

Time to protect our children from cheap alcohol

As leaders of the 12 councils in the North East of England with a responsibility for the public health of our communities we are increasingly concerned about the damage being caused by the widespread availability of cheap, strong alcohol. The latest North East figures speak for themselves:

- one child is admitted to hospital every day because of alcohol;
- alcohol related hospital admissions in the over 65s have doubled in the past 10 years;
- over 570 alcohol related crimes are recorded in the region every day; and
- it costs £3 million a day to clean up the problems caused by cheap booze.

Together with our partners, councils are working hard to address these problems, but this is not about a handful of people who can't control their drinking. This is caused by a marketplace which encourages and makes it easy to consume too much alcohol, too often. The result is that a significant proportion of the population is consuming above the recommended guidelines - and it's the most vulnerable who suffer as people in our most deprived communities are 45 per cent more likely to suffer an alcohol related death than those on the highest incomes.

It is clear local action is not enough. We need your help. We urge you to include in your election manifesto plans evidence-based measures to address these problems. In particular, we call on you to:

- introduce a minimum unit price for alcohol set at a minimum of 50p per unit. The latest evidence from Canada tells us that it will save money, cut crime and save lives – with over 80 per cent of those lives coming from people on low incomes. This is a targeted measure which will leave moderate drinkers virtually unaffected and will help protect our community pubs;
- take measures to protect our children from the influence of alcohol marketing, including an end to alcohol advertising in cinemas unless an 18 certificate film is being shown and a commitment to seriously consider the withdrawal of alcohol sponsorship from professional sport. Recent research shows that children watching televised football matches are typically exposed to 111 references to alcohol brands an hour; and
- review the licensing act, turning it into a strategic tool to be used by localities to minimise harm in their communities. We need legislation which will enable us to protect the vulnerable – especially children – while ensuring the alcohol industry can play an appropriate role in regenerating our local economies.

In the UK we are consuming twice as much alcohol as we did in the middle of the last century. The fact that it is 61 per cent more affordable than it was in 1980; that we have seen a 25 per cent increase in off licensed premises selling alcohol; and that the industry is spending at least £800 million a year promoting its products is no coincidence. These are the things we need your help to address.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul Watson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "P" and a long, sweeping underline.

Cllr Paul Watson
Chair, ANEC