

CLUBS, DRUGS AND DOORMEN

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Summary

This note summarises a report concerning the links between dance venue door supervision and drug dealing. The report uses case studies from two force areas (Merseyside and Northumbria) to illustrate the nature of this connection and develop proposals for its disruption.

Dance venues - whether these are large warehouses, night-clubs, pubs or bars - are potentially highly profitable sites of drug dealing. A recent survey by Release (1997) found that 97% of 517 respondents interviewed at dance events in London and the South East had taken an illegal drug at some point in their lives, and that 90% of these people had taken or planned to take an illegal drug that evening. The most common drugs involved were cannabis, ecstasy, amphetamines and LSD.

Door supervision at dance events takes several different forms. Some venues employ staff on a purely personal and individual basis; others appoint door supervisor teams, which may operate at more than one venue; and in some cases door supervision is provided by registered companies which are likely to be larger than the teams and may also be involved in non-entertainment security provision. The minority of door staff who are involved in drug dealing operate in various ways. Staff may simply turn a blind eye to dealing activity, receive payment in return for permitting dealing on the premises, or act as dealers themselves. The report examines two cases of door staff involvement in drug dealing: one in Liverpool, the other in Newcastle.

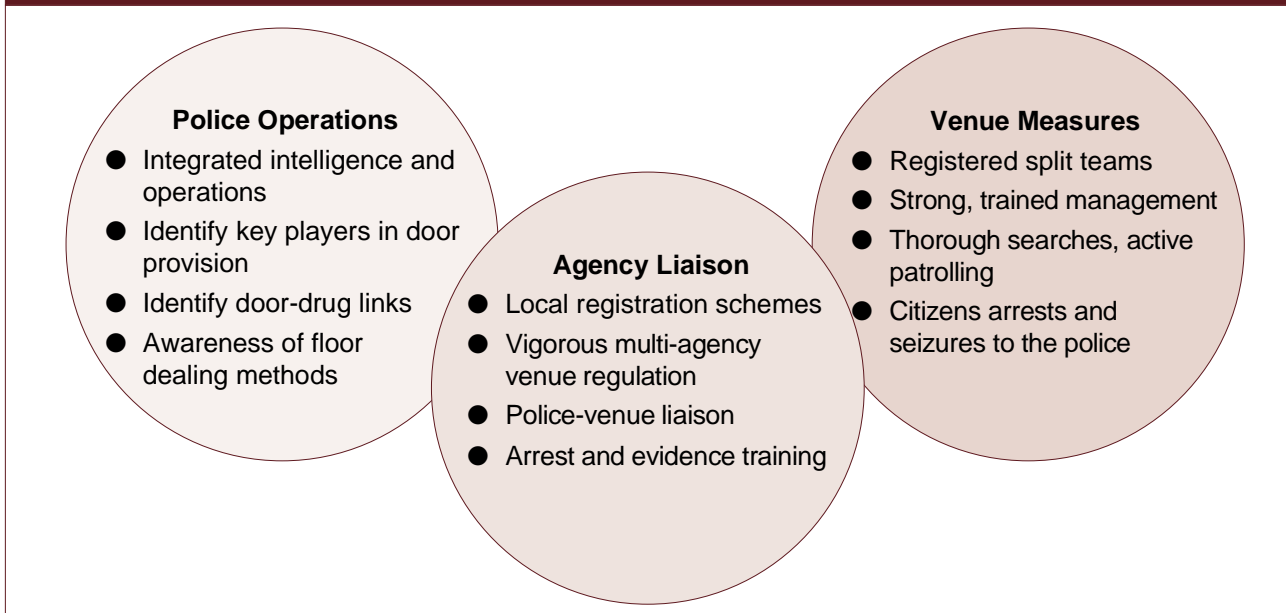
The Liverpool case study concerns a well-organised criminal operation in which a registered security firm took control of a large section of the door supervisor

market in the city through intimidation and bribery. Once this was achieved, the criminals behind the firm used their position to facilitate and dominate drug dealing within the premises they were charged to protect; this strategy is summed up by the expression 'control the doors, control the floors'. An intelligence-led police operation resulted in the conviction of this team, but within a year other members of the group created another security firm and were attempting the same strategy.

In Newcastle, a picture emerges of drug-based criminal groups which provide relatively few door supervisors themselves, but use intimidation and violence to force existing door supervisors to allow the operation of 'approved' drug dealers under their supervision. One estimate by local officers is that no more than ten per cent of door supervisors are selling drugs themselves, working for drug dealers as door supervisors or receiving a 'tax' from dealing within venues they control; nevertheless this figure is a cause of concern. The situation in Newcastle may be a product of various local factors, including the absence of a criminal grouping with the inclination and commercial acumen to develop a significant door security 'business'. Another factor is the introduction of a door supervisor registration scheme by Newcastle City Council in 1990, which prohibits a number of key criminals from continuing as door supervisors in the city area.

The report also looks at the code of practice in operation between the Ministry of Sound night-club in London and the local Metropolitan Police Sector Inspector. This code of practice is the basis of a good working relationship which facilitates the exchange of information and the vigorous use of the powers of citizen's arrest by club security personnel.

Figure1: An integrated approach to policing clubs, drugs and doors



An integrated approach

As the offending activity of organised criminal groups occurs on a number of levels - within venues, against door supervisors, through door supervisors - so measures to tackle them must also be multi-faceted and aimed at the principal components of the problem. This approach, illustrated in Figure 1, requires an integrated strategy and a partnership between the police, venue managers and owners, and local authority departments. Acting together, these parties can introduce tactics which directly disrupt the selling of drugs in venues, improve the standard of security staff and club managers, and challenge the corrupting influence of drug dealing on the legitimate function of door supervision.

Points for action

The report proposes a number of measures which can be used to disrupt criminal door teams and drug dealing in venues. These measures involve the police, local authorities, and venue owners and managers:

For the police

- Integrate and co-ordinate the intelligence and operations of uniformed and CID units.
- Make more vigorous use of licensing units that administer the licences required for the operation of venues.

Other related PRG papers

Crime Prevention and Detection Paper 61	Investigating, Seizing and Confiscating the Proceeds of Crime
Crime Prevention and Detection Paper 62	Performance Indicators for Local Anti-Drugs Strategies - A Preliminary Analysis
Crime Prevention and Detection Paper 72	Methadone Maintenance and Crime Reduction on Merseyside
Crime Prevention and Detection Paper 80	Tackling Local Drug Markets
Crime Prevention and Detection Paper 81	Tackling Rural Drugs Problems: A Participatory Approach
Special Interest Series Paper 8	Drugs Trafficking Enforcement: Examples of Good Practice (RESTRICTED: POLICE ONLY)

- Monitor changes in door supervisor provision and the key figures behind door providers.
- Increase awareness of drug dealing techniques in clubs.
- Insert detainment teams prior to raids, following undercover observations and test purchases.
- Establish a relationship with venue managers and provide training in the powers of citizen's arrest for club security staff.
- Carry out high profile police activity to deter dealing.

For local authorities

- Introduce and enforce door registration schemes.
- Adopt a strategy to inspect venues and enforce registration and health and safety regulations.

For club owners and managers

- Use only registered door supervisors from registered companies.
- Employ a split security team, with door supervisors from outside the area working alongside local staff.
- Strengthen club management and training.
- Ensure door supervisors actively search out and arrest individuals found in possession of suspected drugs.