



Westminster Blue Light Project Achievements 2023

Introduction

In every area there are a group of change resistant, alcohol dependent drinkers who place a huge burden on public services with negative interactions including A&E, ambulances, police and council services. There is no strategic ownership of this group and there is a common belief that this is a 'lifestyle choice' and "*there's nothing you can do if someone doesn't want to change*".

We have partnered with Alcohol Change UK to adopt their Blue Light Protocol initiative ([The-Blue-Light-Manual.pdf](#)) to develop alternative approaches and care pathways for this group. The central message is that change is possible and the manual details positive strategies from health screening (understanding the range of physical conditions that can create a perfect storm of barriers to change from: fatigue due to liver disease, cognitive impairment and confusion due to infections), harm reduction advice, nutritional approaches and legal frameworks.

Any worker can use the manual, but Alcohol Change UK have identified a number of elements to achieve local transformation in adopting Blue Light and we believe we are well on the way to achieving this.

Strategic ownership has been secured on the need to tackle this group – this work has been sponsored by the Safeguarding Adults Executive Board in Westminster, with widescale reach across agencies.

Training has taken place across specialist and non-alcohol specialists on the Blue Light approach including sessions on cognitive impairment, safeguarding and legal powers in relation to this group.

A **small test and learn cohort** - supported with an assertive outreach approach delivering person centred, trauma informed support, has been created to create live understanding of issues and learning loops.

Through a simple **monthly workshop** formula, we have delivered a wide range of small scale 'quick win' initiatives and work has begun on three larger scale systems change areas (around cognitive impairment, pabrinex and communication needs). Creating a space to bring organisations together, with direct feedback loops, that build bridges between key partners to use resources effectively, is paying dividends. This briefing describes the achievements over 2023.



Achievements for the 'test and learn' cohort of 10 Blue Light profile individuals

Securing specialist expertise:

4 clients successfully referred to Speech and Language Therapy for assessments of their communication needs which has supported new understanding and support.

1 client assessed by a neuro psychology service

2 appeals made and accepted to take forward safeguarding investigations, which were initially not picked up

One client successfully entered detox

Accessing the community

4 clients referred and accepted by a befriending service

A mobility scooter secured for a gentleman who, due to complex health concerns and increasing frailty, had become housebound.

Stabilizing housing

Two individuals had been in significant arrears are now making regular payments and gradually reducing their arrears.

Harm minimisation

8 clients accepting regular pabrinex injections.

Intensive health input yielding results

Strong relationships established with caseload multiple disadvantages nurses resulting in all shared clients successfully accessing all health appointments. Partnership working helps:

- Minimise distress in accessing appointments (which are more streamlined).
- Ensure that those who are most medically complex and vulnerable have active and current Urgent Care Plans (UCPs). UCP help ensure that all medical professionals have a comprehensive understanding of the individuals' complex needs, who to liaise with and how to support them with a psychologically Informed approach.



Reductions of negative costs on the public purse

A high impact user on the cohort was supported to achieve major reductions comparing 2022 to 2023:

- 76% reduction in police calls (144 down to 34)
- 64% reduction in ambulance calls and contacts (117, down to 42)

Training delivered and numbers attended

149 people attending Blue Light training over 2023 from over 20 organisations across the council, health and third sector, securing strong coverage across the system.

Training delivered in 2023	
Blue Light Training x2	38
Identifying & Addressing Cognitive Impairment in Dependent Drinkers x3	51
Reviewing Alcohol & Drug Related Deaths x1	11
Anti Racist practice in homelessness services x1	15
Safeguarding Vulnerable Dependent Drinkers x3	34

Blue Light Workshops & Themes

Twelve Blue Light newsletters were despatched highlighting training opportunities and featured initiatives and the circulation list was up to 52 at the end of the 2023.

Workshops ran every month convening workers and managers across the system:

Month	Theme
January 23	Memory theme – leading researcher Dr Penny Rappaport presented on new research and upcoming training tool for hostels. The research findings included that some hostels, although not commissioned to provide it, are actually like proxy dementia communities. Not being able to “see the wood for the trees” is a common experience for workers. So much complexity in terms of deficits and what might be causing the problems, it’s really hard for workers to work out where to start. The training being developed helps address this.
February 23	Lived experienced feedback theme - generating ideas re the need for commissioning for complexity training and a Community of Practice (which started in 2024) Dedicated Cognitive Impairment and Alcohol Forum held with attendance from psychiatrists across the system (hospital, memory services, mental health) with a focus on Dr Rappaport’s research and space for a case discussion on a patient falling between services.



March 23	Autism and Learning Disabilities and Blue Light - leading psychologist and researcher Dr Anna Tickle presented and gave a follow up consultation to the Blue Light assertive outreach worker. Easy read literature on substance misuse harm minimisation identified and circulated.
May 23	Assertive outreach commissioning presentation by Mike Ward of Alcohol Change on new guidance. Shared with a range of commissioners across a range of multiple disadvantage areas (including drugs and alcohol and domestic abuse).
June 23	Themes on liver disease and domestic abuse and blue light overlap . June 2024 – Dedicated Cognitive Impairment and Alcohol Forum held with attendance from psychiatrists across the system (hospital, memory services, mental health) with join up created with a St Thomas hospital focused project on improving outcomes (and reducing costs re bed nights) for alcohol related brain damage.
July 23	Themes on alcohol withdrawals and avoiding seizures with materials widely circulated.
August 23	Dedicated Cognitive Impairment and Alcohol Forum held. Themes included planning a deep dive piece of research into one hostel to evidence need and creating a simple flow chart /practical guidance re steps for workers in Westminster to take when cognitive impairment is suspected when cooccurring with alcohol dependency.
September 23	Themes on hydration and preventing urine infections to stop sepsis
October 23	Feedback on the pabrinex pilots , a cheap and impactful intervention, initiated through the Blue Light project in Westminster
November 23	A superb presentation on executive functioning from leading Social Work expert Ellie Atkins. Dedicated Cognitive Impairment and Alcohol Forum held in November 24. Themes included opportunities to collaborate with PHD researchers, brainstorming case studies and summarising the asks in this area for the ICB and CNWL Trust.
December 23	Feedback on the UCL Inclusion Health pilot providing an A&E service for people experiencing multiple disadvantages and how to refer.



Project Work Achievements

Gap/issue identified	Actions delivered
Huge barriers and blockages for diagnosis and a lack of accommodation, treatment and support pathways for people with cognitive impairment who continue to drink	<p>Dedicated cognitive Impairment and alcohol group was convened and met 4 times over 2023 and convened partners across the system (including the ICB and mental health trust) to refine understanding of the gaps, seek opportunities to lobby to address them and seek quick wins in the meantime.</p> <p>Safeguarding Adults Review agreed following the death of a Blue Light profile client in 2023 with ARBD. The client had been raised in several Blue Light forums and following his death a reflective MDT debrief took place with significant learning relating to communication, capacity assessment and barriers re diagnosis. This SAR will take place in 2024 and is anticipated to profile key systems learning.</p> <p>A mini project took place in Nov 23 at Edward Alsop Court Hostel undertaking a Braining Injury Screening Index (BISI) exercise. Three experienced homelessness staff (including the Blue Light worker) used the BISI to screen 30 male individuals for brain injury. The results were striking : 17/30 (57%) screened positive for brain injury. 46% (11/24) of those who screened positive identified more than one head injury. All findings were fed back to the in-reach nurse at the hostel.</p>
Pabrinex (identified as a preventative strategy to reduce cognitive impairment) was previously only available at a small number of venues making it hard for clients to access	Pabrinex vitamin B1 injections rolled out to more venues across Westminster in 2023 (Edward Alsop Court, MORs, Dr Hickey's surgery etc) and delivered on a mobile basis every Mondays with an outreach nurse. Results of the Edward Alsop Court pilot written up and shared and promoted across inclusion health forums.
Poor awareness of communication needs and lack of adjustments	Communication training and SLT resources available over 2023 with a bank of easy read materials being built up and time organisation kits (clocks, watches, diaries, white boards) shared.
Brain injury awareness	New materials added over 2023 include a reminder poster re reporting head injuries to ambulance crews (drawing on the learning from a rough sleeping pathway death in Q1)
Promoting trauma informed practice and communication	As well as a comprehensive focus on promoting trauma informed practice across the system (via training,



	Community of Practice etc) the Blue Light worker has supported housing teams to formulate trauma informed responses, creating a safe space and using visual aids to help support comprehension, retention and reducing the risk of escalation of unwanted behaviour.
Gaps in end-of-life care needs for dependent drinkers	An end-of-life Community of Practice was delivered over 2023 by Groundswell to improve join up and collaboration to better meet needs
Care packages with a time and task focus, not meeting the needs of Blue Light Clients	Small test and learn pilot (c 6) agreed with the ASC Lead to work with care agencies to introduce MDT agreed plans with flexibility and trauma informed, relational working to better meet the needs of Blue Light people currently refusing care packages.
Improving mainstream GP's response to Blue Light clients	Video for mainstream GPs developed with Groundswell illustrating practical examples of flex to help people experiencing multiple disadvantages access their GPs effectively (examples came directly from the Blue Light workers experience) Top tips for GPs to support people with multiple disadvantage Groundswell
The difficulties caused by KPIs orientated commissioning with a focus on numbers and throughput and the need to influence commissioning teams	Importance of influencing commissioning with a ' commissioning for complexity ' agenda has been taken forward with a dedicated training academy launched by Changing Futures in 2024
High unmet health needs among the Blue Light clients	The Blue Light worker has joined up with a new caseload multiple disadvantage nursing pilot targeting people with high unmet health needs who need a relational, trauma informed and 'meet them where they are at' approach. This collaboration has been highly effective. The 'health first' intensive approach has enabled high engagement and the mutual support of joint working with highly skilled professionals has delivered strong outcomes.
Seeking further learning from the high proportion of rough sleeping	Terms of reference and key lines of enquiry created, and sponsorship secured from the Safeguarding Adults Executive Board to review data on 4 years of deaths in the rough



pathway deaths related to alcohol	sleeping pathway (105 deaths with c50% with a strong alcohol component).
Improving access to emergency service usage data to make 'invest to save' case	ICB link up achieved to secure data on hospital usage with Blue Light clients by joining a pilot ICB approach. Results to be delivered in 2024.

Reflections on work over 2023 and forward planning into 2024

Strategic meetings were held with all partners to review progress and set priorities for 2024. Feedback was sought from lived experience reps on workshops over 2023 and suggestions included:

- improving the link up to the situation on the ground – to address this, more frontline workers to be invited to present anon case studies
- increasing the number of people with lived experience at the group
- coproduction with 'hard to reach' groups themed workshops in 2024

There was a strong human message across the workshops and speakers – holding in mind “no one chooses to be a dependent drinker” the importance of non-judgemental, person centred services with continuity of staff – delivers results.

We are always seeking new partners to join in! Contact Anna Midgley

Anna.Midgley@groundswell.org.uk to sign up for the Blue Light Newsletter (including upcoming training), vaseervatham@westminster.gov.uk to join the monthly Blue Light Workshop or jfortune@shp.org.uk to discuss a referral to the Blue Light pilot.