Alcohol etc. (Scotland) Bill

Salvation Army

The Salvation Army welcomes the Alcohol etc. (Scotland) Bill (SP Bill 34) and appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Health and Sports committee on matters contained within the Bill and trusts that our response will inform its consideration of the Bill at Stage 1.

1. The advantages and disadvantages of establishing a minimum alcohol sales price based on a unit of alcohol

The Salvation Army has historically strongly supported the introduction of a minimum price per unit of alcohol. The social costs of increased health problems requiring NHS resources, increased violence in our towns and cities and damage to family relationships are borne by us all. If an increase in the minimum price of alcohol will reduce consumption of alcohol and reduce the resulting problems for individuals and our society then it is not a case of penalising the majority in order to discourage the minority.

The introduction of a minimum price per unit of alcohol would depend for its success on an across-the-board application. A single, minimum price per unit would establish a baseline cost for a retailer enabling the customer to evaluate unit content and also recognise when a retailer is selling the product below minimum price. Price promotions or discounts would not be allowed to fall below the designated minimum price per unit. Primary legislation is the most significant lever that Government has to effect a change in the drinking culture of the nation and the minimum price per unit is the most effective way to use that lever. The advantages in terms of the health of the nation include fewer violent crimes and hospital admissions, improved community safety and increased productivity with less days lost to alcohol related illness or incident.

2. The level at which such a proposed minimum price should be set and the justification for that level

This is a matter for experts to decide, however, it is important that the minimum price set is high enough to have an impact on purchasing. We would point the committee to research commissioned by the Department of Health (UK) conducted by The School of Health and Related Research, University of Sheffield in 2008 which produced a convincing model measuring the potential impact of minimum alcohol pricing on a variety of population groups. The research indicates that setting a level of 50p per unit would result in a significant reduction in alcohol related harms whilst ensuring that alcohol remains affordable for moderate drinkers. Alcohol consumption would be reduced across all populations groups with the most significant reduction in harmful drinkers (10.3%). Concurrent with the obvious health benefit to the people of Scotland would be the significant reduction in alcohol fuelled crime and disorder with a consequential improvement is the safety of our communities.
The 50p price per unit is also in line with the recommendations of the Chief Medical Officer, Sir Liam Donaldson made in his Annual Report on the State of the Nations Health 2008 and supported by Professor Ian Gilmore, Chairman of the Royal College of Physicians.

3. The rationale behind the use of minimum pricing as an effective tool to address all types of problem drinking

The recent research, quoted above, also examined the “Effect on Consumption and Harm” of a 50p per unit cost. This study showed that a minimum price of 50p would reduce consumption (per drinker) by on average 6.9%. Consumption in the 11-18 year old group would drop by 7.3%. 18-24 hazardous drinkers would reduce consumption by 3%, harmful drinkers by 10.3% and moderate drinkers by 3.5%. This study demonstrates what has been advocated by Members of the Medical Profession and students in Alcohol Policy and Public Health for many years, that Alcohol price directly affects consumption across all types of drinking. If these reductions in consumption could be realised then the move towards Changing Scotland’s Relationship with Alcohol would be significant.

4. Possible alternatives to the introduction of a minimum alcohol sales price as an effective means of addressing the public health issues surrounding levels of alcohol consumption in Scotland

Alongside minimum pricing a reduction in the number of outlets licensed to sell alcohol would be the most productive means of addressing the issue. The Scottish Government made significant progress on this issue and is commended for the introduction the Five Licensing Principles, key among them being the commitment to protect the Public from harm. The twin levers of price and availability can, when utilised for “the public good” effect behaviour change on a societal scale.

Alcohol is “no ordinary commodity” and should not be subject to market forces. The negative consequences to the health of the nation directly associated with excessive alcohol consumption have been recorded and reported on. The opportunity to change Scotland’s Alcohol culture should not be missed.

The Salvation Army accepts that the introduction of minimum pricing will not, in isolation, resolve the current alcohol related problems in Scotland. We believe that it must be a requirement of Government to invest in social programmes to support families, generate attitudinal change which will enable positive choices about the role of alcohol and improve support and treatment for those who need it. However, we welcome the introduction of minimum pricing as a significant step in the right direction.
5. The advantages and disadvantages of introducing a social responsibility levy on pubs and clubs in

A Social Responsibility levy would be a most helpful tool. The revenue generated should be used to address any “anti-social” consequences of the business including increased Police presence at identified “hot spots” or additional street cleaning.

6. The justification for empowering licensing boards to raise the legal alcohol purchase age in their area to 21

No substantive comment.

7. The role of promotional offers and promotional material in encouraging people to purchase more alcohol than they intended

Promotional offers and promotional material are aimed at increasing consumption and again view alcohol as “a commodity”. The irresponsible promotion of alcohol should be banned as part of the raft of measures intended to change Scotland’s Relationship with Alcohol.

Drinks promotions in on-sales premises have already been restricted, it is therefore appropriate to introduce similar restrictions to off-sale premises.

8. Any other aspects of the Bill

No substantive comment.

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The Salvation Army
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