The Sentencer

Issue 3

NATIONAL PROBATION SERVICE

CHESHIRE

From left, Conference speakers Cheshire Probation Area Assistant Chief Officer Kim Thornden, Professor Nick Heather, John Bache, Cheshire Probation Area Chief Officer Steve Collett, Chief Superintendent Gary Finchett, and Cheshire Probation Board Chair Leslie Robinson.

DRINK CRIME - A NEW APPROACH

Cheshire Probation Area unveiled its blueprint for Tackling Alcohol-Related Crime in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington at a major conference at Chester Racecourse on Saturday, January 31.

One of the keynote speakers at the event, which attracted live coverage from Sky News, was Cheshire Probation Area Assistant Chief Officer Kim Thornden.

She outlined the new measures being taken across the county in a speech which has been widely reported in local and regional media.

The conference was opened by Cheshire Probation Area Chief Officer Steve Collett with the morning session chaired by Judge Stephen Clarke and the afternoon by Judge Roger Dutton.

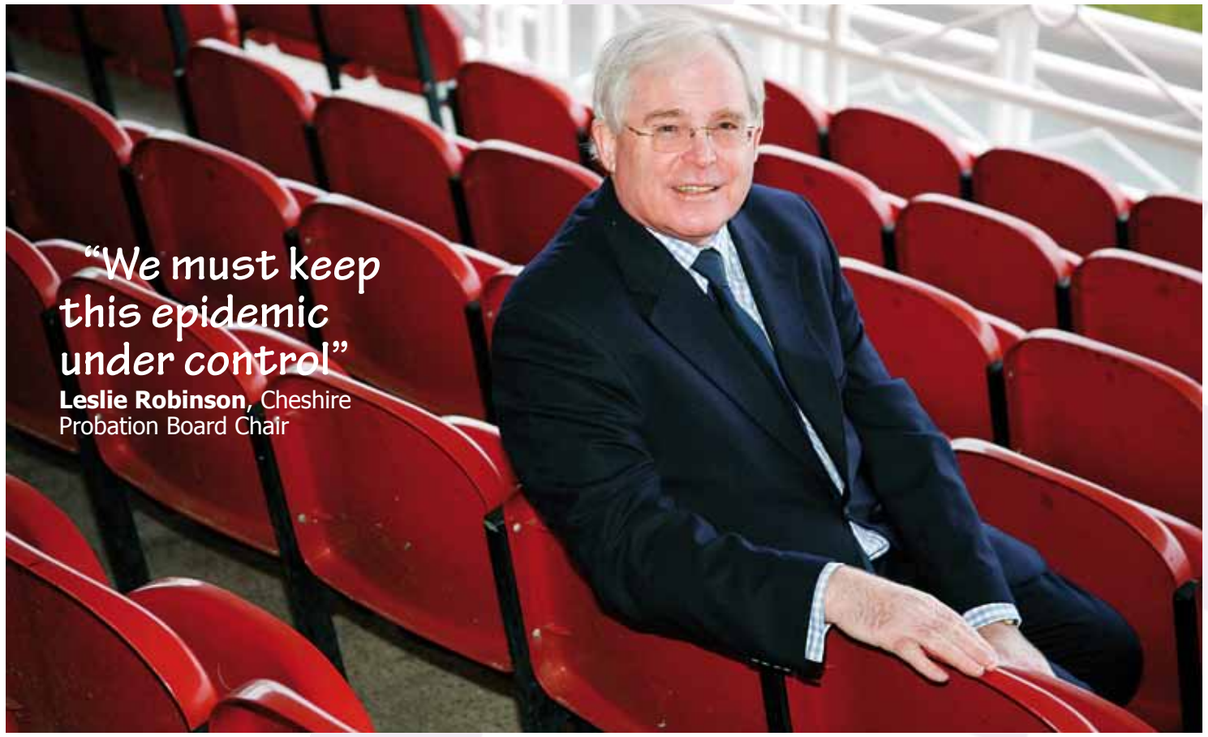
Other key speakers were John Bache, a Consultant at the Accident and Emergency Unit at Leighton Hospital, Crewe, and a JP who chairs the South Cheshire Bench, Chief Superintendent Gary Finchett, of Cheshire Police, based at Warrington, and Nick Heather, Emeritus Professor of Alcohol and Other Drug Studies at Northumbria University, one of the UK's leading authorities on the treatment of alcohol problems.

The closing address was given by Leslie Robinson, Chair of the Cheshire Probation Board and a JP on the Macclesfield Bench.

TACKLING ALCOHOL-RELATED CRIME - A SPECIAL CONFERENCE EDITION

Kim Thornden's keynote speech - see page 4

PROTECTING THE PUBLIC



Anyone thinking Britain was developing a Continental-style café culture would be in for a shock if they braved the streets of Cheshire's market towns after dark, Cheshire Probation Board Chair Leslie Robinson told the conference.

Mr Robinson, a Macclesfield JP, said he had seen "an outwardly respectable young man who had drunk 24 cans of lager and a bottle of brandy describe himself as merry and the assault he had committed as a 'bit of banter'.

"I have also seen a young woman collapse in court after watching herself on CCTV wrestle a passer-by to the ground and give the girl a good kicking – she had drunk a large amount of alcohol and had no recollection of the incident."

He stressed that the problems of alcohol-related offending were growing and causing increasing misery for communities as well as exacting an unacceptable social and economic cost.

He added: "Young people are becoming increasingly prone to such offending and the incidence, particularly among young women, is becoming an increasing concern.

"All agencies must work relentlessly at preventing alcohol abuse and only by a comprehensive multi-agency approach is it likely that anything can be done.

"But we must keep this epidemic under control and the Cheshire Probation Area stands ready to help protect the public from alcohol-related crime."

IT'S CHEAP AND IT WORKS

Treatment for people with alcohol problems is cheap and it works – that was the message to the Conference from a top expert on drink and drug addictions.

Professor Nick Heather, of Northumbria University, said: "The good news is that treatment for alcohol problems is highly cost effective and people who get treatment use treatment less often in future.

"The initial alcohol treatment is relatively easy but the problem is to prevent people relapsing.

"Brief interventions are very effective with drinkers with low levels of alcohol dependence – as little as five minutes of simple structured advice is effective in reducing alcohol consumption and improving the health of hazardous and even harmful drinkers.

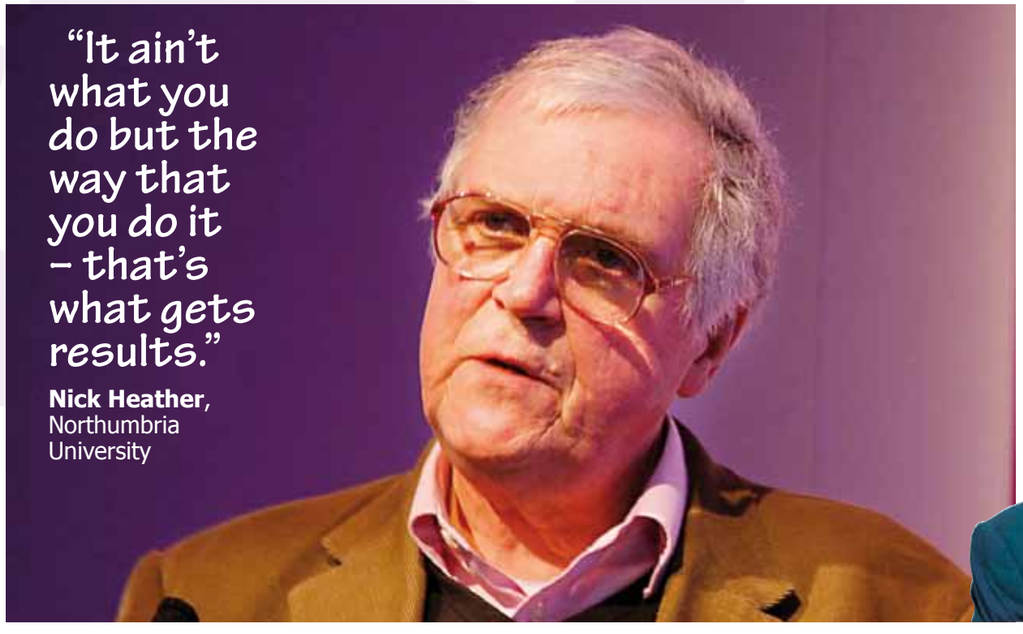
"It ain't what you do but the way that you do it – that's what gets results."

Professor Heather said it was important that brief interventions were widely disseminated and urged Government to pay GPs to carry out such interventions in the same way they are paid to give anti-smoking advice.

He said it was also encouraging that Government was at last taking notice: "There is a groundswell of concern which is relatively new and which will lead to the Government taking action.

"They are now seriously interested in doing something in the criminal justice system to address the problems caused by alcohol.

"One third of the population are now harmful drinkers, drinking over the recommended weekly maximum which is 21 units for men and 14 for women."



This is the third edition of the Sentencer Newsletter, a news-sheet produced by Cheshire Probation Area for all Sentencers in Cheshire.

On this occasion and due to the success of the recent **Tackling Alcohol-Related Crime in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington** conference, this edition will be solely dedicated to providing valuable feedback from this important conference.

We therefore hope that key messages can be communicated to those sentencer colleagues who were unable to attend.

We are also taking the unusual step on this specific occasion of making the newsletter available to a wider audience as there were other key stakeholders and partners in attendance at the conference and they will be keen to see the details in print.

Finally, may we take this opportunity to convey our thanks to all of those partners and colleagues who so freely gave up their valuable time on a Saturday to make the conference a real success.

We are sure that our combined efforts to combat alcohol-related crime will contribute to making the communities of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington a safer place to live.

Thank you!

Steve Collett
Cheshire Probation Area
Chief Officer

Sandra Link
Cheshire Probation Area
Assistant Chief Officer

BEATING BOOZE-FUELLED CRIME

The new Cheshire Probation Area strategy is aimed at protecting the public from alcohol-related crime by helping offenders beat their drink problems through a comprehensive range of services.

That was the message from Cheshire Probation Area Assistant Chief Officer Kim Thornden as she unveiled a new strategy to tackle Alcohol-Related Crime in Cheshire, Halton and Warrington.

The services are evidence-based in terms of effectiveness and involve local partners and Ms Thornden said the new Alcohol Activity Requirement had been rolled out in November and since then 21 such orders had been made by courts in Cheshire.

She added: "What we have created for those particular types of offenders is a new Court sentence called an Alcohol Activity Requirement to ensure that offenders have specialist alcohol-related meetings with their Offender Managers.

"Sentencers are now starting to use this and other similar sentences and although it is too early to gauge their effect we have commissioned Liverpool John Moores University to make an evaluation of them.

"It's not just about giving the offender the facts and figures about the dangers of drinking, it's also about exploring what works for that particular person and galvanising them to take action in their own life.

"It can improve people's health and their lives as well as being of benefit to the community because it leads to less crime.

"But there is also an enforcement element because if they don't turn up for the meetings they will go back before the court.

"Another intervention we're offering is the Alcohol Treatment Requirement which again is a new and additional sentence that we're offering to the Courts.

"It's previously been successfully piloted in two areas of Cheshire but now it's going to be available across the county.

"This particular sentence is for alcohol-dependent offenders with very serious levels of drinking.

"They need a specialist treatment plan which is not for the Probation Service to deliver.

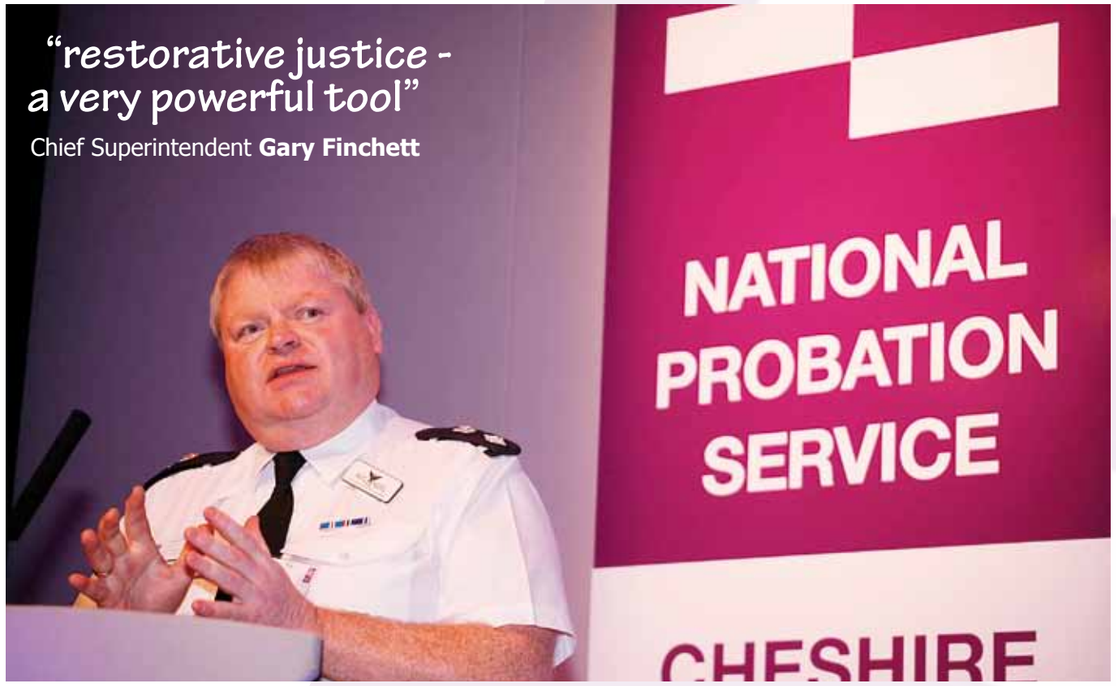
"We will manage the order to ensure the offender is complying but the specialist treatment could involve going to a residential unit or for detoxification and that's where we work in partnership with other agencies.

"If we can have a major impact on these people, we can make huge inroads into alcohol-related crime.

"There is a significant impact in terms of improving health and there are huge economic and social benefits to communities.

"It has an impact on reducing re-offending because if people aren't drinking so much they are going to be managing their lives better".

CHANGING THE CULTURE



"restorative justice - a very powerful tool"

Chief Superintendent **Gary Finchett**

Changing the culture is the most important factor in driving down the incidence of alcohol-related crime, according to the policeman in charge of the second largest town in Britain.

Warrington-based Chief Superintendent Gary Finchett shared details with the conference of ArcAngel, Cheshire Police's strategy for dealing with the problem.

He said that they made considerable use of CCTV to monitor the situation in the centre of the town, both in terms of what was happening and in making sure the police were confronting any problems.

They also used it to show people just how they had been behaving when drunk and this too had proved effective as had their campaign against outlets selling alcohol to the under-age.

They were also working to make more facilities available to young people at all times, giving them an alternative to drinking.

He said: "We also employ restorative justice which is a very powerful tool and one we are looking to make more use of.

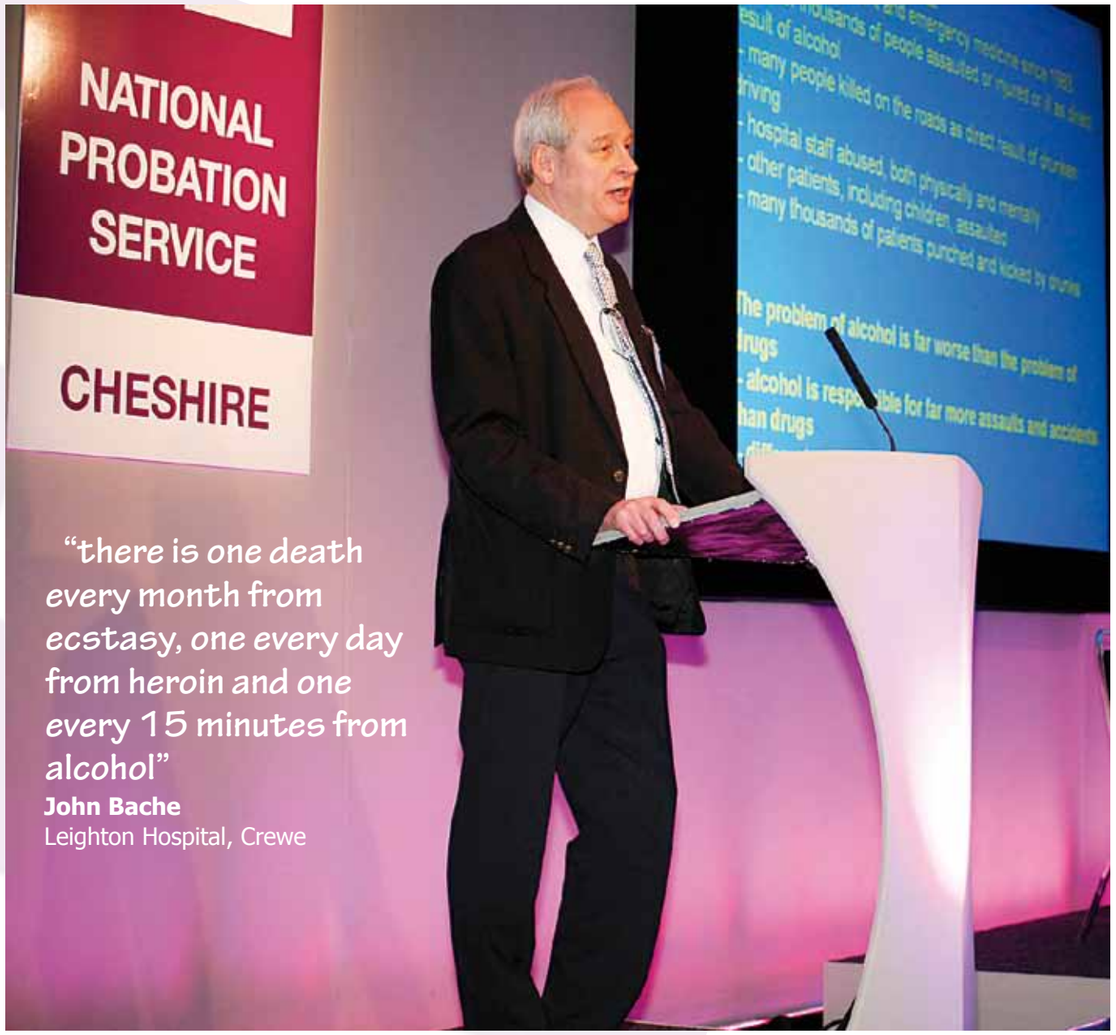
"There are 400 violent crimes in Warrington every month but that is down ten per cent and people are becoming less tolerant of it.

"Custodial sentences definitely help in preventing affrays – it comes down to what's going to deter people and I believe imprisonment is still a deterrent."

Judge **Roger Dutton**: "Everyone needs to know that not only is there a drug problem but that alcohol with all its implications is a far more serious problem."

Cheshire Probation Area Chief Officer **Steve Collett**: Don't get mad with offenders, get even – that way future victims will be spared.

"Sometimes the public see our approach as soft. We don't take a soft approach in terms of enforcement but we work with offenders in an empathetic way because that's what gets the best results."



"there is one death every month from ecstasy, one every day from heroin and one every 15 minutes from alcohol"

John Bache
Leighton Hospital, Crewe

DRINK WORSE THAN HEROIN

A top hospital doctor who also sits as a magistrate has demanded a big increase in the price of alcohol.

John Bache said that heavy drinking among the young now posed a greater threat to society than heroin and the Government should also look again at the 2003 Licensing Act which allows 24-hour opening of pubs and clubs.

Mr Bache, an A and E consultant for 26 years who works at Leighton Hospital in Crewe and a Magistrate in South Cheshire for 20 years, told the conference: "The problems of alcohol are far worse than the problems of drugs.

"For every person I see admitted to A and E because of drugs I've seen far, far more because of alcohol.

"In my time I've seen tens of thousands of people in hospital because of assaults, injuries or road accidents related to alcohol.

"In this country a colleague estimates there is one death every month from ecstasy, one every day from heroin and one every 15 minutes from alcohol – it's a massive problem.

"It's my own personal estimate that on a Friday or Saturday night between midnight and 6am 85 per cent of the patients we see in A and E are there because of drink.

"Increasingly too there are more and more young girls affected and I am very concerned for not only the physical health of young people but also their emotional and psychological health.

"Since 24-hour opening the incidence of drunken attendances has unquestionably increased – the Government can reverse legislation and even the Government acknowledge that it has had a detrimental effect.

"They should also take steps to raise the price of alcohol."

Clare Hoy, JP, South Cheshire:

It was very, very helpful. It was a shame there weren't as many magistrates here as I would have liked to have seen.

It was a really coherent programme, very well organised and the sequence of speakers was just right.

The information about the new orders was very important so it is up to us now to go and spread the word about AARs and ATRs.

Andrew Backhouse, Cheshire Probation Board member:

Alcohol is not a probation issue, it's not a police issue, it's an issue for society.

Leafy Cheshire likes to think it's above all this but what we need is a multi-layered approach. We've got to have a proper strategy and that was a very good start to the process.

Chris McDonagh, Cheshire Probation Area Courts Manager:

It was very interesting. There's a lot of information you think you know but it was good to actually get the facts and figures on the impact of alcohol in the county.

It could be negative and depressing but it's uplifting to know that we have initiatives to reduce these issues and spare some future victims of alcohol-related crimes.

Lisa Davies, Cheshire Probation Area Court Officer:

It was very interesting and very good, especially to hear Kim Thornden talking so enthusiastically about what we can offer.

It's a shame it's taken so long but I hope that once success happens then funding will come from somewhere.

Colin Worsick, JP, Warrington:

It has been very informative and has certainly brought me up to date with a lot of things I didn't know about – it's been a very worthwhile session.

The speakers were very good – perhaps a few too many slides but apart from that the information given was very good and very useful.