Alcohol etc. (Scotland) Bill

South Ayrshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The South Ayrshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP) is grateful for the opportunity to comment on the above Bill.

We note that the main purposes of the Bill are to:

- introduce a minimum sales price for a unit of alcohol;
- introduce a restriction for off-sales on supply of alcoholic drinks free of charge or at a reduced price;
- make provision in law with respect to the sale of alcohol to under 21s;
- restrict the location of drinks promotions in off-sales premises;
- introduce a requirement for licence holders to operate an age verification policy; and
- make provision in law for a social responsibility levy on licence holders.

We further note that responses have been invited on:

- the advantages and disadvantages of establishing a minimum alcohol sales price based on a unit of alcohol;
- the level at which such a proposed minimum price should be set and the justification for that level;
- the rationale behind the use of minimum pricing as an effective tool to address all types of problem drinking;
- 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 advantages and disadvantages of introducing a social responsibility levy on pubs and clubs in Scotland;
- the justification for empowering licensing boards to raise the legal alcohol purchase age in their area to 21;
- the role of promotional offers and promotional material in encouraging people to purchase more alcohol than they intended; and
- any other aspects of the Bill.

2. SOUTH AYRSHIRE ALCOHOL AND DRUG PARTNERSHIP RESPONSE

2.1 Alcohol Related Harm in Ayrshire

In Ayrshire and Arran, more than 150 people die each year directly as a result of alcohol such as through alcohol-related cirrhosis, with a similar
number indirectly attributable. For example, 20% of breast cancer
deaths are linked to alcohol. There are more than 4000 acute hospital
discharges with a diagnosis directly attributable to alcohol, more than
1000 of which are in South Ayrshire.

There is clear evidence that health related harms and deaths occur up
to seven times more frequently in people from the most deprived
communities than in those from more affluent areas. In Ayrshire and
Arran, our GPs have identified a five fold difference in the occurrence
of alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence between the most and least
affluent areas.

In South Ayrshire, drinking in public remains a high priority for
Strathclyde Police and in 2008/09 accounted for 23% of all disorder
crimes. Youth Disorder remains one of the most common complaints
with underage drinking and rowdy behaviour accounting for 62% of all
cases reported.

The South Ayrshire ADP is aware that minimum pricing has not been
tested widely, however, given this picture and scale of the problem we
face, are of the belief that any effort aimed at reducing consumption
across the population is worthy of consideration. We also recognise the
international evidence that tackling price can help effectively address
the problems associated with alcohol misuse as part of a wider
package of measures. We are therefore supportive of the Bill.

2.2 The Advantages And Disadvantages Of Establishing A Minimum
Alcohol Sales Price Based On A Unit Of Alcohol

South Ayrshire ADP is in favour of establishing a minimum sales price
for alcohol as an integral part of further measures effecting greater
control on the availability and promotion of alcohol.

We are convinced that there is sufficient evidence to indicate that the
consumption of alcohol is directly related to its price and that the
societal costs of alcohol, in terms of the damage to health, social harm
and criminal justice elements, have now reached such significant levels
that more measures to control consumption are required.

It is likely that by increasing price we will see a reduction in the
frequency of front or pre-loading, since the younger drinkers who tend
to indulge in this practice will not have the same price incentive to
purchase from off sales premises and commence drinking at home or
outdoors before concluding the drinking session intoxicated within an
on-trade licensed premises.

In the absence of powers to control price through taxation - the
conventional manner in which this is executed with income generated
being retained within Government spending - controls through
minimum pricing appear sensible. It is recognised that minimum pricing
per unit will result in increased revenue for the retailer, which will offset any drop in sales and can be considered worthwhile for the greater societal benefit achieved through the overall reduction in consumption.

Price per unit is considered by South Ayrshire ADP to be the most appropriate mechanism through which this can be delivered since it relates the strength of an alcoholic beverage to the cost. Evidence indicates that people drinking at harmful and dependent levels tend to purchase the alcohol that provides most units for least expenditure.

2.3 The Level At Which Such A Proposed Minimum Price Should Be Set And The Justification For That Level

The South Ayrshire ADP is of the view that there requires to be a significant increase in the price of the lowest cost per unit types of alcohol in order to have a significant impact on consumption and ultimately health and social outcomes. Any price which brings the purchasing cost of off-sales alcohol close to that of on-sales licensed premises is considered appropriate.

2.4 The Rationale Behind The Use Of Minimum Pricing As An Effective Tool To Address All Types Of Problem Drinking

There is considerable disparity between reported and actual consumption in the population. Sales figures indicate that every adult in Scotland is consuming more than 23 units per week each. More than 60% of this alcohol purchased was bought from off-licensed premises. However, people underestimate significantly the amount of alcohol they consume (the mean from the 2008 Scottish Health Survey being 18.0 units per week for men and 8.6 units per week for women).

Efforts to raise awareness in relation to units and recommended limits have had little effect in reducing consumption or in keeping consumption levels within recommended limits.

More radical action to reduce the amount of alcohol consumed by the whole population is required and an approach of minimum pricing is one potential way to do this.

2.5 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

There is a need to maintain efforts to change the cultures around drinking patterns, excessive consumption and associated behaviours (sexual activity, tobacco and illicit substance use, antisocial behaviour and crime).
Evidence from the World Health Organisation (2003) demonstrates that restricting availability of alcohol through age restrictions and reducing outlet density would also be effective measures.

In addition, there are a number of opportunities that do not currently sit within The Scottish Parliament’s remit to legislate. These include the power of taxation of alcohol and the control of its advertising and promotion and, in particular, a reduction in indirect advertisement through the restriction and tighter control of alcohol product placement in the media.

The South Ayrshire ADP would urge the Scottish Parliament to press the UK Government to act to address these areas where there is good evidence that raising taxes and applying mandatory restrictions on advertising reduces consumption of alcohol.

2.6 The Advantages And Disadvantages Of Introducing A Social Responsibility Levy On Pubs And Clubs In Scotland

The Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 enhanced the controls on alcohol in on-sales premises through amendments to promotions, tighter controls on licensing hours and mandatory server training. This was welcomed as evidence indicates that those with effective stewarding and server training in place will have fewer problems. Current powers are also available to Licensing Boards and Police in relation to known premises associated with frequent disturbances.

As off-sales have not been constrained by legislation there is currently a risk that by placing too great an emphasis on the social responsibility of pubs and clubs this will result in them unfairly being held responsible for behaviour resulting from pre/front loading of alcohol purchased from off licence premises.

2.7 The Justification For Empowering Licensing Boards To Raise The Legal Alcohol Purchase Age In Their Area To 21

There is evidence to suggest that the majority of young people legally able to purchase alcohol do so responsibly. However, additional licensing powers may be needed for two reasons, namely: in areas where there is either considerable pressure on retailers to sell to those under the legal age for purchase such as through the intimidatory presence of young people around the shop access; or where there is a significant problem associated with sales to those aged 18 to 20 years such as antisocial behaviour, violence or other crime. In these situations an increase in legal age of purchase may have a positive impact.
2.8 The Role Of Promotional Offers And Promotional Material In Encouraging People To Purchase More Alcohol Than They Intended

It is recognised that, in a highly competitive market, it is not realistic to expect retailers to reduce, voluntarily, their promotion of products aimed at increasing footfall into stores. However, all forms of alcohol promotion are inappropriate and therefore the South Ayrshire ADP would welcome the introduction of advertising restrictions through the use of appropriate legislation.

2.9 Any Other Aspects Of The Bill

The South Ayrshire ADP support the general principles of the Bill and in particular the opportunity it presents to advance two of the most effective measures available to reduce alcohol consumption, namely pricing and availability.

There are a number of other issues, however, which we feel are also worthy of consideration and action in conjunction with these proposals including:

- the need to place controls on the availability of ‘fortified’ alcoholic beverages with caffeine used as a stimulant alongside the depressant effects of alcohol;
- the need to reinforce a collective sense of responsibility for changing Scotland’s alcohol culture beyond the drinks industry and licence trade in order to change underlying cultural norms;
- the power of community involvement and activism in bringing about ownership and lasting change in our communities and the need to grow, develop and support it;
- the requirement to ensure the non-stigmatisation of people with harmful or dependent use and to ensure that they receive the best support and care available to ensure their recovery; and
- the opportunity to consider the most effective approach to labelling.

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Chair
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