



**Response from Fresh- Smoke Free North East to the Home Office Alcohol Strategy Consultation: 'Delivering the Government's policies to cut alcohol-fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour.'**

**February 2013**

Fresh is the North East of England's comprehensive tobacco control programme funded by all 12 primary care trusts in the region. It was the first of its kind to be set up in the UK with the aim of reducing smoking prevalence through leading a partnership between the NHS, local authorities, charities and the private sector. When Fresh was established in 2005, 29% of the adult population in the North East smoked. By 2012, prevalence had reduced to 21%, the furthest and fastest drop of any region in England.

This consultation is a real opportunity for the Government to reduce the unhealthy and disruptive levels of alcohol consumption often seen in the North East. For example, the region has the highest rate of alcohol-related hospital admissions, including those under 18 and costs to the NHS and the wider economy top £1 billion each year in our region alone.

Fresh supports the detailed response of Balance, the North East alcohol control office, to this consultation and in addition would like the following points to be taken into account in relation to specific sections of the consultation:

**Multi-buy promotions**

We believe that the Government should put an end to multi-buy promotions for alcohol. Alcohol is not an ordinary consumer product. It is addictive and can cause significant problems both to health and to the wider society. Multi-buy promotions encourage people to purchase more than they would have, thus tempting people to consume more.

We also believe that this principle should be strengthened by applying it to the on-trade as well as the off-trade. Balance and Alcohol Concern recently undertook research<sup>1</sup> with 16 and 17 year olds in the North East and found that particular promotions such as 'buy one, get one free' attracted young people to drink more than they would have, and to 'drink to get drunk.'

**Minimum unit pricing**

We believe that the introduction of a minimum unit price (MUP) for alcohol that is set at an effective level will, along with an end to multi-buy promotions, reduce the availability of cheap alcohol to those people who need the most protection from alcohol-related harm, e.g. young people and those who drink heavily. MUP provides a highly targeted and effective mechanism that will have the most impact on these

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<sup>1</sup> Balance and Alcohol Concern, 'Drinking to Get Drunk' (2012)

vulnerable groups and its level needs to be set at a minimum of 50p per unit, not at 45p as the consultation suggests.

Not only will this make us comparable with Scotland, which borders the North East region, but research<sup>2</sup> shows that this small increase of 5p per unit would save an additional 1,000 deaths and cut an additional 18,000 crimes per year. Furthermore, we recommend that the level is regularly reviewed and, if required, updated, to ensure its continued effectiveness.

A MUP at 50p is a measure that is supported by all 12 North East Councils' Leaders and Elected Mayors, and 81 per cent of people in the region said they are more likely to support MUP if it reduced drunk and rowdy behaviour.

### **Health as a new licensing objective**

We support recommendations that 'health' becomes a new licensing objective for cumulative impact policies. This will strengthen the position of local government as leaders in public health, for which they are responsible locally from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2013 and it will reinforce the message that tackling alcohol-related harm is an issue for all local government departments.

### **Cutting red tape**

We believe that the proposals outlined in the consultation to reduce red tape run counter to its aim of cutting alcohol-fuelled crime and anti-social behaviour. The addictive and potentially harmful nature of alcohol should require it to be subject to robust and increasing regulation, rather than a weakening of controls.

We believe the proposals for the deregulation of ancillary sellers will not only lead to confusion in the definition of the term – which the consultation document itself grapples with – but will also increase the availability and visibility of alcohol which in turn will lead to increased consumption and, with it, increased health and societal harms.

This consultation is a positive opportunity for the Government to take greater control over the harm caused by alcohol misuse. We trust that the Home Office will take this submission into account in its consideration of the consultation responses and we are happy to provide further information if needed.

