

To: Scrutiny and Audit Committee

From: Chief Constable

Date: 25th May 2010

POLICING STRAWBERRY FAIR

1. Purpose

- 1.1 The report is to inform the Committee of objectives under the Licensing Act 2003 and other issues surrounding the policing of Strawberry Fair.
- 1.2 Members will be aware that some quarters have sought to criticise the Constabulary for the cancellation of the 2010 Strawberry Fair. For its part, the Constabulary has no objections to the Fair itself but has considerable concerns about associated crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB). The Police Authority has called for a report on the circumstances and this paper provides an update accordingly.

2. Background

- 2.1 Strawberry Fair has run on Midsummer Common in Cambridge for the last 37 years. It was started by local residents in the 1970s as an alternative to the College May Balls, and to contrast with the high ticket prices for the May Balls, the event has always been a free festival with no entry control. Fair goers are free to enter and leave the site at will. Income is generated by selling stall space and costs kept low by providing entertainment by local or relatively new bands and music providers.
- 2.2 Strawberry Fair organisers have hitherto used Cambridge City Council's licence in order to be able to carry out licensable activities such as the sale of alcohol, regulated entertainment and the showing of films. By law, certain objectives must be promoted and met. These are set out as objectives under the Licensing Act of 2003 namely:
 1. The prevention of crime and disorder
 2. The protection of children from harm
 3. The prevention of public nuisance
 4. The promotion of public safety
- 2.3 The City Council decided to withdraw the use of their premises licence for this year's event prompting the Strawberry Fair Committee (SFC) to apply for their own.

3. Crime and Antisocial Behaviour

- 3.1 Over the last few years the event has increasingly become associated with crime and ASB, the extent to which has meant that the Constabulary considered that the terms of the Licensing Act 2003 were no longer being met and required action to ensure that the objectives were adhered to.
- 3.2 The open nature of the site means that Fair goers are free to bring whatever they want onto Midsummer Common. This has led to many participants arriving at Strawberry Fair with large quantities of alcohol. Many attendees also bring with them illegal drugs, the most common being cannabis, which they often smoke openly in public. When police officers confiscate their cannabis, many fair-goers express surprise as they were under the impression that cannabis is either “legal” in Cambridge on the day of Strawberry Fair or that its open use will be tolerated by the local police. This opinion is voiced, often quite aggressively, by many people on the day. In 2009 a plain clothes officer was badly assaulted when she attempted to confiscate cannabis from one individual.
- 3.3 Cannabis is not only the most obvious drug in use, with other Fair goers being arrested in possession of ketamine, cocaine or the various amphetamine derivatives. In years prior to 2008, covert operations were run to target the dealers of class-A drugs at the Strawberry Fair. Whenever run, these operations always yielded results but they are expensive operations to run and have not been used for the past two years.
- 3.4 The large quantities of alcohol consumed lead to inevitable public order problems as the day progresses, drunken violence being a serious problem as the Fair moves from the afternoon into the evening.
- 3.5 Over the past few years there has been an increasing problem with public urination and defecation. Many of the local residents living near Midsummer Common have had to suffer their streets, garages and gardens being used as toilets by Fair goers. Some local residents now choose to leave Cambridge on the weekend of the Strawberry Fair and simply deal with the aftermath of the Fair on their private property when they return.
- 3.6 This picture of crime and ASB is entirely at odds with the notion of a public festival for local people and visitors to get together, play music and relax. The opportunity for a low level reassurance police presence has had to give way to a substantial public order operation necessary to deal with inappropriate behaviour and public nuisance.

4. Police Resource Demands

- 4.1 Strawberry Fair now requires a high level of police resource. Over the last few years the number of officers deployed to the event has been in the region of 250. The opportunity cost to the Constabulary of policing the event is about £80,000. The event needs considerable uniformed police presence including the use of three complete public order units (29 officers to a unit). Events on the day of the Fair now run well past its scheduled finish time with various groups using the opportunity presented by the large crowd to set up illegal raves in the area to attract people when the Strawberry Fair officially finishes. This stretches the requirement for policing resource well into the night and often into the day following the Fair.

5. Timeline

5.1 Strawberry Fair 2008

There were over 300 recorded criminal offences, mostly for possession of a controlled drug – Class C (cannabis). Other offences included; possession of cocaine, possession of ecstasy, thefts and a wide range of assaults. This does not include the offences recorded by the British Transport Police (BTP), who ran a large operation at Cambridge railway station, using passive drugs dogs. BTP figures suggest that an additional 15,000 people travelled to Cambridge by rail on the day of Strawberry Fair. This is inconsistent with some commentaries that it is a local event for the local community. Many of those arrested or subject to cannabis cautions are not from the county or its immediate neighbours.

5.2 Strawberry Fair 2009

There were over 350 recorded criminal offences, mostly for possession of a controlled drug - Class B (cannabis). Other offences included; possession of cocaine, robbery, thefts and a wide range of assaults. Again this doesn't include offences at the railway station. Also, during the day intelligence came in indicating that people were getting off the trains to Cambridge in Shelford village and taking taxis to Midsummer Common to avoid the BTP drugs dogs.

- 5.3 This year saw much needed improvement to the lives of residents of the Brunswick area. This was achieved through the commitment of considerable resources by the police and the City Council and the SFC arranged for fencing to be used around a third of the Common to restrict people leaving the fair into Brunswick Terrace and Gardens. There was still evidence of ASB around the other areas of the Common, namely public urination into private gardens or on private property the other sides of the Common that were not protected by the fence. The fence had to be reinforced by security staff, further supported by police in order to prevent people simply dismantling it to gain access to the area beyond. Many of the residents of the area commented afterwards that this was a definite step in the right direction but that much more could and should be done by the organisers of the Fair to deal with the numerous local issues it creates.

5.4 By 9pm. all plain clothes police officers were withdrawn from the site due to the increasing hostility of the crowd. Normally-attired officers also withdrew shortly afterwards and the event was then policed by officers in public order dress.

5.5 **After Strawberry Fair 2009**

The Constabulary sought advice from the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) on how best to cope with the increasing demand of Strawberry Fair. Supt. Simon Megicks (then head of operations for Cambridge) enlisted the help of Chief Inspector Ian Ross from the Policing of Public Events team at the NPIA. Chief Inspector Ross is seconded from the Avon and Somerset Constabulary and former Operations Chief Inspector for the division hosting Glastonbury Festival. He expressed a number of grave concerns over the running of Strawberry Fair. He stated that, in allowing the event to go ahead in its current format, the Constabulary was not complying with its obligations as a responsible authority under the Licensing Act 2003 as mentioned above at 2.2

5.6 **November 2009 - Letter to the Council**

In view of the above advice, Chief Superintendent Rob Needle (divisional commander for Cambridge) held a meeting with senior City Council officers and subsequently wrote to the Council informing them he would be seeking a review of their alcohol and events licence due to the number of criminal offences committed in their licensed premises (i.e. on Midsummer Common) as he believed that the Fair, as it had been run, did not uphold those objectives.

5.7 In response to his letter, the City Council Events Management team informed the police and the SFC that the Council would not allow the SFC to use its alcohol and events licence for Strawberry Fair 2010 and that the SFC would need to apply for their own alcohol and events licence.

5.8 **January 2010 – Strawberry Fair Committee applied for a licence.**

In January 2010 the SFC applied for an alcohol and events license for Midsummer Common to run from the evening of 4th June to the end of 5th June. The license applied for was virtually identical to that held by the City Council and contained nothing to address the police concerns that had prompted the call for a review.

5.9 **1st March 2010 – Strawberry Fair Licensing Hearing**

Cambridge City Council Licensing Authority granted the licence to the SFC. The Constabulary is of the view that the Licensing Authority dismissed outright the police concerns over the management of the event and the crime and disorder issues it generates.

The Licensing Authority's notice to the Chief Constable stated that the Licensing Authority decided not to impose any conditions on the event in relation to the licensing objectives because promoting the event was in line with the City Council's Cultural Strategy. Cambridgeshire Constabulary decided to appeal the Licensing Authority's decision to the Licensing Magistrates. This follows the statutory procedure set out in the Licensing Act 2003. The appeal hearing is scheduled for the 5-7th October 2010 with a number of pre-cursor hearings in the meantime.

5.10 19th March 2010 – Strawberry Fair 2010 Cancelled

The SFC made a public announcement stating that they were cancelling the Strawberry Fair 2010. They stated that the main reason for this was the "continuing hostility" of the police to the event. A number of commentaries have since been made, both in the media and on social networking sites to the effect that the Constabulary is responsible for the cancellation of the 2010 Strawberry Fair. This is unfortunate given the Constabulary's position has always been supportive of the Fair in general yet concerned by the incremental rise in crime and ASB.

6. Current Situation

- 6.1 Notwithstanding the formal cancellation of Strawberry Fair a number of alternative events have been proposed for the weekend when Strawberry Fair would have taken place. Chief Superintendent Needle continues to work with the SFC and other parties seeking to organise alternative events.
- 6.2 A policing operation for the weekend concerned is being planned consistent with all of the information available as to the likely number of potential attendees.

7. Recommendation

- 7.1 The Committee is recommended to note the report.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Source Document (s)	Contact Officer	Location
	Rob Needle Southern Divisional Commander <u>rob.needle@cambs.pnn.police.uk</u>	Cambridgeshire Constabulary Hinchingsbrooke Park, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire, PE29 6NP.
<p>Originating Officer Chief Constable</p> <p>Is it considered that this report contains 'exempt information' and should be considered in private? NO</p> <p>If the answer is "YES", please state the nature of the exempt information <u>and the relevant clause(s)</u> in Part 1 of Revised Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972</p> <p>.....</p> <p>The attached report has been cleared with the undermentioned officers: (delete as appropriate)</p> <p>Chief Executive/Chief Constable/Treasurer</p> <p>Others</p> <p>Submitted on18th May 2010.....</p> <p>A report will not be sent to the Authority unless this box has been satisfactorily completed and all necessary consultation carried out - the responsibility for which rests with the originator (except for consultation with the Chairman and this will be undertaken by the Chief Executive).</p>		

