Engaging the community in local alcohol decision-making

Reflections from a scoping study

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Local alcohol environment shapes:

- where, when, how much people drink, and

- with what consequences for health, well-being and society.

Policies and decisions made at **local government level** can help reduce alcohol-related harms.

Value of **engaging communities in decision-making**:

- To help shape policies and programmes to make them more effective

- As the 'right' thing to do.

Some recognition of the need to involve the community in local alcohol decision-making:

- Eg recommended in the Licensing Act for England & Wales
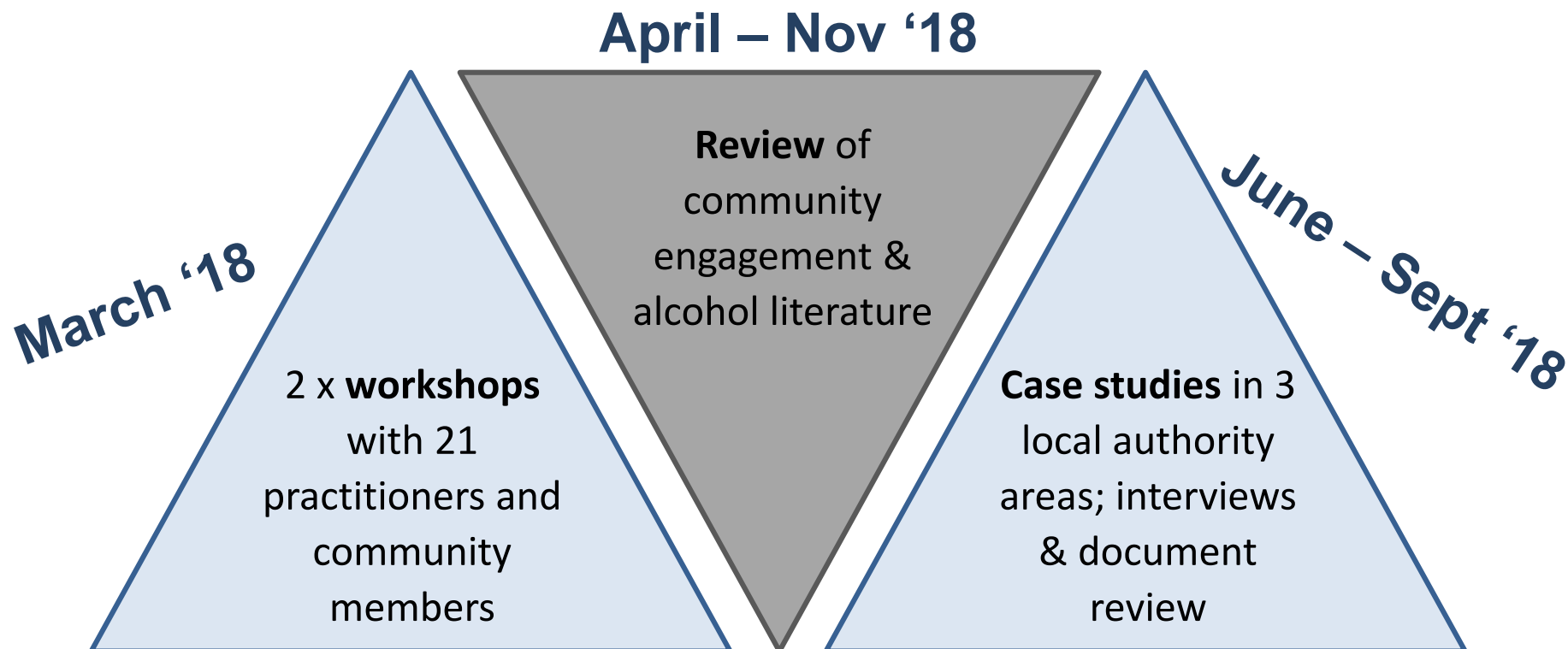- In Scotland: licensing forums

But how best to support this at the local level in England?

Community engagement in local alcohol decision-making (**CELAD**) study aimed to:

- Explore mechanisms, facilitators and barriers to engaging the community to influence local decision-making on the **alcohol environment**.

CELAD study methods

April – Nov '18

March '18

Review of community engagement & alcohol literature

2 x **workshops** with 21 practitioners and community members

June – Sept '18

Case studies in 3 local authority areas; interviews & document review

Sheffield Hallam University

LA01: North West England, metropolitan borough

5 interviews with:
Licensing practitioner
Local councillor
Public health practitioners
Employees of local alcohol recovery group

LA02: South East England, unitary authority

7 interviews with:
Public health practitioner
Local councillors
Community safety officer
Manager of local alcohol treatment service
Member of local residents' association
Representative of students' union

LA03: North East England, metropolitan borough

8 interviews with:
Public health practitioners
Local economy practitioner
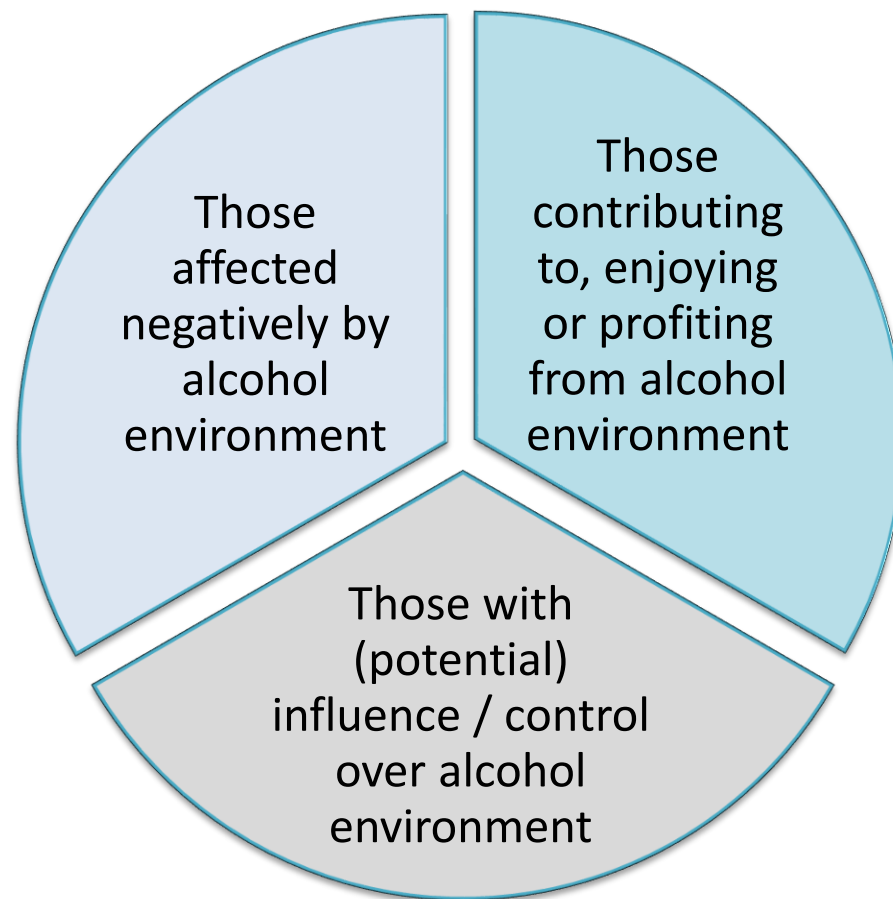Local councillor & licensing committee member
Service user member of alcohol strategy group
Members of local residents' association
Manager of local bar

Insights from workshops

Defining the local alcohol environment:

- cultures of drinking

- spaces of & affected by drinking

- policies and regulation

- organisations and service providers

- [local] alcohol industry.

Defining 'community' in relation to the local alcohol environment:

Those affected negatively by alcohol environment

Those contributing to, enjoying or profiting from alcohol environment

Those with (potential) influence / control over alcohol environment

Key findings: case studies

Four types of mechanism of C.E. in alcohol decision-making:

1. **Statutory processes:**
   - Engaging with local councillors to 'get voice heard'
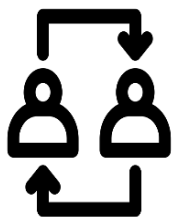   - Making representations within licensing process.

2. **Consultation processes:**
   - For formal policy making eg gathering evidence to support CIPs
   - More informal eg sharing views on alcohol services via social media.

3. **Representation:**
   - Members of communities invited to attend different task groups for alcohol decision-making, eg night-time economy task group

4. **Ongoing programmes / initiatives:**
   - Relationship-building between community and council as a by-product of alcohol-related initiatives, eg Best Bar None
   - Relationship-building helps sharing of information, sometimes leading to policy change.

Developing a resource to support community involvement in licensing – LA01

- Need for community members to have more say in licensing decisions identified through community-based alcohol inquiry.

- Public health team working with regional partners to develop a resource to offer guidance to community members to input to licensing process.

- Engaged with residents and councillors about their experiences of the licensing process to shape the resource.

Case study example 2

Using community engagement to shape local licensing policies – LA02

- Concerns about alcohol availability in parts of LA02; PH practitioner engaged with range of residents' groups, community organisations and to explore their views on local alcohol-related issues.

- Residents' **"personal experiences"** of facing anti-social behaviour and other alcohol issues proved powerful in influencing decisions.

- Led to introduction of several cumulative impact policies, change to Statement of Licensing Policy, and residents feeling more engaged.

Representation and relationship-building across decision-making areas – LA03

- Multiple opportunities for representatives of different communities to be part of groups related to alcohol decision-making eg:

  – 'Expert by experience' member of alcohol strategy group

  – Members of a local residents' association and local night-time economy business network sitting on a city centre task group.

- Also, examples of 'bottom-up' relationship building:

  – Community-led groups inviting council practitioners to attend meetings to talk about alcohol environment.

Barriers & facilitators

Range of barriers and facilitators to the community becoming engaged and influencing decisions; lots of overlap with other areas of C.E.:

Facilitators

Advocates to guide through decision-making processes

Gathering information on local issues, and personal stories

Building up knowledge of decision-making processes

Collaborating with existing networks and groups
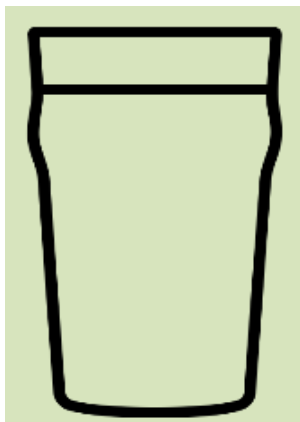
Barriers

Lack of capacity and time among practitioners to support

Time, energy and persistence required to be engaged and influence decisions

Restrictions within formal decision-making processes and legislation

Lack of clear information on decision-making process

What's specific to alcohol

- Community role in licensing process **formally recognised** in licensing legislation.

- Established **cultures of engagement** and **outreach** in alcohol recovery communities.
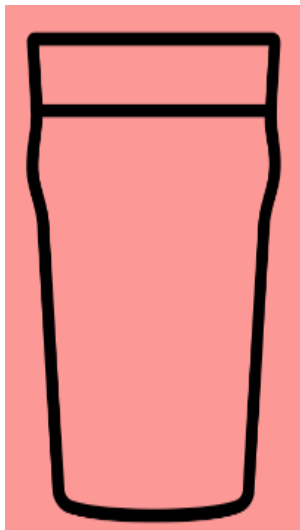
- Concerns that encouraging community engagement within the licensing process would be seen as 'soliciting' objections.

- Challenge of **understanding the licensing process** and what's required for objecting to licence applications.

- **Competing sets of interests** around local alcohol environment: culture, economy, social factors, health, safety.

Insights and conclusions

1. **Value of engagement for building relationships and knowledge:**

   - Engagement not just as part of formal decision-making processes

   - Potential to build capacity to influence decisions in future.

2. **Range of ways communities can influence alcohol environment and potential for more:**

   - Several examples of influence on licensing policy

   - More opportunities through place-shaping decision-making including planning, local economy.

3. **Different groups engage, reflecting different interests in alcohol environment:**

   - Potentially competing interests reflected in engagement

   - Need more understanding of whose interests are (and are not) reflected in decisions.

4. **Top down versus bottom up engagement approaches:**

   - Predominantly top down: community invited to into council-controlled spaces

   - However, a few examples of community led-action to influence decisions.

Limitations & further questions

Challenges with recruiting areas to participate in case studies:

- reflecting budget cuts and restructuring

- community engagement (and / or alcohol policy) not a priority for all areas

Little interaction with planning processes in case study research:

- reflects recruitment process (via public health contacts) but also lack of cross-sector working, especially between licensing and planning

- more understanding of planning influence on alcohol environment needed.

Need more exploration of how different sets of interests are reflected in decisions made:

- whose interests are included / excluded from engagement and decision-making, and what impact for health and inequalities?

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