

6 February 2013

Alcohol Consultation  
Drugs and Alcohol Unit  
Home Office  
4<sup>th</sup> Floor Fry Building  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF


Dear Home Secretary

**'DELIVERING GOVERNMENT'S POLICIES TO CUT ALCOHOL FUELLED CRIME AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR'**

The Association of North East Councils is the representative body for local government in the North East. It encompasses all 12 local authorities in the region, throughout Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and the Tees Valley, on issues of concern to them and the communities they serve. It is a cross-party organisation, with all of its Members democratically elected and accountable politicians.

The Association wishes to express its strong support for measures to reduce unhealthy and disruptive levels of alcohol consumption and to strengthen the licensing regime. This co-ordinated response is submitted on behalf of our member authorities who will also be submitting individual responses.

The Association is also aware of and supports the response being made by Balance, the North East Alcohol Office, which together with the individual council responses will address the detailed and technical elements to the proposals as set out in the 35 questions posed by the consultation. This response focuses on the following high level issues highlighted in the consultation:

- encouraging a reduced level of consumption through the introduction of minimum unit pricing and banning multi-buy promotions;
  - highlighting an inconsistency in the consultation which on the one hand looks to reduce consumption but on the other, through the ancillary licensing proposals, proposes to make it more freely available; and
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- health needing to be a licensing objective but on a more equal standing alongside the other licensing objectives.

The Government's Alcohol Strategy is a real opportunity to make significant progress in tackling alcohol misuse in the North East where alcohol harm has had a number of affects on individuals, families and communities. For example:

- the North East of England has the highest rate of alcohol-related hospital admissions in England;
- the region has the highest rate of under 18s in alcohol treatment and the highest under 18 alcohol specific hospital admissions in England; and
- around half of violent crime in the North East is related to alcohol and almost 40% of domestic abuse is linked to alcohol.

Our children and young people are also affected by the wide availability and heavy promotion of cheap alcohol. In the North East something like 40% of child protection cases and three-quarters of child mistreatment cases have a link to alcohol. Even non-drinkers are paying the price of alcohol harm, as dealing with the problem costs the North East:

- £264 million to the NHS;
- £316 million in crime and licensing costs;
- £404 million to the workplace and wider economy; and
- £106 million in social services costs.

## **Reducing consumption**

As a way of reducing the availability of cheap alcohol to the most vulnerable and susceptible members of our communities we support the proposals to introduce minimum unit pricing (MUP), and to ban multi-buy promotions.

The Government's continued commitment to introduce a minimum price per unit of alcohol is welcomed as it is a highly targeted and effective approach that would have the greatest impact on younger and heavier drinkers. However, we suggest that this measure does not go far enough and needs to be set at an effective and realistic level at no lower than 50p per unit. Our support for this is based on clear evidence from independent, peer reviewed sources that shows it is highly effective and targeted at the right people.

A study by University of Sheffield has modelled the effects of MUP on a number of parameters. A MUP of 50p compared to a MUP of 45p would save annually an additional 1,000 deaths, 31,000 alcohol-related hospital admissions, 18,000 crimes and would reduce consumption by a further 2.4%. To miss the chance to save thousands of lives and to make communities safer and healthier for the sake of 5p extra per unit would be a missed opportunity.

The introduction of a ban on multi-buy discount deals would be welcomed as they encourage people to purchase and consume more than intended but it should be strengthened further by including the on trade. In a recent report from Alcohol Concern and Balance, the North East Alcohol Office<sup>1</sup>, it was noted that a North East focus group of 16 and 17 year olds felt that promotions such as 'Buy One Get One Free' attracted young people to drink more than they would and to 'drink to get drunk'.

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<sup>1</sup> Drinking to Get Drunk – Influences on young adult drinking behaviours

The level of alcohol-related hospital admissions in the North East emphasises the need for health to be an integral part of a revised licensing system. We therefore welcome the government's proposal for it to become a new alcohol licensing objective but propose it should be given equal weight with the other licensing objectives. Local people, through their local councils, need to be given greater control over the density of premises and availability of alcohol in their communities. Given local government's new responsibilities for public health and wellbeing it is important we are able to include consideration of health issues in everything we do, including the licensing of alcohol.

### **Changing our relationship with alcohol**

Under the section on 'reducing red tape' there are proposals which will increase the availability and visibility of alcohol and further cement a pro-alcohol culture. This would be inconsistent with other elements of the consultation which are aimed at reducing consumption. Making it easier for small businesses to sell alcohol will only encourage children to see alcohol as a central part of adult life. In turn this could lead to increased personal and social harm and further worsen health inequalities. We should avoid 'normalising' the availability and consumption of alcohol.

We view this consultation as a real opportunity to make significant progress in tackling alcohol misuse and we urge the Government to take note of the independent evidence base and that of public health, police and other frontline professionals and reduce the affordability and availability of alcohol for the benefit of all of us.

