol- free beaches & parks

### Community facilities and activities

- Youth clubs
- Cafes opening in evenings too
- Create a Young Peoples' Alcohol Strategy via a Youth Alcohol inquiry



# 5. Conclusion

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## Comments from facilitators

Wirral Council Public Health has asked Shared Future to comment on the process. The following are our thoughts:

Citizens Inquiries are an experiment with new forms of citizen engagement. They aim to challenge the notion that members of the public are not interested in engaging with politics and that the person on the street will always struggle to navigate their way through the complex policy landscape to produce any kind of meaningful conclusion that moves beyond personal interest but instead caters for the greater public good. As with every Citizens Inquiry style process that the Shared Future team have been involved in, the Wirral Inquiry has proved the meaningful role citizens can have in public health policy making. The participants of the Wirral Alcohol Inquiry maintained very high levels of interest and attendance throughout the process. Our experience of Citizens Inquiries and the Wirral Alcohol Inquiry seems to confirm the thirst for engagement that exists in many communities. Indeed participants in the Inquiry launch event expressed a desire to continue working on the project.

## **The Inquiry model aims to move the process of engagement from one of consultation to one of empowerment and ultimately co-production.**

By investing time in the participants and the relationships between them, we shift from using the group as a body from which we extract information for our own purposes to a team of residents who want to shape their own neighbourhoods. A shift from passive consumers (of services) to citizens. However in order to do so we need to invest in supporting our Inquiry participants as they move into this new role. It is

always the case that Inquiry participants leave the final session and the launch event highly engaged and committed to taking further action. It is vital therefore that wherever possible we are able to act swiftly to support this enthusiasm. This means having in place a very clear set of support mechanisms to enable the group to realise its full potential.

As facilitators of the process we noted the following of many learning points:

One of the most exciting dimensions of the Wirral process was the dynamic between young participants and older generations. The commitment of three younger group members throughout the process ensured that the voice of young people was always present. All the members of the group regularly commented on the value of their participation and both groups constantly learned from each other's experiences and opinions. This diversity is particularly important in a process such as this in ensuring that no group within the community, that isn't in the room, is scapegoated and blamed (e.g. young people) as the root cause of the problem of alcohol harm.

The Group was particularly animated by the lack of alternative local social provision so were very keen on further exploring for example the Brink inspired model of an alcohol free venue. It is difficult to ascertain how much of the priority attached to certain recommendations is based upon people's belief in how feasible a recommendation is and so therefore whether or not it is worth prioritising. So, for example is it worth voting for the idea of more local social provision (e.g. an alcohol free venue) or for the Council to limit the number of licensed premises if one believes that neither would actually happen. This is something we have been able to explore at other Inquiries in the follow-up sessions where participants are supported as they plan their own action.

Our efforts in recruiting participants were particularly helped because of the knowledge of constituency managers, help from Apex and the

friendliness of people on the streets. One of the many challenges we faced in recruitment was the understandable reluctance of many who got the letter through the door to actually open it. In other Inquiries we have described the voucher incentive on the envelope in an effort to encourage people to look inside.

The presence of a senior member of the public health team at all sessions was a boost for all. Firstly it was a visible recognition of the commitment of the public health team to the work of the Inquiry and secondly it allowed instant access to a source of local knowledge.

Commitment of the group to continue meeting after the launch event was not helped by a lack of clarity as to whether or not any future support for the group would be available.

As facilitators we are always eager to explore how such processes can improve policy-making and empower citizens to take their own action. The inquiry model that draws upon notions of deliberation, dialogue, community development and co-production has huge potential which we would love to further explore. Here are some possibilities:

Organising Citizens Inquiries in conjunction with an assigned budget, which can then be allocated through a Participatory Budgeting process.

Organising Citizens Inquiry style processes in conjunction with co-production training for public sector officers and elected members so preparing them to be able to act swiftly to maximise the potential of such a process.

In order to spread the conversation still further, Citizens Inquiries with a well thought through media strategy could have a bigger impact e.g. the “Listening to the City” deliberations around rebuilding lower Manhattan involved tens of thousands of newspaper and Internet readers in a conversation about urban planning.

Tying deliberative processes into institutional decision making processes and arrangements so that recommendations are acted upon has been successfully achieved across the world on hugely important issues suggesting it can be achieved on smaller scale ‘local issues’ e.g. The Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform, British Columbia (2004)

## Wirral and the other Alcohol Inquiries

Previous Alcohol Inquiries have been held over the last three years in seven different localities across the North West (Barrow in Furness, Blackburn, Blackpool, Ellesmere Port, Fleetwood, Halton and Morecambe). It is interesting to compare the recommendations from these Inquiries with the recommendations from Wirral. The table on the next page summarises the recommendations from the other Inquiries according to which were most frequently placed in the top 10 of each Inquiry<sup>1</sup>.

There are some very clear themes, with many recommendations being repeatedly placed highly by Inquiry participants.

The need for alcohol education for young people both in and out of schools was consistently prioritised and indeed made the top ten of all seven Inquiries. In Wirral this priority was less of a concern but was still mentioned. The recommendation here was around a plea for interactive education that *'allows young people to discover for themselves what's involved and to then make their own decisions e.g. young people's peer guidance'*.

The top priority for Wirral residents, i.e. *'Limit the number of licensed premises.....'* figured in the top 10 of regional priorities (9<sup>th</sup>). In Halton the fourth priority echoed the Wirral recommendation *'Licensing Authority should be able to limit the number of outlets, i.e. corner*

*shops, off license etc, that sell alcohol in the community to reduce the adverse cumulative effect'* while in Morecambe the second recommendation was *'Cap the number of licences for Pubs and Off licences in this area'*. In Blackpool the sixth recommendation echoed the Wirral concern that it should be made *'easier for the public to object to licensing applications'*.

**The Blackpool recommendation suggested that 'Members of the public require greater influence on licensing decisions overall. We feel that too many decisions are made by a higher authority and made in the interests of industry itself, leaving little or no influence for the communities these decisions then effect'.**

There is clearly a large appetite across all inquiries to limit the availability of alcohol. When we combine the recommendations limiting the number of licensed outlets with the recommendations limiting opening hours of licensed premises, it becomes the third priority. The third priority for Wirral residents of a need for *'community projects for young people and adults which provide alternatives to drinking alcohol, keep people together and offer new ways to make friends, and gain life, social and work skills'* echoed the third regional priority of the need for increased community based activities i.e. more things for people to do. Other Inquiries talked of the need for *'a youth and community centre, to reduce boredom and isolation and create community spirit'* etc.

The need to reduce or ban alcohol advertising was the second priority across the seven Inquiries although was less of a priority for Wirral residents (the tenth priority).

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<sup>1</sup> The figures were calculated by allocating a similar recommendation ten points if it was prioritised by an Inquiry as the number one priority, nine points if it was prioritised as the number two priority and so on.



## Most frequently occurring recommendations across seven Alcohol Inquiries

rank	recommendation	value
1	Improve alcohol education for young people and in schools	101
2	Reduce or ban alcohol advertising	49
3	Increase community based activities (more things for people to do)	40
4	Improved education (outside of schools) on alcohol harm and the benefits of not drinking	29
5	Separation of areas where alcohol is sold (e.g. Supermarkets, licensed premises)	26
6	Limit the opening hours of licensed premises	26
7	Better communication and coordination between services	26
8	More health warnings on posters and labels	25
=9	More training for professionals on alcohol harm (e.g. school nurses, GPs, health workers, social workers)	20
=9	Support pubs (e.g. more community pubs)	20
=9	Limit the number of licensed outlets	20
10	Increase the availability of alcohol free drinks and alcohol free pubs	18
=11	Better promotion of support services	14
=11	Minimum Unit Price	14
=11	More support for families and parents	14
=11	Better training for the staff of licensed premises	14
=12	Young people found drunk to be taken home by the police or warned by them	13
=12	Health as the 5th Licensing objective	13
=12	Clamp down on drink driving (e.g. increased sentences)	13
=12	Alcohol profits to fund NHS, rehabilitation etc.	13

# Appendix 1: Oversight Panel report

The Wirral Alcohol Inquiry Oversight Panel was chaired by Fiona Johnstone Director of Public Health. Below is a list of key stakeholders who made up the membership of the Oversight Panel:-

Chris Oliver	Strategic Manager
Ann Taylor	Alcohol Nurse
Mark Buchanan	A & E Consultant
Julie Mates	Fire Service
Paula Basnett	Chamber of Commerce
Bernadette Mooney	Councillor
Christine Jones	Councillor
Margaret O'Donnell	Council Licensing Lead
John Martin	Police Supt
Clare Fish	Director of Families & Wellbeing
Nesta Hawker	CCG Rep
Sian Stokes	GP
Jim McVeigh	JMU
Colin Clayton	Trading Standards

The panel met three times to discuss and oversee the Inquiry and were very supportive of the process. At each meeting an update on the Inquiry process was given by Gary Rickwood from the local Public Health team who attended each Inquiry session and Alison Wheeler from the Shared Futures team. Discussions took place on progress and any issues from each Inquiry session. Questions and challenges were invited from the Oversight Panel to ensure that they were happy with the progress and process that the Inquiry was following. Five of the Oversight Panel members also attended the Inquiries as Commentators. Cllrs Mooney and Jones attended together, Mark Buchanan and Ann Taylor attended together and Margaret O'Donnell attended with other colleagues from Trading Standards. They were also able to provide feedback on their experiences to the Oversight Panel meetings which added value and integrity to the process.

The Oversight Panel held its last meeting two days after the launch event. Most of the panel had attended the launch event and stated how impressed they were with the recommendations and the way in which they were presented by the participants. The Oversight Panel discussed ownership and action for each of the recommendations and also ongoing support for the Inquiry participants who may wish to continue to engage with the agenda. It was agreed that the recommendations needed to be shared across all of the partners involved in the process or who could be affected by the recommendations and wider through the Health and Wellbeing Board and other partnership routes. The recommendations will also be fed in to the development of the new Wirral Alcohol Strategy. In addition, a number of avenues will be explored around involving the participants in the local licensing process and also the local responsible retailers group. It was felt by the Oversight Panel that communication to the group about their work and impact was important that they see and hear their recommendations being put into action.

# Appendix 2: Questions for the commentators as asked by the Inquiry members

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## Questions for Andrew Taylor (Tobacco Free Futures, formerly Drinkwise)

- How much money is spent by alcohol companies on advertising?
- Who decided that binge drinking was just over 4 pints and why?
- Why has no legislation been put in place to stop promotions on alcohol?
- Are different types of drinks priced differently per unit?
- If a can of Skol is one unit then is a can of Skol super more than one unit?
- Please clarify: in unit pricing would a strong beer be more expensive than a lighter beer of the same quantity?
- How does it work with units? What happened to the 50p unit (minimum)?
- How difficult is it to get a licence?
- Can there be a 24-hour clinic for drug and alcohol related issues?
- What can we do to help pregnant women stop drinking while pregnant?
- What is a healthy level of alcohol to have whilst pregnant?
- Why hasn't there been more public information about blood alcohol levels the morning after drinking in relation to driving the next day?
- Should be a drink-driving limit reduced down to 50?
- Why is there a resistance to police doing random breath tests?
- After losing a driving licence how hard is it to get it back?
- You didn't mention interaction of alcohol with drugs/medication in relation to operating machinery or driving?
- Why haven't England followed Europe and lowered the blood alcohol level for drink-driving?

- Why don't they do zero tolerance in the workplace and zero tolerance for drink-driving?

## Questions for Wirral Council Environmental Health Officers: Jon Hardwick and Heidi Jones, Licensing Manager, Margaret O'Donnell

- If a member of the public made a representation how seriously would it be taken? How many people would it take to be effective?
- What can be done to make the reality of what John and Heidi see every morning match with the work of Margaret?
- If somebody loses a licence to sell alcohol can they get it back and if so how hard would it be for them to get it back?
- What is duty of care to the local community does the licensing officer have? If the area is already cluster bombed per head of population do we need more licensed premises in that area?
- How many people read the local newspapers?
- How many pubs in Birkenhead have lost licences?
- Selling to people who are drunk. Who decides if you are drunk/not to be served after 2 pints or 6 pints?
- How can you stop people (women and children and pensioners) being victimised and racially abused by shop owners and staff?
- How do you get the evidence for court?
- What time at night can children remain in a pub?
- Why do you have no say in the review of a licence?
- Geographically speaking if there is a high concentration of licensed premises does that come into consideration when a licence is granted?

- How much is an alcohol licence?
- How much does the applicant actually know about holding a licence? Do they require qualification/do they understand English language and law?
- The Licensing Act 2003: if someone broke the law in 2003 would they be breaking it or does it apply from 2005 onwards?
- What role does the door staff have the right to refuse?
- How can you stop tampering with gas and electricity theft?
- How often does a licence owner actually spend on the premises?
- Are private clubs under different rules to normal pubs?
- Do businesses get charged for selling alcohol and if so how much?
- Is there a better way to inform people as no one stops to read a little piece of paper?
- Why can't they put a permanent time that a premises can sell alcohol til and from?
- There isn't there a law up to now (CRB) checking everybody who is selling alcohol?
- How many times can you apply for an alcohol licence after being knocked back?

## Questions for Steve Morton: Public Health England

- How many women lose their children during pregnancy? Or have their child having problems?
- How many people die per year due to alcohol?
- How much does it cost annually the NHS to treat drunken people?
- Can you recommend something similar to the government like what they did with tobacco behind closed doors?
- Do you want our group to support the amendment request on the Licensing Act 2005?
- How effective is the Drinkaware campaign?
- What's the most successful thing that you have done in the past with things like this?
- Who can put a stop to the increase in pubs? Is their local power or a change in the law from Parliament?
- What's the effect on pregnant women while drinking?

- How many detox places are there in the north-west and how much does it normally cost to run?
- Why do we not have graphic advertising against drinking to excess as we do with smoking?
- What are the most effective ways of lobbying?
- A client will often have a relationship with and feel comfortable with their GP. So why does the GP have to refer them to CRI (provider of drug and alcohol services in the Wirral) rather than be treated by the GP?
- Little government money is spent on mental health. Diagnosis of mental health and alcohol go hand in hand. What is your opinion on this lack of funding?
- How could we change the product placement in the supermarkets?
- Is there a limit on the amount of alcohol a person can buy from a shop/supermarket?
- Why is money spent on drug rehabilitation and not on alcohol rehabilitation?
- What is the most effective thing we as a group can do?
- Is there a budget for education and where is it spent?
- How can the business rates be balanced so that corner shops do not have to sell alcohol in order to make a profit (compared to the supermarket chains)?
- Could we have simple bullet points for members of the public so that they can make representations (objections) to a licensing authority e.g. health reasons?
- What is the most effective way of putting objection forward so the whole of the local community supports it

## Questions from Mark Buchanan: Accident and Emergency consultant.

- why are you accepted onto a detox program if it is difficult to get rehab afterwards?
- How difficult is it to get into a rehabilitation centre?
- Why is there very little rehab after detox with alcohol as there is with drugs?



- Do the licensing listen to the recommendations of medical professionals?
- Does a mother have her baby taken from her if the baby was born addicted to alcohol?
- Can you refuse to treat a violent patient who is drunk?
- Is there a medical difference between how alcohol affects the body dependent on age e.g. maturity of the organs (underage drinking) for with older people?
- What do you think the community could do that would work to help prevent excess drinking?
- How do perpetrators overcome alcohol-related violence?
- How many places for victims of domestic violence and alcohol are there to go to? How much information is out there for them?
- How many detox centres are there in the Wirral?
- Out of the 30% admitted how many teenagers/young people account in this figure?
- If there were stricter licensing laws do you feel that this would reduce the impact of alcohol abuse on the emergency department?
- What does community/inpatient detox entail?
- In my opinion health visitors and midwives need to better educate pregnant women about the dangers of drinking while pregnant?
- Is alcoholism considered as an illness or an addiction?
- Do alcoholics get more money in benefits?
- Other patients you see getting younger?
- Is there a breakdown of statistics used per area on the Wirral or just Wirral as a whole?
- We were very impressed with the talk could this be delivered to schools and colleges (by request or made part of general teaching PSA)?
- What feedback have you had from other areas of the country that could help the Wirral?

## Questions for: Councillors Christine Jones and Bernadette Mooney.

- Do you think the 'shot' culture can be avoided in the future?
- Do you think there is any way to stop people from drinking excessively before going out?
- Why do you think that parks have a low priority?
- Could local authorities put pressure on supermarkets to keep alcohol to specific areas i.e. byelaws?
- Is there any pressure councillors could put to reduce the sales of very strong ciders etc without risking not being re-elected?
- What can the community do to assist the local authority when both are against allowing another licence?
- How much rubbish per year is just alcohol bottles that people have thrown away while being drunk and how could that be cut down?
- Could Wirral be part of a pilot scheme for education re alcohol in schools?
- You spoke about a centre opening in Brighton Street. What is the centre for? How does it aid the community?
- Can licensing and planning change the byelaws a) to make it more difficult to open licensed premises b) how many objections are needed to hold a licence? c) is it that difficult to halt or revoke a licence?
- Are there any groups for the older generation so they are not by themselves, as that would probably cause them to not drink as they would have something to do?
- How many kids clubs are there in Wirral for teenagers and would it be possible to make more youth clubs and skate parks?
- How do you decide the budget for alcohol?
- What questions to the public bring to you about issues around alcohol?

## Questions for David Barnicle from The Brink, Liverpool

- What are your opening hours?
- Are you open to one off events?
- Do you get any extra support from other agencies?
- What are the main costs of setting it up and running it?
- Is the Brink covering its costs?
- How do you advertise The Brink so people know what's on every week?
- How do you advertise your service/business to each target audience?
- Does it make money for Action on Addiction?
- What are some of the alternative drinks you sell?
- What time are you open until?
- How much does it cost to set up and how long does it take to break even?
- Do you think that it would work outside the city centre e.g. Birkenhead?
- Do you have any statistics to show your success of the business?
- Is it a profitable organisation?
- How do you help young people (13 to 25) with addictions or asking for help?
- Would the Brink willing to help local shops and supermarkets that are willing to get alcohol free drinks in stock? And what alcohol free drinks are there already apart from beer?
- Why is it called the Brink?
- How long has the Brink been running for?
- If you didn't get funding how much would it cost to run the Brink?
- Would you branch out to the Wirral, Birkenhead town centre?
- Are Action on Addiction looking to open more branches?
- Are the staff paid or are they volunteers?

## **Wirral Alcohol Inquiry 2015/16**

**This report summarises the deliberations of a group of local residents from across the Wirral in 2015/2016 who took part in the Wirral Alcohol Inquiry.**