Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill

West Lothian council and the Community Health & Care and Tobacco, Alcohol & Drugs Partnerships

A. Purpose of Report

To respond to the Scottish Parliament's Health and Sport Committee call for written evidence on the general principles of the Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced by the Scottish Government on 31 October 2011.

B. Recommendation

That the PDSP considers the appended draft response and recommends submission to Council Executive for approval.

C. Summary of Implications

I Council Values
- Focusing on our customers' needs
- Being honest, open and accountable
- Working in partnership

II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)
Measures included in Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill 2010 will impact favourably on health and harm related to alcohol misuse in West Lothian.

III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers
None

IV Impact on performance and performance indicators
It is expected that the proposed measures will contribute positively to performance indicators related to reduction of alcohol misuse and community safety.

V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement
The intended outcome of the Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill 2010 is consistent with commitments in the Single Outcome Agreement, both in respect of health and well-being and community safety.

VI Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)
No direct impact on resources.

VII Consideration at PDSP
None

VIII Other consultations
The proposed submission reflects West Lothian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drug Partnership’s alcohol strategy, which was widely consulted on.

D. Terms of Report

The Scottish Parliament’s Health and Sport Committee has called for written evidence on the general principles of the Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill, which was introduced by the Scottish Government on 31 October 2011.

West Lothian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drug Partnership Alcohol Strategy 2009 reflects the concerns of the Scottish Government in respect of the damaging impact of alcohol misuse, both to individuals and to communities:

“Alcohol misuse is damaging the health, happiness, safety, and prosperity of both ourselves and our children. With increasing consumption over the last 50 years has come a tide of rising harm, not limited to health nor experienced solely by the drinker but spilling over on family and friends, communities, employers, and Scotland as a whole. By tackling alcohol misuse and by supporting and encouraging communities to make more positive choices about alcohol availability and provision, we can help them to maximise their potential both individually and collectively “

Consistent with this position, the Council Executive supported the main provisions of the Alcohol etc (Scotland) Bill (see minutes of 9 February 2010) which also included a commitment to a minimum sales price for a unit of alcohol and submitted evidence to that effect.

It is recommended that the council again contributes to the call for evidence in support of the minimum pricing provisions of the Bill. Appendix 1 provides the recommended submission.

E. Conclusion

The Scottish Government’s proposals on minimum pricing for alcohol are consistent with our local Alcohol Strategy. Council Executive has already contributed evidence in support of this position and it is recommended that the submission in Appendix 1 is submitted as evidence to the Scottish Parliament’s Health and Sport Committee.

F. Background References

1. Council Executive, 9 February 2010, item 23a
3. West Lothian Tobacco, Alcohol and Drug Partnership Alcohol Strategy 2009

Appendix 1: Response to call for evidence on Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill
Appendix 1

Evidence contributing to West Lothian Community Health and Care Partnership’s support of principles of the Alcohol (Minimum Pricing) (Scotland) Bill

West Lothian Tobacco Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (TADP) has a well established strategy based on addressing the alcohol use of the whole population as the most effective harm. Central within this is strong support for the introduction of minimum unit pricing as a powerful intervention to reduce health and social harm arising from Scotland’s profoundly unhealthy relationship with alcohol.

There is a clear view within the international public health community that price is a central factor in alcohol-related harm:

There is extensive and consistent evidence that raising the price of alcohol reduces alcohol-related harm.... There is consistent evidence that price has an impact on younger and heavier drinkers.¹

In Scotland and the UK, alcohol has become greatly cheaper to buy over the last 20 years, particularly in the off-sales sector. The figures in the graphs below are based on a comparison of the retail price of alcohol and average household income. As can be seen, there has been a consistent rise in the affordability of alcohol (i.e. a reduction in its economic price) other than in the last few years, when average household income has reduced.

Figure 14: Affordability of alcohol by type and price 1987-2009²

¹ WHO, Effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of policies and programmes to reduce the harm caused by alcohol.
The effect of this price reduction (at UK level) can be seen in figure 15: as alcohol has become cheaper, consumption has risen.

### Figure 15: Alcohol consumption in the UK (per person 15+) relative to price, 1960-2002

![Graph showing alcohol consumption and price relative to income from 1960 to 2002.](https://example.com/graph.png)

The strength of this association is described in a recent analysis:

> As the price of alcohol relative to income has declined, the amount of pure alcohol consumed by the population has increased…. Per capita alcohol consumption in the UK has gone up by over 15 per cent in the past couple of decades and doubled since the 1960s.

> Even accounting for a recently reported recession-related drop in consumption, more alcohol is drunk per head today than was ten years ago.

> Nearly 1 million people in Scotland currently drink at hazardous and harmful levels, and over 10 million drinkers in England are exceeding recommended weekly drinking limits. As alcohol consumption has increased, so have levels of alcohol-related harm.²

Local evidence reflects the national picture and displays trends reinforcing the links between health harm and cheap alcohol; figures on consumption and on local alcohol related deaths and alcohol related hospital discharges show a steady rise over at least 20 years (as the affordability of alcohol has increased) followed by a recent drop during the economic downturn (which effectively increased the price of alcohol). These figures strongly suggest the importance of price in West Lothians level of alcohol related harm.

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³ Scottish Health Action On Alcohol Problems (2010) Getting the price of alcohol right

⁴ Scottish Health Action On Alcohol Problems (2010) Getting The Price Of Alcohol Right
In line with our local policy, we have undertaken considerable work within our communities developing support for effective alcohol interventions and attempting to increase awareness and understanding of the role that societal attitudes to alcohol play in affecting alcohol related harm.

Although arguments are often advanced that culture, rather than affordability and availability is the factor which needs to be addressed to tackle alcohol misuse, we would suggest that culture is dynamic and, despite much mythmaking on the subject of Scots and alcohol, we have not always had unusually high levels of alcohol abuse historically.

Further, it should be noted that the way in which alcohol is sold is not a neutral factor in the culture of alcohol use; widely available, heavily marketed and cheaply sold alcohol sends clear messages about the desirability and normality of heavy drinking. In addition to the well demonstrated direct benefits of increasing effective price, the measures proposed in the bill seem an important that Scotland is acknowledging and addressing its unhealthy relationship with alcohol.

We strongly support the principles underpinning the Bill and are happy to provide any further local information which may be needed.