



MISSION & PUBLIC AFFAIRS

27 January 2012

The Rt Hon David Cameron MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

Please respond to:
Joint Public Issues Team
Methodist Church House
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Dear Prime Minister

We write to you as a coalition of Churches, charities and community groups bringing running experience in the field of alcohol policy, and in helping individuals and communities harmed by alcohol misuse.

We welcome recent indications that, in recognition of the danger posed by cheap alcohol, the Government is seriously considering the introduction of a per unit minimum price. We believe that action on pricing must form the central element in the Alcohol Strategy which your Government is due to publish in February. There are various factors involved in problem drinking, but numerous studies have shown that price is the key determinant. Unless you include strong action on per unit pricing, other measures such as a ban on below-cost sales, a special tax on strong beers or a voluntary code for advertising are likely to be inadequate.

We recognise that there may be complex legal issues involving competition law. But current levels of ill health and public disorder associated with problem drinking mean that these issues must be addressed. In 2011, leading medical experts including Sir Ian Gilmore (Chairman of the UK Alcohol Health Alliance) and Andrew Langford (Chief Executive at the British Liver Trust), predicted that unless strong action is taken 250,000 lives could be lost over the next 20 years. They specifically advocate introducing a minimum unit price of 50p and implementing stricter controls on advertising. Alcohol misuse costs the UK an estimated £25 billion per year in public spending, without even considering the serious (but harder to measure) effects on people's wellbeing, including their mental health, family and social relationships and careers.

A YouGov poll commissioned by the Methodist Church and its partners in November 2011 found that 61% of UK adults felt that excessive drinking was a problem in their neighbourhood. We have seen the effects of cheap, strong drink on our streets, in our hospitals and police stations. It is in local communities that the damage caused by alcohol misuse is felt most deeply, particularly disadvantaged communities, which continue to suffer disproportionately from alcohol-related harms. Furthermore, it is estimated that between 1.3 and 2.6 million children are affected by parental problem drinking. Neglect is a particular concern and these children are more vulnerable to developing other problems, including substance misuse. A joined-up national solution for these issues is clearly in the UK's best interests as a whole.

Some are concerned that per unit minimum pricing would penalise responsible drinkers. But research by the University of Sheffield found that a minimum price of between 40p and 50p per unit would save thousands of lives at the cost of only a few extra pence per week to the average drinker.

Legislation containing provisions for per unit minimum pricing will soon be considered by the Scottish Parliament. Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are developing a cross-border alcohol strategy and working towards the possibility of agreeing a minimum price by December 2012. We are very encouraged by reports that you have taken a lead on per unit minimum pricing, as this is central to ensuring the success of the Alcohol Strategy. This is an opportunity for the Government to make a real difference to communities and vulnerable people across the UK.

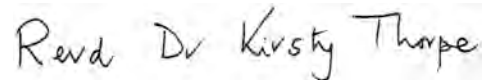
Yours sincerely,



Dr Dave Landrum
Director of Advocacy
Evangelical Alliance



Helena Chambers
Director
Quaker Action on Alcohol and Drugs




Revd Dr Kirsty Thorpe
Moderator of the General Assembly
United Reformed Church



Revd Jonathan Edwards
General Secretary
Baptist Union of Great Britain



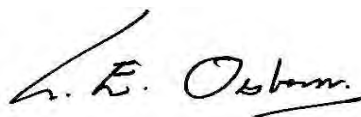
Adam May
Director of Development, Street Angels
CNI Network



Mr Paul Blakey MBE
Founder of Street Angels
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Helen Donohoe
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Revd Lionel E. Osborn
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