

Sirs

I am writing to you in relation to the Green Paper focussed on prevention recently announced by DoHSC. I am doing so as new evidence based on research by the University of Sheffield has shown that significant harms experienced by Bury Metropolitan Borough Council can be averted by introducing a policy which should be at the forefront of both documents.

Cheap alcohol is at the root of many of the problems both initiatives are attempting to address. The real price of alcohol compared to other goods has fallen dramatically over the past 30 years and this has been most pronounced in shops and supermarkets. It is now possible to buy three litres of white cider containing the equivalent of 22 shots of vodka for around £3.50.

For specific, vulnerable populations, this is associated with an increased risk of harm. The published vision for the Green Paper expressly identifies alcohol as “...*one of the leading causes of ill health and early death.*” Additionally, however, those subjected to alcohol-related harm are not only the drinkers themselves but also the many others affected, often innocent bystanders. As you will already be acutely aware, alcohol has been shown to be a contributory factor in child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, family breakdown and crime and disorder, among others. Government figures show that this harm is felt disproportionately in Bury Metropolitan Borough Council and across the North of England generally.

A Minimum Unit Price (MUP) would allow all alcoholic beverages to be priced based on their strength. Stronger drinks, such as high strength white cider and spirits, would have a higher price than their lower-strength alternatives. The research shows that doing so would be more effective in terms of reducing harmful consumption, hospital admissions and preventing alcohol-related deaths than other similar policies. It would have immediate and long-term benefits to health, crime prevention, economic growth and health inequalities. Many people stand to gain from the introduction of MUP – particularly the most vulnerable. In Bury Metropolitan Borough Council alone a 50p MUP would mean:

- the NHS would save £259,109.00 per year,
- alcohol related hospital admissions would fall by 120 per year
- 77 deaths would be avoided over the ensuing 20 year period.
- 176 fewer associated crimes would be committed per year

The vision for the Green Paper makes a specific case for intervention which is “...*targeted and co-ordinated for groups most at risk*”. The new research demonstrates that MUP precisely targets those products consumed by people drinking harmful quantities and young drinkers. At the same time, it achieves this without significantly penalising moderate drinkers, including those on low incomes. In fact, it is estimated that moderate drinkers in the most deprived areas in Bury Metropolitan Borough Council would spend just £2.50 more on alcoholic drinks per year under a 50p MUP, a barely noticeable difference.

In light of this new evidence and the potential benefits outlined for residents of Bury Metropolitan Borough Council and the country, I believe the Government should take

the earliest possible opportunity to introduce MUP in England and I urge you to set out plans for its immediate implementation.

The Scottish government recognised the problem and introduced a minimum unit price (MUP) for alcohol over a year ago. Wales are due to do the same. If MUP is not introduced in England, the lives saved, crime cut and money saved across the borders will highlight a serious failure in the Government's duty to protect the health and wellbeing of the English population.

Yours sincerely