

<b>Committee(s):</b>	<b>Date(s):</b>
Health and Wellbeing Board	4 <sup>th</sup> July 2013
<b>Subject:</b> Alcohol minimum unit pricing	<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Community and Children's Services	<b>For Discussion</b>
<p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>Minimum pricing per unit has been proposed as a way of reducing harmful drinking and alcohol-related harm. The Government is yet to announce its position in relation to minimum pricing; however, some health leaders have called for local minimum unit pricing schemes to be implemented.</p> <p>Although alcohol-related health harm, as well as crime and anti-social behaviour are a key issue for the City of London, it is not clear whether introducing a minimum unit price for alcohol would have any impact upon City drinking, as most alcohol served in pubs and bars in the City is already priced above 50p per unit.</p> <p>However it is possible that introducing a minimum unit price may reduce alcohol purchases by problem drinkers with limited means, such as rough sleepers. Adopting a minimum unit price for alcohol may also send a powerful message that the City is in solidarity with local authorities who wish to introduce this measure in areas where it will have a more significant impact.</p> <p><b>Recommendation(s)</b></p> <p>Members are asked to consider this report and how to take any recommendation forward.</p>	

## Main Report

### Background

1. High levels of drinking have a negative effect on public health and public order. One proposed mechanism for reducing excessive alcohol consumption is minimum pricing.
2. In public debate the term "minimum pricing" has been used generically to refer to two different policies. The first is to set a *minimum price per unit* of alcohol. The second is to ban the sale of alcohol *below cost price*.

3. In June 2010 NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) called for alcohol to be made less affordable by introducing a minimum price per unit; this price, they argued, should be regularly reviewed so that alcohol does not become more affordable over time.
4. The Government's *Alcohol Strategy* (March 2012) included a commitment to introduce a minimum unit price for alcohol. There would be consultation on the actual price but, once introduced, it would be illegal for alcohol to be sold for less than the set price.
5. In November 2012, the Home Office published *A consultation on delivering the Government's policies to cut alcohol fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour*. This recommended a minimum unit price of 45p, to be introduced through primary legislation. The paper claimed that a unit price of 45p would lead to an estimated reduction in consumption across all product types of 3.3%, a reduction in crime of 5,240 per year, a reduction in 24,600 alcohol-related hospital admissions and 714 fewer deaths per year after ten years.
6. Alcohol Concern has been campaigning for a minimum price per unit of alcohol; its preferred option is a price of 50p.
7. The Scottish Parliament passed the *Alcohol (Minimum Pricing)(Scotland) Bill* in May 2012, paving the way for a minimum price per unit of 50p. The Scottish Whisky Association (SWA) believes minimum unit pricing is contrary to EU law and in July 2012 filed a petition for judicial review with the Scottish Court of Session. In a ruling of 3 May 2013, the Court refused the SWA's petition. The SWA has said it will appeal.
8. There was no announcement in the Queen's speech relating to minimum alcohol pricing. The Prime Minister has pledged to deliver a 'package of measures' to deal with cheap alcohol; however, the government is yet to confirm its decision on minimum unit pricing, as a result of "powerful arguments on both sides".
9. The Director of Public Health in Blackpool, Dr Arif Rajpura wants councils in the North West of England to join together to order a lowest price of 50p-per-unit. The Wine and Spirit Trade Association has questioned whether setting a local minimum unit price for alcohol would be legal.

## Current position

10. The cost of alcohol misuse in England is estimated to be around £21bn per year made up of the following<sup>1</sup>:
  - NHS costs, at about £3.5bn per year at 2009-10 costs
  - Alcohol-related crime, at £11bn per year at 2010-11 costs
  - Lost productivity due to alcohol, at about £7.3bn per year at 2009-10 costs (UK estimate).
11. The impact of alcohol on health is a significant issue. Over the last ten years health harms have continued to grow. Alcohol-attributable deaths in England rose by 7%, from 14,000 in 2001 to 15,000 in 2010. In contrast, deaths from all causes in England fell by 7% over this period. Over the same period, alcohol-specific deaths rose by 30%. The rate of liver deaths in the UK has nearly quadrupled over 40 years, a very different trend from most other European countries. Approximately 60% of people with liver disease in England have alcoholic liver disease, which accounts for 84% of liver deaths. In addition, the rate of alcohol-related hospital admissions has also continued to rise by an average of 4% each year over the eight years 2002-03 to 2010-11. Alcohol is now one of the three biggest lifestyle risk factors for disease and death in the United Kingdom, after smoking and obesity.
12. There is also a strong link between alcohol and crime, particularly violent crime. In 2010/11, there were around 930,000 (44%) violent incidents in England and Wales where the victim believed the offender to be under the influence of alcohol, this rose to 58% in instances of stranger violence.
13. Although alcohol-related health harm, as well as crime and anti-social behaviour are a key issue for the City of London, it is not clear whether introducing a minimum unit price for alcohol would have any impact upon City drinking. Minimum pricing affects those who drink the cheapest and the strongest alcohol. This is unlikely to impact upon the majority of City drinkers, as drinks purchased in City establishments are unlikely to be below the 50p minimum per unit.
14. Introducing minimum pricing to the City may impact upon “off sales” (meaning alcohol that is sold for consumption off the premises) of, for example, strong cider and “own brand” spirits sold in City supermarkets and off licences. This may have a preventative effect upon harmful drinking amongst rough sleepers in the City.
15. A two litre plastic bottle of strong cider (15 units) currently sells for around £3-£4. Under the proposed minimum pricing scheme of 50p per unit, it could not be sold for less than £7.50 (15 units x 50p = £7.50). A supermarket ‘own

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<sup>1</sup> Home Office (2012) A Minimum Unit Price for Alcohol.

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/157763/ia-minimum-unit-pricing.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/157763/ia-minimum-unit-pricing.pdf)

brand' whisky or vodka currently sells for between £8 and £12. This would become £14.00 as a minimum price (28 units x 50p).

## **Considerations**

16. Although a minimum unit price is likely to help reduce alcohol-attributable harm amongst the majority of City drinkers, it may have an impact upon alcohol consumption amongst rough sleepers. However, unless neighbouring boroughs also adopted a minimum pricing policy, it would be impossible to prevent this group from purchasing their alcohol from outside the City.
17. Adopting a minimum price per unit would, however, show solidarity with other local authorities where minimum alcohol unit pricing is likely to have a much more dramatic effect upon harmful drinking, alcohol-related crime and anti-social behaviour.

## **Appendices**

*none*

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