Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill

Association of Directors of Social Work

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

ADSW supports the proposal to introduce a minimum alcohol sales price based on a unit of alcohol.

Research from Europe and worldwide is accumulating and shows a clear, direct relationship between the price and consumption of alcohol. ADSW believes that minimum pricing will have a positive effect in reducing the effects of alcohol related harm in the areas of health, criminal and anti-social behaviour and employment.

Minimum pricing will have minimal effect on moderate drinkers. Its greatest effect on actual price will be seen in the high volume/high alcohol products, which are often the choice of young, inexperienced drinkers.

There is compelling evidence which shows that when prices rise, consumption falls. Alongside recent legislative changes concerning multi-pack purchase and bargain basement offers, these proposals offer a real opportunity to effect culture change to Scottish drinking habits.

ADSW believes that the minimum sales price based on a unit of alcohol will, over time, reduce the population mean alcohol consumption and produce its greatest effects on those groups in the population who are currently most at risk of alcohol related harm and thus, of most concern.

On a more cautionary note, the ADP is concerned that the proposed changes may produce unwanted consequences such as increased trafficking of cheap alcohol from the European mainland, increased cross-border purchasing from England or online sources and possible loss of employment in the cheap-end alcohol production industry.

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

The ADSW believes that a minimum price of at least fifty pence per unit of alcohol should be set.

Using the pricing formula described in the Bill and applying to concrete examples shows that a unit price of fifty pence will result in a pricing structure which minimises the financial effects on moderate drinkers but will have significant effects on the high alcohol/high volume end of the market. The effects on the on-trade should also be minimal.
Once a minimum price is set it can, of course, be reviewed and varied in light of effect and circumstances. The Scottish Government should enshrine in law the authority to review and vary the minimum price set as evidence of its effectiveness accumulates over time.

Any other aspects of the Bill

ADSW welcomes sight of the formula that will be used to calculate the minimum price and would suggest that this be more widely publicised with examples of its application to help address the arguments being put up by those who oppose the introduction of minimum pricing.

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