Alcohol Etc (Scotland) Bill

West Dunbartonshire Licensing Forum’s Sub-Group

With reference to the above Committee’s call for written evidence from groups following consideration of the general principles of the Alcohol Etc (Scotland) Bill which was introduced by the Scottish Government on 25 November 2009, copies of the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill and the Policy Memorandum were circulated to Members for information.

The Forum’s Sub-Group, having considered the points detailed in the ‘Call for Evidence’, expressed the under noted views on the Bill:-

- **The advantages of establishing a minimum alcohol sales price based on a unit of alcohol;**

The Sub Group was unanimous in its support for establishing a minimum sales price based on a unit of alcohol.

The following opinions/points for information were expressed by Members of the Sub-Group:-

- that, in theory the establishment of a minimum sales price would remove the purchasing of alcohol for certain groups of people;
- that establishing a minimum alcohol sales price would provide a level playing field for both on and off trade;
- that it would prevent supermarkets selling at below cost price and using alcohol promotions as a marketing tool;
- that in time it would help restore the general public’s attitude towards alcohol and aid the process of people respecting alcohol;
- that other countries have successfully set a minimum sales price for alcohol including Russia;
- it was thought that setting a minimum price would stop people buying large amounts of alcohol at supermarkets for consumption at home thus reducing the problems associated with excessive consumption of alcohol at home i.e. help towards reducing the incidence of domestic violence, etc.;
- that it would help towards tackling problems associated with the damaging levels of consumption of alcohol and the cost of alcohol misuse to Scotland’s public services and economy as backed and supported by health service specialists and police chiefs;
- that it would reduce the volume of alcohol being stored at home thus preventing children/persons under the age of 18 removing alcohol from the stock held at home for their own personal consumption; and
- that it would ban drinks offers “such as buy one get one free” and prevent use of alcohol as a “loss leader”.

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• The disadvantages of establishing a minimum alcohol sales price based on a unit of alcohol;

The following opinions/points for information were expressed by Members of the Sub-Group:

- that it may have an impact on crime;
- that it may lead to the unregulated sale of cheap alcohol being purchased across the border; and
- that it would mean sensible drinkers are penalised by an increase in the price of alcohol.

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

The Sub-Group agreed that £0.35 was an effective level to set the minimum price per unit of alcohol.

The following opinions/points for information were expressed by Members of the Sub-Group:

- that this would raise the cost of the cheapest ciders and other alcoholic drinks favoured by problem drinkers;
- that this would be an acceptable level for on sales and off sales trade; and
- that this would not exclude people who drink sensibly.

• The rationale behind the use of minimum pricing as an effective tool

The following opinions/points for information were expressed by Members of the Sub-Group:

- It was reported that global evidence based research indicated that minimum pricing does work;
- that it would assist in meeting the criteria of the health objective in the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005;
- that some of the tax gained from the increase in the price could be diverted to health promotion by the government: one suggestion being a reduction in the price of fruit and vegetables;
- that if tax duty only was increased then supermarkets would be unaffected due to their practice of below cost selling. It was therefore felt that setting a minimum price for alcohol would force irresponsible retailers to retail alcohol products in a more responsible manner; and
- that setting a minimum price for alcohol would control irresponsible promotions in both on sales and off sales premises.

- 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

- Following discussion the Sub-Group agreed that there were no possible alternatives to the introduction of a minimum alcohol sales price and that irresponsible promotions would continue without the introduction of a minimum alcohol sales price.

- The advantages and disadvantages of introducing a social responsibility levy on pubs and clubs in Scotland

  The following opinions were expressed by Members of the Sub-Group:-

  - that should a social responsibility levy be agreed, then it should be applied to all licensed premises and not just pubs and clubs;
  - that all outlets selling alcohol could be rated;
  - that the social responsibility levy should apply to all premises selling alcohol;
  - that the social responsibility fee should be apportioned to specific premises which may be a locus for anti social behaviour as a result of alcohol misuse; and
  - that a social responsibility fee should be proportioned to off sales premises at the end of the year depending on the sales of alcohol for that year.

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

  The following opinions were expressed by Members of the Sub-Group:-

  - that raising the legal alcohol purchase age to 21 was a useful tool for Licensing Boards to use as a punishment for irresponsible licence holders;
  - that the Licensing Boards could use the increase in purchase age to 21 as a tool and would be required to justify raising the purchase age with evidence;
  - that it could not be applied as a blanket to all licensed premises in the Licensing Board area; and
  - that it could lead to an increase in the incidence of agency purchase in a Licensing Board area.

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

  - Following discussion the Sub-Group agreed that promotional offers and
promotional material definitely encouraged people to purchase more alcohol than intended.

Other aspects of the Bill which were discussed by the Sub-Group

- **Age Verification Policy**

  Following consideration, it was suggested that there should be compulsory identification cards for everyone under the age of 25.

- **Power of Board to Vary Premises Licence Conditions**

  Following consideration, it was suggested that Boards should have the power to Vary Premises Licence Conditions retrospectively e.g. all pubs must join the pub watch scheme if there is one operating in their area. It was agreed that this would be useful for Boards as long as it was not used as a barrier to licence holders and, in addition, it was felt that there should be some level of appeal for licence holders.

  It was also agreed that this would afford the Board the right to apply conditions to licences without the need for a Board Hearing.

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