

Written evidence submitted by the Local Government Association (SPI0021)

1. About the Local Government Association (LGA)

1.1. The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national voice of local government. We are a politically-led, cross party membership organisation, representing councils from England and Wales.

1.2. Our role is to support, promote and improve local government, and raise national awareness of the work of councils. Our ultimate ambition is to support councils to deliver local solutions to national problems.

2. Summary

2.1. Councils are committed to promoting safety in the night-time economy. To do this, they work in partnership with businesses, police and other partners to ensure that everyone can enjoy a night out safely.

2.2. In recent months there has been an increase in reports of spiking. Councils take these allegations extremely seriously and have worked swiftly with partners to discuss reports and develop a collaborative local response.

2.3. While the response to spiking incidents is primarily led by the police, councils play a key role in convening the police, businesses and other local organisations to review the local picture and take preventative and broader action to effectively address the wider community safety issues.

2.4. Councils work in close partnership with businesses, voluntary and community partnerships and initiatives that work to improve safeguarding the night time economy, with many councils referencing these partnerships in their statement of licencing policy as a core part of how they manage their night time economy and community safety.

2.5. [LGA best practice guidance](#) encourages councils to reference partnership schemes and training packages in their statement of licensing policy and work proactively with their local nightlife sector and other local partners to implement best practice approaches.

2.6. The most direct way councils are able to take action to address incidents of spiking is through the licensing system. If there are specific safeguarding concerns related to a particular venue, a licensing authority's licensing committee has powers to suspend or revoke a premises' licence or apply conditions to the licence.

2.7. The LGA would welcome more national funding for local initiatives that aim to address and prevent spiking and wider community safety issues. We are calling for the Safer Streets Fund and the Safety of Women at Night Fund to be expanded, with multi-year funding for projects, to allow areas to invest in initiatives that deliver longer-term outcomes.

2.8. Spiking needs to be addressed as part of wider national and local strategies to tackle and prevent violent crime, and violence against women and girls. Whilst raising awareness of the risks and signs of spiking is important, it is vital that there is also a focus on addressing perpetrator behaviour.

2.9. To support local areas to tackle serious violence, including that associated with

spiking, the LGA are calling for Serious Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) to be funded on a long-term basis and for the Government to extend the Violence Reduction Unit funding, already made available to 18 Police and Crime Commissioners, to the remaining 23 local areas.

2.10. The Local Government Association, alongside wider partners, are already working to develop and share best practice of what is working to tackle spiking. We will continue to work with the Government, councils and partners to address spiking as part of councils work to make our communities and public spaces safe for all.

3. How effective is partnership working between the police and others (such as local authorities, the health service, night-time industries, universities and third sector organisations) in safeguarding potential and actual victims of spiking?

3.1. Creating a safe, vibrant and diverse night-time economy is a priority for councils. To achieve this, councils work closely with the police, emergency services, community safety teams, local businesses and the community.

3.2. In recent months there has been an increase in reports of spiking, including a new trend of allegations of substances being administered by needles rather than through drinks. Councils take these allegations extremely seriously and have worked swiftly with partners to respond to new reports and develop a collaborative approach to any spiking incidents locally.

3.3. While the response to spiking incidents is primarily led by the police, councils play a key role in convening police, businesses and other local organisations to review the local picture and take action to address broader community safety issues and put in place preventative initiatives. For example:

3.3.1. [Bristol City Council is launching a trial rollout](#) of testing kits to detect drink spiking which will be made available to all police officers and at 60 night-time economy venues, following a successful bid to the Government's Safer Streets Fund. This will enable officers to test drinks on the spot to prevent spiking and help them to collect early evidence for investigations. Bristol City Council will also receive £150,000 to develop and deliver training and an awareness raising campaign to help night-time venues to tackle sexual harassment.

3.3.2. In Devon and Cornwall, urine testing kits are available in police stations for people who suspect they have been spiked, and drink testing kits are available in various bars across the region to enable customers to test their drinks.

3.4. The LGA and other partners have issued a joint position statement to encourage licensed premises to be proactive and take steps to improve safety for customers on a night out. This includes ensuring all incidents of alleged spiking are reported to the police; providing appropriate training on preventing and responding to spiking to relevant members of staff; reviewing searching procedures and amending if necessary; and ensuring consideration is given to displaying information about spiking in licensed premises. UK Hospitality and the British Beer and Pub Association have also [published a joint note](#) signposting licenced premises to relevant resources on spiking.

3.5. The most direct way councils are able to take action to address reported incidents of spiking is through the licensing system.

3.6. When a venue is granted a premises licence, it is granted for life. However, if there are specific safeguarding concerns about a particular venue, a licensing authority's licensing committee has the power to decide to suspend or revoke a premises' licence. For example, [Tunbridge Wells Borough Council recently suspended the licence](#) of one local premises after the police shared evidence of multiple drink spiking reports at the venue.

3.7. A licensing committee can also review a licence and decide whether to or apply conditions to the licence to help ensure the premises upholds the licensing objectives. It can also suspend or revoke a licence

3.8. A review of a premises licence would generally be triggered by a responsible authority expressing concerns or sharing new evidence about a premises with a licensing authority - in the case of spiking, the responsible authority raising concerns is most likely to be the police.

3.9. Alternatively, a venue could volunteer to vary its licence and have conditions added as a way of making improvements. One of the most effective conditions a licensing authority could impose would be mandatory vulnerability training for staff.

3.10. Some licensing authorities have raised concerns about the impact of court delays during the appeals process for licence revocations. If a premises' licence is revoked, premises have the right to appeal the decision and the premises can stay open until the appeal is heard in court. Given the current capacity challenges in the courts, this process could take several months and venues which are in breach of their licensing conditions are able to remain open in this time. Some licensing authorities would like to see this position tightening up to ensure swift action is taken following a serious safeguarding incident.

3.11. There are also various long-established partnership schemes and initiatives across the UK, which councils and businesses use to promote safeguarding in the night-time economy:

3.11.1. **Pubwatch** – an effective voluntary network of licensed premises in the hospitality sector, who work together to promote best practice in the night time economy and combat crime, disorder, and anti-social behaviour in towns, cities and local communities. There are about 1000 pub-watches in the UK. National Pub Watch, a voluntary organisation, supports existing schemes; encourages the creation of new ones and maintains a database of Watches.

3.11.2. **Best Bar None** - a national award scheme, supported by the Home Office, that aims to improve standards in local night time economies by sharing and promoting best practice.

3.11.3. **Purple Flag** - the accreditation programme that recognises excellence in the management of town and city centres in the early evening and night-time economy. It provides an endorsement of the vibrancy of the local night-time economy.

3.11.4. **Community Alcohol Partnerships** - a retailer-led partnership to tackle issues of underage drinking and promote greater awareness and understanding of alcohol among young people.

3.11.5. **Street Pastors** - volunteers from the local church community who give up their time to patrol the streets on weekend evenings to help keep people safe on nights out.

3.12. Councils routinely work in partnership with these schemes and many councils refer to these schemes in their statement of licensing policy which makes them a core part of how a council manages its local night-time economy.

3.13. Within their statement of licensing policy, some councils also refer licensed premises to training packages and best practice for safeguarding.

3.14. The Welfare and Vulnerability Engagement (WAVE) initiative is an example of a training package that is widely promoted by councils and used by venues in the night-time economy. Developed by the Metropolitan Police, WAVE is a free tool that aims to increase the skills and knowledge of those working in licensed premises to identify vulnerability and make appropriate interventions to keep people safe.

3.15. The 'Ask for Angela' initiative is another example of a scheme that is widely promoted by councils and used within the night time economy. This initiative advises customers via posters in venue toilets that, if they 'ask for Angela' at the bar, staff will be alerted to the fact that the person feels unsafe or threatened. Staff will know that the individual needs support to leave their situation, and can call them a taxi, escort them to their car or by call the police, for example.

3.16. [LGA guidance](#) encourages councils to reference partnership schemes and training packages in their statement of licensing policy and work proactively with their local nightlife sector and other local partners to implement best practice approaches to improve safety and safeguard the welfare of customers and the wider community. The LGA has also [compiled a number of case studies](#) which highlight best practice and encourages councils to promote safeguarding and implement approaches that have been proven effective.

3.17. It is important to stress that many licensed premises work incredibly hard to ensure that their customers can enjoy a night out safely. Many premises take a zero-tolerance approach to spiking, train their staff on vulnerability and display signage in prominent places in their venue, such as information on the 'Ask for Angela' initiative. However, it is important that there is consistent participation in these initiatives and training. All partners also have an important role to play in raising awareness amongst the public of these schemes and to reassure people that they can enjoy a night out safely and deter potential perpetrators.

4. What role should Government play in tackling this crime?

Supporting reporting and the frontline response

4.1. At present, the prevalence of spiking is poorly understood. Research from the anti-spiking organisation, StopTopps, has [identified](#) that over 97 per cent of cases of drink-spiking are not reported to the police, which makes it difficult to ascertain exact data on the prevalence. There is also limited evidence relating to allegations of needle spiking.

4.2. To increase reporting and secure better data on spiking, further work needs to be done to raise awareness of how to take action if a person suspects they have been spiked, and the importance of individuals and venues reporting incidents or concerns to the police.

4.3. There are many reasons that may prevent victims of spiking from reporting suspected cases of spiking. They may feel shame or personal responsibility for what has happened to them for a perceived failure to take precautions. [StopTopps also highlights](#) that victims of spiking sometimes experience 'a culture of disbelief' when reporting allegations

and people may fear that they will not be taken seriously by the venue or relevant authorities. National awareness raising should focus on encouraging people to come forward to report any suspected case of spiking and offering reassurance that they will be taken seriously and that the case will be appropriately investigated. This should be supported by a wider shift towards addressing perpetrator behaviour.

4.4. It is also vital that all venues and frontline authorities, including the police and health workers, are provided with training and the right equipment to respond to suspected spiking incidents appropriately and swiftly gather evidence.

Addressing perpetrator behaviour

4.5. The inquiry identified that 1 in 9 women and 1 in 17 men in the UK say they have been the victim of drink spiking, and one in three women and one in five men knew someone who had been a victim of drink spiking. [The Alcohol Education Trust](#) has also highlighted that their research indicates that those who identify as LGBT+ are victims of spiking at similar rates to women.

4.6. Drink spiking can be [carried out without 'non-malicious' intent](#), such as adding additional shots of alcohol to friends' drinks. It can also be done with 'malicious intent' to cause the victim intentional harm, or with the intention of leaving the victim vulnerable to additional crimes such as robbery, assault or sexual offences.

4.7. In the Government's Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) Strategy, the Minister for Safeguarding outlined: "These crimes are conducted by a minority of people, yet the consequences reach far and wide across society. They cause us to calculate risk without realising it, to calibrate our behaviour, to live our lives differently in response to our experiences and fears".

4.8. A number of the initiatives outlined in this submission are aimed at raising awareness spiking and providing the public and frontline staff with the tools and information to minimise the risk of spiking. Government funding, via the Safer Streets Fund and the Safety of Women at Night Fund, has helped to support a number of these local community safety campaigns and initiatives.

4.9. Too often, the focus of efforts to prevent spiking is focussed on what the victim can do to protect themselves, and the onus is placed on the victim to change their behaviour or assess their own personal risk. Whilst empowering individuals to reduce their own risk of being spiked is important, it is vital that there is also a focus on understanding and addressing perpetrator behaviour, with the aim of preventing and disrupting people from committing spiking in the first place.

4.10. Several organisations, [including StoppTopps](#) have highlighted the need to address spiking that is carried out with 'non-malicious intent', for example, adding extra alcohol or illegal drugs to someone's drink without consent. This may be carried out as a 'prank' or to get friends to 'catch-up' on drinking. In some cases, the perpetrator may not even be aware that what they are doing is spiking, and that it is illegal and potentially harmful. Greater action is needed to educate people about 'non-malicious spiking' and the potentially devastating consequences for those who have their drink spiked. This could be done in secondary school, Sixth Form and Universities and public awareness raising campaigns.

4.11. Spiking should be addressed as part of wider national and local strategies to tackle

violent crime and violence against women and girls (VAWG). Whilst spiking is not only encountered by women and girls, evidence shows that women are targeted at a higher rate than men. As part of its VAWG Strategy commitments, the Government has confirmed that a national communications campaign will be launched, focussing on raising awareness of violence against women and girls and creating behaviour change. We believe that a whole society response, underpinned by a Government commitment to provide long-term funding and support, is needed to drive a cultural shift to tackle VAWG and its underlying causes.

4.12. Leadership and education are key to achieving this change. National personal, social, health and economic, and relationships and sex education curricula in schools should include actively tackling harmful gender stereotypes (for men and women), and education about consent and harassment and abuse.

Funding

4.13. The LGA would welcome additional funding to ensure all local areas are able invest in comprehensive local initiatives to address spiking and secure the sustainability of existing schemes.

4.14. Whilst funding from the Safety of Women and Night Fund and Safer Streets Fund has been helpful to local areas, each round of funding has been made available on a one-year short-term basis with often short turnaround times to develop and submit bids. This has limited councils' ability to invest funding in long-term initiatives which could deliver more impactful outcomes. Given the importance of improving safety in the night time economy and that the fund was overwhelmed with bids, we are calling for the extension of the Safety of Women at Night Fund beyond March 2022. The Safer Streets Fund should be should also be extended and multi-year funding should be provided for projects, rather than one-year only.

4.15. Long term funding is crucial to enable councils to invest in safeguarding schemes in the night-time economy on a longer-term basis. For example, as a result of funding pressures, [Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council and Dorset police have recently had to close their Safe Bus](#) for three months. The Safe Bus is a partnership project supported by Dorset Police, Bournemouth Borough Council and South Western Ambulance Service, and is set up in the town centre to provide a safe environment for anyone who may be vulnerable or the victim to a crime.

4.16. To support local areas to tackle wider serious violence, including that associated with spiking, the LGA is calling for Violence Reduction Units (VRUs) to be funded on a long-term basis and for the Government to extend Violence Reduction Unit funding, already made available to 18 Police and Crime Commissioners, to the remaining 23 local areas. VRU's aim to bring local organisations including the police, local government, health, community leaders and other key partners to identify what is driving violent crime in an area and develop a coordinated response. These units and local partnership working should be utilised to respond to reports of spiking and deliver an effective, multi-agency approach to disrupting and preventing perpetrator behaviour.

4.17. The Local Government Association, alongside wider partners, are keen to share best practice of what is working to tackle spiking. We will continue to work with the Government, councils and partners on this important issue.