Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill
North Ayrshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership

Thank you for giving North Ayrshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership the opportunity to comment on the proposed Alcohol etc. (Scotland) Bill, which would result in the introduction of a minimum sales price for a unit of alcohol below which alcohol must not be sold on licensed premises.

Alcohol Related Harm in Ayrshire

In Ayrshire and Arran in 2008/09 there were 166 alcohol related deaths, 3869 acute hospital discharges with a diagnosis directly attributable to alcohol, and 398 Psychiatric inpatient hospital alcohol related discharges. More than 1700 alcohol attributable acute hospital discharges and Psychiatric inpatient hospital discharges are residents of North 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.

North Ayrshire ADP is aware that minimum pricing has not been tested widely, however given this picture and scale of the problem we face we 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.

1. The advantages and disadvantages of establishing a Minimum Alcohol Sales Price based on a Unit of Alcohol

We can recognise the benefits associated with the proposals included in this Bill, and the potential positive impacts that this measure could have with regards consumption on the collective adult population in Scotland, including young people and those with problematic drinking behaviours. 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.

We are encouraged by emerging evidence from Canada which demonstrates a link between price and consumption in areas undertaking minimum pricing schemes. Preliminary findings from the evaluation carried out by Professor Tim Stockwell at the Centre for
Addictions Research in British Columbia indicates that there was a reduction in consumption which was consistent with the price set in the two provinces included in the study (i.e. the greater the increase in price the greater the reduction in consumption).

In the absence of powers to control price through taxation - Price per unit is considered by North 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. We would also advocate that the price should be index linked to ensure that minimum pricing keeps up with inflation.

Evidence indicates that people drinking at harmful and dependent levels tend to purchase the alcohol that provides most units for least expenditure and therefore will benefit most from an increase in unit pricing. Minimum pricing is also likely to impact positively on young people who also favour cheaper drinks. In addition, a reduction in the frequency of front or pre-loading is likely, 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 on-trade licensed premises. This evidence is also supported by Professor Stockwell’s findings.

2. The Level at which such a Proposed Minimum Pricing should be set and the justification for that level

North 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.

North Ayrshire ADP recognises the work currently being undertaken by the University of Sheffield to update its modelling work on minimum pricing in line with 2010 Scottish Health Survey findings. However it is our view that, in order to achieve the greatest reduction in consumption, the cost per unit of off-sales alcohol requires to be brought as close to that of on-sales licensed premises as possible.

3. Any other aspects of the Bill

The health and welfare of North Ayrshire’s residents is paramount to our Partnership. There is a need, however to continue to see this Bill as a part of a wider set of measures to address alcohol harm. We would therefore like to note a number of other considerations which should be taken into account with regard these proposals including:

- 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
• the need for tighter 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.

North Ayrshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership
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