

Parliamentary Briefing

Alcohol Etc (Scotland) Bill Scottish Parliament Stage 3 Debate Wednesday, 10 November 2010

Children in Scotland supports enactment of this Bill. We are strongly in favour of the Bill's goal of significantly reducing overall alcohol consumption, binge drinking and the associated social, economic and health costs of alcohol use and misuse. *While drinking among young people is a real problem, it is far outweighed by the negative impacts of parental (and other adult) alcohol misuse upon children.*

However, there is widespread, firm support among our membership (more than 450 organisations and individuals) for restoring meaningful minimum pricing of all alcohol products to this Bill.

Specifically, Children in Scotland has two recommendations:

- Any minimum price set for alcohol must be set high enough to demonstrably and significantly discourage/reduce consumption significantly; and,
- The price of alcohol must make unhealthy consumption out of reach to children and young people under the age of 18, i.e. it should not be available at 'pocket money' prices.

Minimum pricing was removed despite overwhelming medical, scientific and economic evidence in favour of this bold move to reduce irresponsible alcohol consumption. We continue to pay an astronomical price for turning a blind eye to alcohol being cheaper than healthier alternatives, even water, particularly when sellers are pushing 'happy hour' and other 'bargain' campaigns.

Irresponsible alcohol consumption costs the public an extraordinary amount - from direct health care in A&E departments, hospitalisation and chronic illness, to ongoing social work, police and justice costs for domestic violence and child maltreatment. The extravagant cost to taxpayers is higher than the modest cost individual 'responsible' drinkers would pay under a minimum unit pricing system.

MSPs sometime voice frustration about receiving diverse views on proposed legislation from Scotland's children's sector. On this issue, there is unity.

Children in Scotland also supports the 'social responsibility levy' provisions within the current Alcohol Bill. In fact, we support extending this levy to large off-license retailers of alcoholic products, too. Some critics of the Bill have suggested that it could result in 'windfall profits' for large supermarket chains and other big retailers. Since this is not is an agreed principle/goal of this Bill, there should be a Stage 3 amendment to ensure it does not become an unintended consequence of this legislation.

We further recommend that any money raised through this additional levy on large, off-license alcohol retailers be ring-fenced for the funding of effective, evidence-based methods of preventing (or reducing) the damage caused to Scotland's children and young people by alcohol – ranging from foetal alcohol harm to binge drinking among young people to alcohol-fueled domestic violence and child abuse/neglect by parents and other adults.

Putting meaningful minimum unit pricing back into the Alcohol Bill will save scarce public funds and contribute to a healthier Scotland. Enacting as strong a social responsibility levy as possible could help to fund the forthcoming reform of the Children's Hearings System and strengthen work to promote prevention and treatment of alcohol-fueled problems throughout our nation. Together, these actions will result in a better law and better childhoods.

*Further information is available from Children in Scotland at:
policy@childreninscotland.org.uk or 0131 222 2412.*