Alcohol etc. (Scotland) Bill

Poverty Truth Commission

The Poverty Truth Commission (www.povertytruthcommission.org) brings together commissioners who live with poverty, and commissioners of influence in society, aiming to understand and address the root causes of poverty in Scotland. It was established in March 2009 and is co-chaired by Tricia McConalogue (Bridging the Gap [Gorbals]) and Lord Wallace of Tankerness (formerly Deputy First Minister of Scotland). Its launch was attended by Alex Neil MSP - Minister for Communities, and the Scottish Government is represented on the Commission by Frances Wood (Deputy Director, Social Inclusion).

One key area of the Commission's work has focused on the need to tackle violence (including domestic and gang violence) and to develop positive alternatives to violence. In our discussions we have noted how the cheap-price and easy availability of alcohol can exacerbate issues of poverty, hopelessness and violence. Though we assert that alcohol is not only a problem for people in poverty, the effects of alcohol abuse and heavy drinking hit low income families particularly hard.

The Commission are broadly in support of minimum pricing for alcohol which goes part of the way to discouraging alcohol abuse and related problems which affect our communities.

However, we see that Scotland's relationship with alcohol has cultural and psychological roots which minimum pricing alone will not address. In disadvantaged communities this includes issues of hopelessness, disempowerment, violence, unemployment and other forms of de-humanisation associated with poverty. We advocate the accompaniment of pricing interventions with resources for community projects which address the root causes of alcohol abuse and resulting anti-social behaviours.

Though we have not had opportunity to discuss and feedback on the range of other measures suggested in the consultation process on the Alcohol etc. (Scotland) Bill we welcome the opportunity to work with the Scottish government in this area. In particular we would welcome the opportunity for members of the Poverty Truth Commission, including those who have lived with and deeply understand issues of alcohol and poverty to present evidence during oral submissions.

At the heart of the work of the Commission lies our understanding that the complex problems of poverty which scar the lives of so many people in Scotland will not be adequately addressed unless people directly experiencing poverty are involved directly in the development of solutions – 'Nothing about Us without Us is for Us'.
Martin Johnstone
Secretary
Poverty Truth Commission
18 January 2010