

## Health: The Design, Planning and Politics of How and Where We Live

- **Paper / Proposal Title:**

“Seeing the numbers”: Conceptualising space and place through public health contributions to alcohol licensing processes in local government

- **Format:**

Presentation in-person

- **Author(s) Name:**

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- **University or Company Affiliation:**

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- **Abstract (300 words):**

Public health holds a legally recognised role in the alcohol licensing process in local government in England, and practitioners are expected to review alcohol licence applications and make representations (objections) against applications where appropriate. This role has been framed as a potentially valuable mechanism through which public health can help to shape the local alcohol landscape to reduce alcohol-related health and social harms. However, the specific ways in which space, place and locality are conceptualised and negotiated through the licensing process are often in tension with the values, knowledges and evidence linked to the role of public health in seeking to reduce alcohol-related health harms at the population level. This raises questions for understanding how public health can most effectively intervene in licensing to shape local availability and accessibility of alcohol to reduce harms, and also for how

space and place might be enacted and shaped through the mechanisms of the licensing process.

In this presentation we draw on a mixed methods study involving ethnography, interviews, focus groups, survey and analysis of routine data, and which aimed to explore the influences on public health practitioners' contributions to alcohol licensing in local authorities in London. We highlight the different ways in which space and place are conceptualised, negotiated and produced through policies and legal frameworks of licensing; the uses of data and evidence to justify objections against licence applications to reduce harms; and the relationships and positioning of public health with other professions within local government. We seek to explore the tensions and negotiations between these enactments and how space is interpreted and mobilised within a public health perspective to understand and target the determinants of alcohol-related harms. In doing so, we highlight the possibilities and limitations of the public health role in relation to shaping the local alcohol environment through licensing.

• **Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

**Joanna Reynolds**, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in Social Science and has disciplinary training in anthropology and public health. She has established research interests in using qualitative methods to explore the evaluation of 'complex' interventions and policies addressing the social determinants of health and health inequalities. Her current research focuses on understanding policy and practice approaches to shaping local alcohol environments, and she also has interests in definitions and operationalisations of 'community engagement' in public health and social policy and practice. Joanna is a member of the NIHR School for Public Health Research group at LSHTM.

**Michael McGrath**, MPH, has an academic background in anthropology and public health and is currently undertaking research exploring alcohol licensing in London. Prior to joining the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine he worked in the civil service in both the United Kingdom and Australia. This has included roles in the research and evaluation of alcohol and tobacco programmes and policies, burden of disease and risk factor assessment studies for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, and most recently as an analyst at Public Health England. Michael is a member of the NIHR School for Public Health Research group at LSHTM.

**Karen Lock**, PhD, is a Professor in Public Health, has disciplinary training in geography and is also a qualified Public Health Consultant, having previously worked at a local level in Primary Care Trusts. Her current research focuses on upstream determinants of chronic non-communicable diseases, and on evaluating upstream policies and approaches to tackling the social determinants of health. She has particular interests in the contextual environmental determinants of diet, alcohol, physical activity and cardiovascular disease. Recent research has focused on what factors might define 'healthy' neighbourhoods and how this can be operationalised through local government policies such as planning and licensing. Karen is a co-programme lead of the NIHR School for Public Health Research group at LSHTM.