At a recent meeting of the South Aberdeenshire Licensing Forum, members discussed the consultation documents associated with the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill and made the following comments:

The advantages and disadvantages of establishing a minimum alcohol sales price based on a unit of alcohol was discussed by the Forum and are detailed below:

- A lower minimum price (i.e. 30p) would make little difference to those classified as sensible drinkers and it was suggested that a higher level will be required to make a significant difference to those classed as harmful drinkers.

- A minimum alcohol sales price based on a unit of alcohol is likely to affect off-sales more than on-sales but it was felt that this would give smaller off-sales stores an even playing field with national supermarkets.

- It was felt that some consumers who cannot afford the price increase may resort to committing crime to pay for their alcohol addiction – a minimum alcohol sales price based on a unit of alcohol may also encourage consumers to purchase other, cheaper drugs as a substitute for the alcohol.

It was recognised that 40p is the value which is most widely given as an example when referring to a proposed minimum price but the Forum question how effective this level will be in addressing problem drinking. It was suggested that the minimum price should be set at a level which will make a difference and should therefore be set at a medium to high level such as 50-55 pence. The Forum also suggested that the minimum price could be increased in stages over a period of time.

The Forum agreed that minimum pricing is part of an effective strategy which will address all types of problem drinking. It was recognised that this strategy will not just benefit individuals but also the Health Service, A&E, crime statistics and unemployment levels.

The Forum suggested no 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.

The Forum believes that the introduction of a social responsibility levy is a disadvantage to licence holders as they already pay fees associated with the application and training processes. It is thought that the introduction of a social responsibility levy may be one cost too many for licence holders.
The Forum also commented on the suggestion that those licensed premises which breach the provisions of the 2005 Act would be subject to a social responsibility levy. The Forum questions how this would work in practice and believes that there are other, more effective sanctions which could deal with this issue.

The Forum does not support empowering licensing boards to raise the legal alcohol age in their area to 21. The Forum feels that if the legal purchase age is to be raised to 21 this should be on a national basis rather than on a regional one. However, the Forum recognises that Challenge 21 and Think 25 initiatives have been adopted in many off-sales stores to combat the issue of “borderline” cases.

The Forum agreed that promotional offers and promotional material encourage people to purchase more alcohol than they intend and agreed that restricting the display of alcohol to one area in an off-sales should limit this.

No other aspect of the Bill was discussed.

Arlene Kelday
Assistant Committee Officer
South Aberdeenshire Licensing Forum
20 January 2010