



Dispersal Policy

Introduction

It is clear that the licensed trade has played a major role in regenerating our town and city centres; however, there is a tipping point where the positive benefits give way to problems as a lack of infrastructure creates pressure points which in turn lead to disorder and disturbance.

“The night time economy is helping enable economic regeneration in many deserted and run down traditional urban centres. However, it is in no-one’s long-term interest if such economic regeneration leads to social degeneration in the shape of violence, disorder and destruction of private and public property.”

p36, Lessons from the 2004 Summer Alcohol Misuse Enforcement Campaign - PSU

It is widely accepted that the vast majority of problems relating to alcohol occur at the end of the evening and in the public realm as customers leave venues and begin to compete for scarce resources. Potential victims and aggressors are to be found side by side at taxi ranks, in the queue for fast food or walking the streets in a bid to hail a cab.

“From the information given to Nitelite it was clear that poor lighting, not enough transport and overcrowding at closing time can pave the way for people feeling unsafe.”

Nitelite Southport

Operators accept that their responsibilities cannot simply end at their front door and that, by contributing to a better managed end of night, they can deliver a safer town or city centre. The most popular venues will attract large numbers of customers and, by their very nature, can be potential sources of nuisance, antisocial behaviour and crime which may create concern for the immediate neighbourhood, its residents and the authorities. Operators are, therefore, eager to develop, in partnership with the police and council, a dispersal policy which will seek to reduce the pressure on the police at the end of trading, ease customers’ passage home and minimise the likelihood of local residents being disturbed.

Preparing A Dispersal Policy

Every venue, be it pub, club or bar, can and should prepare and implement a dispersal policy. Such a policy would set out the steps the venue will take at the end of the trading session to minimise the potential for disorder and disturbance as customers leave the premises. Clearly the contents of the policy would vary widely from one venue to the next based on its size, location and offering.

Prepared in consultation with the licensing officers of the local council and police and, ideally, in place prior to a venue beginning to trade, the policy should be kept under review to address new issues as they arise.

While preparing their policy, operators should consider the local statement of licensing policy and any relevant conditions attached to the premises licence.

Elements of a Dispersal Policy

Transport

Probably the biggest single factor triggering disorder and disturbance is a lack of public and private transport at the end of the evening, preventing the swift dispersal of customers away from the venue. There are a number of steps operators can take to reduce transport related problems:

- Promote safety on leaving, for example through operating a concierge service and providing a safe place for customers to wait for taxis (particularly lone females);
- Advertise reliable services by providing free phone numbers for licensed mini-cabs and details of nearby taxi ranks, bus timetables or other local transport networks.
- Agree an operating policy with local private and public hire vehicles, for example banning the sounding of horns after 11pm;
- Discuss with the council the location of taxi ranks to ensure they are easily accessible without causing bottlenecks outside venues;
- Consider, in discussion with the police and council, the use of stewards to act as marshalls at bus stops and taxi ranks; and
- Work with the local authority and transport providers to agree bus routes, stops and timetables.

Road Safety:

Should the venue exit onto a public highway, operators should ensure separation of customers and traffic – if necessary by the installation of permanent or removable barriers.

Car Parking

If appropriate, operators could advise customers of the best car park to use (either through their website or on printed material) so that they leave in a direction with minimum disturbance to local residents. Operators might also be able to negotiate with local car park operators to allow customer usage.

Staffing

During the last half hour of trading, the service points in each bar may be reduced and some staff reallocated to collect glasses or work in the cloakroom. This will assist customer departure and reduces the potential for people to carry glassware out of the premises.

Cloakroom

The cloakroom should be set up in order to assist the swift return of coats with staffing and control systems increased in the period prior to closure.

Music & Lighting (internal)

During the last 20 minutes of trading, the DJ may typically play slower music and reduce the volume of the music played. In addition, lighting levels can be manipulated to encourage the gradual dispersal of patrons during the last part of trading and the drinking up period (see winding down).

Lighting (external)

Operators have found that the use of bright lights at the exit of the venue encourages customers to leave more quietly. Operators should liaise with the local council to establish guidelines on the positioning of these lights which will also prompt customers to leave the area quickly and enhance CCTV coverage.

Minimising Noise on Exit

If possible, a manager should be in the area close to the main exit to oversee the end of night departure period. DJ announcements should be used to remind customers to be considerate on leaving the premises. While highly visible notices can be placed in the foyer requesting exiting customers to leave quietly and to respect neighbours and their properties.

Bottles or glasses

Signage should make clear that customers will not be allowed to leave the premises with bottles or glasses. This policy should be supported by a vigilant door team searching customers where necessary. If appropriate, bins can be provided at exits for use by customers. Operators could also provide advice on any drinking ban in the area.

Litter

Operators should send out a 'Rubbish Patrol' following closure. This patrol will pick up bottles, flyers, food wrappings etc in the immediate vicinity of the premises. As well as clearing rubbish, the patrol acts as another set of eyes and ears identifying potential disorder. Their activity, particularly sweeping the pavement, will also encourage customers to vacate the area outside the premises.

Door staff

The door team play a key role in the implementation of several aspects of any dispersal policy:

- encouraging customers to drink-up and progress to the exit within a venue throughout the latter part of drinking-up time;
- drawing the attention of exiting customers to the notices in the foyer and ask them to be considerate;
- ensuring the removal of all bottles and glasses from departing customers;
- actively encouraging customers not to congregate outside the venue; and
- directing customers to the nearest taxi ranks or other transportation away from the area.

Marshalls:

The use of venue security staff as marshalls should always be in negotiation with the police and kept under review. A marshall is a patrolling security officer wearing high visibility clothing, who works close to the venue in a designated area and is in direct communication with the venue management. Their aim is to create a highly visible presence and to communicate, rather than deal with, potential problems.

Wind down period or "Chill out hour"

Many aspects of a model dispersal policy can be drawn together into a chill out hour that gently winds down the evening rather than bringing it to an abrupt halt. Operators might find there is a profit to be had from offering a taxi booking service and providing coffee, soft drinks and bar snacks as a way of keeping customers in the premises and thus spreading departures over a longer period of time.

Examples of good practice

Perhaps the most comprehensive example of the steps venues can take to reduce anti-social behaviour comes from Newport where a club has worked with local police to develop a model dispersal policy. Rather than be pushed out on to the street to compete for the all too few taxis operating late at night, customers can book a taxi through the club, wait in comfort, warmth and safety, purchase snacks and coffee while they wait and be escorted to the taxi when it arrives.

In Dursley, a club extended its hours to sell soft drinks and coffee after bar staff stop serving alcohol at 2.00am. This chill-out hour allows customers to disperse over a longer time period and reduce the risks of flashpoints in the centre of town. Previously, Dursley had three late night venues all closing at the same time with only one kebab house and one small taxi-rank.

In Edinburgh, one operator details staff to monitor customers on departure identify lone customers (particularly lone females) and hand them a small card which states, "If you are traveling alone and require a CLUBSAFE CAB please speak to a steward or a member of staff".

A Middlesbrough operator stocks lollipops to be given out free to people leaving late night events in a bid to curb noise. A taxi ordering system is also in operation to prevent people waiting in the street.