

**A Gateshead convenience store has been forbidden from selling alcohol after Gateshead Council revoked its licence.**

The Shibdon Convenience Store, also known as Costcutters, in Park Terrace, Bleach Green, Blaydon, is the first off-licence in Gateshead to have its premises licence removed after councillors were shown evidence that considerable quantities of alcohol were being sold to local children.

The action followed a complaint to Northumbria Police on 1st November last year that children were being sold alcohol at the store. Police officers subsequently visited the store and obtained CCTV footage from the shop's own internal CCTV system which showed:

- Children known to be as young as 15 years of age being openly sold alcohol, without any request for proof of age,
- **Staff selling alcohol to children wearing school uniform,**
- Adults repeatedly buying alcohol which was clearly on behalf of under-age friends.

One customer known to be aged 18 was seen to purchase 14 bottles of wine on four separate occasions within the space of five hours, clearly for others. All of the sales were unchallenged.

In total, between the end of the school day and 9.30 in the evening, staff at the store sold more than 19 bottles of beer, 65 bottles of Lambrini, 42 cans of lager and 2 bottles of cider either to children who were either clearly under-age or were sold to adults blatantly buying them on behalf of children.

Members of Gateshead Council's Licensing Sub-committee viewed video footage seized by the Police this morning and examined written reports submitted by police officers and the Council's own Neighbourhood Wardens. After discussing the evidence with Balbir Singh, who is licenced to operate the Shibdon Convenience store, councillors acted to immediately revoke his premises licence.

Chairman of Gateshead Council's Licensing Sub-Committee, Councillor Kevin Dodds, says: "This was an appalling case."

"The evidence from the store's own CCTV cameras showed a complete disregard for the law, and a total disregard for local residents who have to endure the anti-social behaviour which invariably accompanies such under-age drinking.

"As a local councillor, I know only too well the fear and distress which large groups of

unruly, drunken youths can cause, not to mention the vandalism and criminal damage which often accompanies such gatherings.

He added: "I trust this will prove a valuable lesson for other shopkeepers – particularly as it may be one of their own customers, as in this case, who reports them."

Richard Ferry, Team Leader for Trading Standards, says: "We put a lot of effort into raising the awareness of traders over the problem of under age sales, so its disappointing that some traders are continuing to make sales of alcohol to children.

"We have always given small businesses like this support and advice on ensuring they don't sell alcohol to children, but more recently we have also provided a training DVD. We've also launched a 'Challenge 21' campaign asking businesses to always ask for photo ID if they suspect a buyer is under 21."

Northumbria Police Neighbourhood Inspector for the area Keith Middleton, said: "We are pleased that this licence has been revoked which sends out the right message to other licensees in the area who do not adhere to the law.

"Not only are these licensees risking their livelihoods by selling alcohol to under 18s but they are bringing misery to the lives of people who live in the area where they themselves live and work.

"The force has been running the 'Enough is Enough' campaign over the Christmas period and into January where we have focused on youngsters who disrupt their neighbourhoods. Part of this initiative involved targeting outlets which added to the problem by serving underage youngsters."

It is believed that Mr Singh intends to appeal the sub-committee's decision.

Northumbria Police are also understood to be preparing to prosecute Mr Singh for these offences.