SUBMISSION FROM CHILDREN 1ST

This submission is made by CHILDREN 1ST on behalf of:
Action for Children Scotland, Barnardo’s Scotland, ChildLine in Scotland, CHILDREN 1ST and Parenting across Scotland

Our organisations are working together on issues of shared interest on alcohol. We are primarily concerned with the impact on children and young people of parental alcohol misuse. The Scottish Government has estimated that 65,000 children and young people are growing up in Scotland with a parent or parents who misuse alcohol, with detrimental effects to their childhood and life chances. We believe that the true figure may in fact be much higher.

We are therefore keen to support measures which will result in a whole population shift in attitudes to alcohol and in particular, reduce parental alcohol consumption. Accordingly, we have confined our remarks on the committee’s key questions to 5) and 11).

5) What is your opinion on the proposal for the control of excise duty on alcohol and tobacco and what may be the risks and benefits?

Our organisations support the proposal to shift control of excise duty on alcohol from Westminster to Holyrood. This would give Scotland access to funds with which to address alcohol misuse and in particular, to provide greater funding for support for children and young people living with parental alcohol misuse or to help them recover from abuse and trauma experienced in their childhoods due to parental alcohol misuse.

This would be one of the key benefits of controlling excise duty on alcohol but one of the risks would be for that additional income to be used generally to add to the Scottish budget without clear direction on how it might be spent. Indeed, even if hypothecated to expenditure in relation to alcohol, there is a risk that children will miss out or that consideration of their needs would be confined to addressing them as users of alcohol. If control of the duty is transferred, it will be vital to consider carefully how to spend the additional income and where and how it might have the most impact.

Transferring control of alcohol excise duty would also address some of the concerns expressed about the policy of minimum alcohol pricing. Our organisations support this policy but acknowledge that it would be beneficial if Scotland was able to use the revenue raised from minimum pricing to fund other priorities aimed at reducing alcohol consumption. Again, we would welcome a focus on supporting children and young people living with the impact of parental alcohol misuse.

11) What further views do you have on the Bill at this stage and do you have any suggestions which, in your view, would enhance the Bill and should be considered by the UK Government for inclusion?
Currently, under Schedule 5 of the Scotland Act 1998, at section C7 consumer protection, “misleading and comparative advertising” is a reserved matter “except regulation specifically in relation to food, tobacco and tobacco products”. This means that alcohol advertising is reserved while tobacco advertising is devolved.

Our organisations believe that if we are to achieve a radical whole population shift in our attitude to and consumption of alcohol, we need all the tools in the box to do so, and to use these effectively. As we have seen in terms of trying to reduce smoking rates, previous Scottish Parliaments have attempted to limit the impact of advertising and its reach, in particular, to children and young people. A similar approach could be taken with alcohol, if advertising was no longer reserved.

The committee may be interested to note that there is a private member’s bill currently in Westminster to limit advertising which will receive its second reading on Friday 9 September. The bill proposes to adapt the policy developed and applied in France over the last twenty years, known as the Loi Evin, to a UK context. Essentially, the Loi Evin is used to protect children and young people by minimising their exposure to alcohol through media and cultural activity. We would be happy to provide more details to the committee on how the Loi Evin works in France.

However, if Sarah Woollaston MP’s bill falls, by shifting control of alcohol advertising to Holyrood, Scotland could explore, develop and implement its own version of the Loi Evin to protect children and young people from exposure to advertising and sponsorship by alcohol companies and brands. Without access to the power, however, we cannot do anything to address how alcohol is promoted and therefore lack a vital tool in our collective and concerted efforts to reduce alcohol consumption and achieve a huge cultural shift in our attitudes towards consumption.

Whether or not the Scottish Parliament might decide to use such a power in the way our organisations envisage, it is incongruous for tobacco and food advertising to be devolved while alcohol advertising remains a reserved matter. We would hope that the committee might agree and recommend to the Scottish Parliament that alcohol advertising becomes a devolved matter.

Children 1st
13 September 2011