

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Strategy, Planning, and Performance (Police) Committee Licensing Committee	Dated: 11/02/2025 06/02/2025
Subject: Review of drink spiking in the City of London	Public report: For Information
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides statutory duties 	This relates to a measure in the City's statutory Serious Violence Duty strategy
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/a
What is the source of Funding?	N/a
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/a
Report of:	Town Clerk and Commissioner of City Police
Report author:	Charles Smart (Police Authority), Amanda Wolf (City of London Police)

Summary

This report reviews the issue of drink spiking in the City, meeting a commitment made in the City's 2024 Serious Violence Duty strategy.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report.

Main Report

Background – what is spiking?

1. 'Spiking', in legislation, is *administering a noxious substance with or without intent, usually to stupefy the victim and carry out further offences. This can be by*

Alcohol, Drugs or other substance, most commonly added to a drink but can be by needle point and more recently by Vapes containing drugs or laced with drugs.

2. This is a review of the issue in the City, fulfilling a commitment made in the City's Serious Violence Duty strategy published January 2024¹.

Background – national discussion and evidence on drink spiking

3. In recent years the issue of drink spiking has risen in national prominence. The most recent and comprehensive treatment of the issue is a Home Affairs Committee (HAC) inquiry published in April 2022², responding to a sudden increase in reported spiking incidents in 2021 and subsequent media coverage.
4. The HAC report found it is difficult to estimate the scale of drink spiking – with a (small) survey showing 11% of women and 6% of men said they had been spiked, but volumes reported to police much lower at c. 1,900 nationwide in 2019. One survey referenced found 87% of incidents occurred in licensed premises, with a minority at house parties and festivals, while police data at the time showed 88% of spiking victims are female and 73% aged 18-21.
5. It touches briefly on the issue of 'perceived vs actual spiking' – noting the Royal College of Emergency Medicine's submission: "*The academic literature that exists on spiking in the UK concludes that the majority of people who present to emergency departments with concerns about spiking usually do not have illicit drugs in their blood or urine samples*" (but acknowledged that) "*alcohol can be used as a spiking agent by a perpetrator*".
6. Further issues with understanding the scale of drink spiking referenced in the HAC report are: delays in reporting potential cases limiting the scope to collect forensic evidence, limited provision of and resources for obtaining and testing forensic samples (NHS only conducts blood and urine tests where there is a clinical justification for doing so, and this costs £500-£2,000 and can take c. 8 weeks), and inherent difficulties in judging whether someone has been 'spiked' with (additional) alcohol.
7. It recommends or references a wide range of potential measures to tackle the issue – more guidance and training for police and night-time economy staff, better venue security including searches, reviewing CCTV, use of drink protectors in venues, stricter licensing conditions or penalties, and more partnership working and information sharing between agencies (police, NHS & public health, community safety partnerships).
8. It notes that drink testing kits are increasingly being used, but that evidence is mixed on their ability to accurately identify drugs. Noting the very low rates of

¹ [Link](#)

² [Link](#)

prosecutions for drink spiking (<100 a year), it also recommends government address each of the factors that hinder prosecuting the offence.

9. A 'spiking factsheet' published by the Home Office in December 2023³ aligns with the HOC report. It sets out that subsequent surveys have found that 10% of women and 5% of men say they have been spiked, that on average victims are young (26 years old) and female (74% of cases), and that it primarily occurs in bars and clubs. It noted that in the year April 2022-23 cases reported to police had risen to 6,732.

Background – national government response

10. In December 2023 the then-government announced a new package of measures⁴ to tackle spiking with changes to the legislation, research into self-testing kits, more training for door staff and better education for young people, to raise awareness about the threat. It announced there will also be coordinated police action to crackdown on spiking during key weeks of the year – an approach that it notes has proved successful in tackling other crimes, such as knife crime.
11. In its Kings Speech in July 2024, the new Labour government confirmed it would legislate to make spiking a specific criminal offence. In November 2024, in its most recent announcement on the issue, government re-iterated its commitment to legislate and announced the rollout of anti-spiking and victim support training to 10,000 bar staff nationwide.

Background – City Police data and analysis

12. The City Police have undertaken two recent reviews of drink-spiking data, one covering November 2020 to February 2023, the next covering April 2023 to March 2024. The results of these are summarised below:

Graph 1 – Volume of spiking incidents reported to or recorded by City Police



³ [Link](#)

⁴ [Link](#)

Summary results of City Police spiking reviews		
	1st Review (Nov 2020 to Feb 2023)	2nd Review (Apr 2023 to Mar 2024)
Number of reported incidents – in drink	134	44
Number of reported incidents – injection, other, or unknown	10	11
Proportion in licensed premises	92%	91%
Commonest times	Thursday-Saturday evenings	Thursday-Saturday evenings
Proportion of female victims	72%	76%
Proportion of cases where forensic sample taken ⁵	36%	36%
Proportion of cases where, when taken ⁶ , forensic sample found positive evidence of drugs ⁷	0%	10% (or 4% of <i>all</i> spiking reports in period)
Proportion of cases with an ‘alcohol qualifier’ on incident log ⁸	79%	N/A
Proportion of cases including reported theft	16%	9%
Proportion of cases including reported sexual offence	4%	4%
Proportion with no description of suspect / potential offender	69%	75%
Proportion of cases resulting in identification and arrest	4%	6%

13. Several things are notable from the above:

- Other than a large rise in October / November 2021 (in the months following widespread media coverage of the issue), *reported* spikings are very uncommon in the City, at around 10-20 a quarter, while remaining higher than pre-2021. It is important to bear in mind that national survey evidence suggests a large degree of under-reporting.
- While a majority of spiking reports involve female victims, it should be borne in mind that about a quarter involve male victims. All spiking victims of theft have, to date, been male.

⁵Important to note that it is not always possible to obtain a forensic sample. City Police’s policy is to test all drinks involved in reported spikings wherever possible.

⁶ 10 cases were awaiting results in 1st review and 5 cases awaiting results in 2nd.

⁷ A negative test does not necessarily mean the victim has not been spiked – it may, for example, be that the individual was spiked with alcohol or the sample was not received and tested in optimum timeframes

⁸ A note by the responding officer suggesting either the suspect, victim, or both were intoxicated

- Only a minority of spiking reports are associated with reports of theft or, very rarely, sexual assault. As such the motive for many reported offences remains largely unclear.
- While 'positive results' have increased, it remains uncommon to find definitive evidence (i.e. a positive toxicology test) of illicit drugs being present in reported spiking incidents. This is a complex area but is likely due to a combination of factors: tests are not able to be conducted or conducted reliably⁹, or victims are predominantly spiked with alcohol alone, or there was no spiking in the alleged incident (i.e. the individual mistakenly believed they had been spiked).
- The proportion of cases resulting in positive identification of a suspect and an arrest is low. A significant issue is that in around three-quarters of reports there is no description given of a suspect (including because of the nature of the offending – predominantly occurring in crowded, dark night-time venues), as above there are also difficulties in definitively confirming that spiking has occurred. City Police investigations frequently find that no suspicious behaviour can be identified from CCTV records, that drinks either cannot be tested or on occasion have been thrown away, or that drink or urine tests do not produce definitive evidence of spiking (with drugs). As such, there are many inherent issues around investigating spiking reports and identifying suspects and an evidence base for any prosecution.

Current Position – City approach to drink spiking

14. The City has a well-developed approach to tackling and preventing drink spiking, across:

- *Awareness and training* – City Police and Corporation licensing teams provide proactive educational sessions and workshops for licensed premises and members of the public (it has, for example, featured as a theme of Operation Reframe). This includes a specific focus on training staff to retain evidence (i.e. drink glasses and bottles) to improve opportunities for forensic testing. The Safer City Partnership has funded the rollout of the Ask for Angela scheme and Welfare and Vulnerability Engagement training to City hospitality venues and licensed premises, providing wider training and awareness of women's safety and tackling violence against women and girls in the night-time economy. Undertaking such training is also recommended for newly-licensed premises.
- *Risk monitoring and responsive action* – The volume and nature of spiking reports are monitored closely by City Police and, as above, are periodically analysed in depth. Any reported spiking incident prompts engagement with the premises in question, including providing practical guidance and re-iterating expectations on venues. More broadly, City licensed premises' overall performance is continually monitored by City Police and Corporation licensing teams under the 'traffic light' system to proactively identify and engage venues of potential concern.

⁹ The optimum time period for forensic testing of urine samples is within 12 hours of drug consumption. The 2nd City Police review found that 38% of reports fell in this window.

- *Prevention and reporting* – In addition to training and awareness, as above, the City Police have facilitated provision of 5,000 drink toppers to City licensed premises. They have also introduced a new online reporting form specifically for incidents of spiking, which includes signposting to support services.
- *Investigation and enforcement* – Spiking reports are investigated thoroughly and the City Police has committed to test all samples retrieved, funded by the Late Night Levy. In addition to business-as-usual patrolling, which is already focussed on the night-time economy, City Police are rolling out Operation Servator VAWG with specially-trained officers tackling sexual violence and predatory behaviour in the night-time economy. This will lead to an increased, and better-trained, police presence in the night-time economy to tackle offences including drink spiking. All spiking cases are also referred to the City Police's Criminal Investigations Department and there is an appointed Single Point of Contact for spiking

Proposals - going further

15. As above, there is already a wide range of activity being delivered across the City Police, Corporation, and Safer City Partnership to tackle drink-spiking – and this has increased since 2022 in line with higher reported volumes (though in overall terms these remain very uncommon) and the rising national priority of the issue.
16. The City Police's '2nd review' earlier in 2024 concluded with recommendations to explore the following, many of which (as noted in italics) have now been delivered in part or in full, with the remainder under ongoing consideration subject to resourcing and proportionality:
 - Training for licensed premises staff on dealing with spiking incidents – *As above, training is already provided voluntarily and in response to incidents in specific premises. Venues are now being tested monthly by City Police on compliance and awareness of schemes (e.g. Ask for Angela), by plainclothes officers. Where relevant, venues receive follow-up engagements with City Police requesting action plans from Directors and working with legal teams to look at licensing conditions. Lastly, City of London Licensing alongside City Police are reviewing the 'traffic light' licensing scheme, considering giving venues additional points (towards a negative rating) if they have confirmed spiking incidents, any changes to the scheme will be presented for approval by the Licensing Committee.*
 - Dedicated training on spiking response for night-time patrol officers – *All officers have now been provided with step-by-step guidance on conducting initial investigations of spiking and, as above, Operation Servator VAWG is now providing wider dedicated training on sexual violence in the night-time economy*
 - Additional awareness campaigns, including targeting friends and witnesses of victims (to improve reporting) and perpetrators (to deter offending) – *City Police and Police Authority are continuing to develop their joint comms and engagement work and this includes crime prevention communications elements*

- Providing drink covers – *As above, these have now been rolled out*
- Providing drink-testing kits at licensed premises – *Drink-test kits are being evaluated nationally and we await the results of this. It is important to note that, at present, these are not 100% accurate and can only test three types of drug. Using such kits carries risks of blaming or not believing victims (if, for example, they have been drugged with a substance that the test cannot identify) and of venues being less likely to call the police over incidents. At present, the preferred City approach is to send all samples for more robust lab testing.*

17. In addition to the above, the City's serious violence strategy is being reviewed (in line with national legislation) and will be updated in c. early 2025. To similar timescales, the Safer City Partnership is drafting its next 3-year strategy and the City Police its next Policing Plan. All these provide opportunities to re-assess broader approaches to tackling violence, including violence against women and girls, of which drink spiking is a component.

Conclusion

18. This review has considered the national context, local evidence base, current response, and options to go further to tackle drink spiking in the City. This is a sensitive and complex topic and – noting the many caveats set out above – the *reported* instances of drink spiking and *confirmed* uses of illegal drugs in these both remain, at present, very low in volume.

19. The review has set out the wide range of activity underway to address the issue which it concludes, broadly, is proportionate to the scale and severity of drink-spiking in the City. Additional options to go further have been identified and – as above – are to varying degrees already in progress. The refreshed serious violence strategy, SCP strategy, and Policing Plan are moments to assess options for further action alongside other crime and safety priorities.

Background Papers

- N/a – Various wider documents are indicated by footnotes in the report text

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