

Written evidence submitted by the Night Time Industries Association (SPI0024)**WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE INQUIRY ON SPIKING**

Executive summary

1. The Night Time Industries Association (NTIA) is concerned by the reported rise in spiking incidents and is determined to work with partners across local authorities, police and other agencies to tackle spiking. Spiking reports are particularly concerning as there is currently no way to accurately monitor or compare the scale of the problem, given the various approaches to spiking and inconsistent ways of recording spiking as a criminal offence. Venues in the night time economy already provide thorough staff training to identify cases of spiking and provide support to victims, and the NTIA has engaged in a number of awareness campaigns on the subject. While thorough security checks are commonplace as a condition of entry to venues, security searches alone will not be enough to tackle spiking, given the statutory and practical limits on searches. We are encouraged by the spiking pilot scheme conducted by Devon and Cornwall Police in collaboration with licensed venues as a means to proactively identify cases of spiking, support victims, and secure evidence for convicting perpetrators. The NTIA would like to see the Government take an active step to encourage the national roll-out of such schemes and harness its communications infrastructure for a messaging campaign to raise awareness of the signs of spiking and the available avenues of support.

About the Night Time Industries Association

2. The Night Time Industries Association (NTIA) is a leading not-for-profit trade body representing night time economy businesses in the UK. These industries can be described as those trading predominately between the hours of 6pm and 6am, such as nightclubs, live music venues, bars, pubs and casinos. The night time economy is also supported by a vast supply chain and auxiliary businesses. The NTIA consists of 1,400 members, representing 9,000 night time economy businesses across the UK.
3. The NTIA welcomes the Home Affairs Committee Inquiry into Spiking as an important step to re-evaluate the current landscape for tackling spiking in night time economy venues and other environments. We remain committed as an industry to work constructively with partners, authorities and the Government to eradicate spiking and are submitting written evidence to this inquiry in response to growing reports of spiking in night time economy venues, and to share proposals to end this practice. Our response is confined to the operational perspective of preventing, dealing with, and responding to spiking incidents.

4. The prevalence of spiking**a. How common is spiking?**

- The NTIA are deeply concerned by the rise in reported spiking incidents taking place over the last six months. We strongly believe that everybody should be able to enjoy a night out in a night time economy venue without fear of harm.
- Spiking is not a new issue despite the rise in reported incidents. Venues often find an increase in reported drink spiking incidents around the Autumn season as students return to universities and many take part in Freshers' Week events. Venues have similarly seen a rise in reported spiking incidents following the re-opening of nightlife spaces after closures during the Covid-19 pandemic.

- Despite this, it is incredibly difficult to say with any degree of confidence how prevalent spiking is nor the scale of the problem. Many victims of spiking do not report that they have been spiked and at present, there is no way of categorising the act of spiking itself. Drink spiking, for instance, is currently a criminal offence encompassed under a range of crimes, such as 'Cause to Administer Poison', 'Noxious thing with intent to injure', or 'Aggrieve and Annoy contrary to Section 24 Offences against The Person Act 1861'.
- Because these crimes capture many other types of incident that are not spiking, and do not reveal the nature of the crime (i.e. whether such incident occurred within a licensed venue or another setting) it is difficult for venues to assess an accurate picture of the problem.

b. Where and when does it happen?

- Spiking can and does happen in a variety of environments, including nightclubs and other late-night venues but also often in private house parties and events.
- The NTIA supports and encourages those who have come forward to tell their stories of spiking within licensed venues.
- Recent anti-spiking campaigns have pushed for boycotts of nightclubs and other night time economy establishments in response to an increase in spiking. The NTIA takes these concerns very seriously. We would reiterate that many venue staff are trained as first responders in the event of any spiking incident and are there for the safety of customers. Spiking and the impact of spiking can be more severe in unregulated environments, where trained security and support staff are not present.
- A focus on changing the way police categorise reported incidents would help to better understand the scale of the spiking problem and provide a granular breakdown of where and when spiking occurs, whether in a night time economy venue or otherwise.

5. How spiking should be prevented and addressed

a. 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?

- Night time economy venues and establishments already work closely with the police and relevant authorities to support spiking investigations. Different localities take different approaches to this issue, and there is no universal blueprint for responding to an incident.
- We have recently been encouraged by a pilot scheme run by the Devon and Cornwall Police. This pilot involved licensed venues working with the police, which provided bars and nightclubs with kits to test for spiking, including drink testing and urine testing. If a suspected spiking incident was confirmed, evidence was secured and medical assistance provided to the victim, sometimes within minutes of a suspected incident. The testing facilitates also provided peace of mind to those who were revealed to have not been spiked.
- This pilot has shown real promise for joined-up collaboration between night time economy venues and the police, and the NTIA would support the roll-out of this scheme nationally to authorities across the UK.

b. How effective are the measures used to prevent spiking, including the advice and guidance that is used to train, educate and support those involved in handling this type of crime (such as police officers, nightclub security staff and A&E staff)?

- Night time economy venues already have stringent measures and procedures in place to keep guests and staff safe, including but not limited to security searches of customers as a condition of entry.
- While these measures are in place, it is in practice very difficult to prevent all substances from entering a venue. This is particularly the case for very small substances that can be easily hidden and not detectable by standard searches or metal detectors.
- This means that there will always be limitations to relying solely on security staff to detect instruments of spiking, be that substances or needles. While venues do their utmost to meet their licensing conditions, we recognise that not all substances can always be detected by security, whether these are for recreational use or for spiking.
- In light of this, the NTIA has taken a progressive stance towards the provision of drug safety testing, given the recent incidents of recreational drug-related harm in the night time economy. We feel that an emphasis on enhanced security alone will not significantly change the number of spiking incidents, while at the same time may undermine initiatives, such as substance safety checking, to prevent drug-related harm in night time economy spaces.
- Many venues already conduct guidance and awareness campaigns for staff and customers, to provide them with reassurance and to ensure they follow best practices. Venues provide training to security and bar staff to support staff to identify, recognise and respond to suspected incidents of spiking and to provide the necessary assistance to victims.
- Despite this, with the reported increase in spiking incidents, there is clearly more work to be done to educate staff and the public on dealing with spiking.

c. What barriers do victims face in reporting spiking incidents and obtaining treatment and support?

- We are aware that many victims of spiking do not report their suspicions to venue staff or to the police. This may be for a number of reasons, including the belief that victims will not be believed or that perpetrators will not be caught.
- The NTIA recently supported a study conducted by its SaveNightlife CIC and the Lady of the House, finding that over one thousand women surveyed overwhelmingly ([92% did not trust the police force to protect them at night.](#))
- The same study also found that young women, who are often most vulnerable to spiking, may feel less comfortable confiding in male security staff than female staff. The NTIA would support any initiatives designed to empower women to take up careers in the night time industries, including as venue security staff to provide this important representation.

d. Are the police doing enough to identify perpetrators and bring them to justice?

- We are aware that despite alarming increases in spiking reports, it is rare for convictions to take place. We believe this has much to do with the way that spiking is reported and recorded, and that many victims of spiking do not feel it is of value to pursue a criminal case, to relive their trauma with little evidence or chance of conviction.
- Pilot schemes, such as the programme developed by Devon and Cornwall Police, would help to bring perpetrators to justice, by providing on-site evidence of a spiking incident and allowing authorities to investigate within moments of a suspected case. The transparency provided by this scheme, if rolled out nationally, will help to address the apparent failure to hold perpetrators to justice.

e. What role should the Government play in tackling this crime?

- We believe that the Government should take an active and leading role in tackling this crime by making sure that spiking is properly and universally categorised and that data recorded is publicly available, including the number of reports that have led to convictions.
- There is an opportunity for the Government to review the measures that are working at the regional level, most notably in Devon and Cornwall, and to push and advocate for wider adoption.
- The Government should also address the urgency of security shortages facing the night time industries following the Covid-19 pandemic and the UK's exit from the European Union. These staff shortages ultimately impact the ability of venues to provide front-line safety support to the highest standard. It would also be helpful to attract female licensed security staff to the industry so that more women and girls attending nightlife venues feel comfortable raising issues and confiding in venue staff.
- The Government should engage with the night time industry on a national messaging campaign, similar to previous collaborative campaigns in Bristol and by Savenightlife CIC to raise awareness of this issue, identify cases of spiking, and communicate avenues of support. There are already many such campaigns underway in the industry but coupled with the government-backed communications infrastructure the reach of these campaigns could be dramatically expanded.

January 2022