

REPORT TO: Health & Wellbeing Board

DATE: 2nd October 2019

REPORTING OFFICER: Chief Executive and
Director of Public Health

PORTFOLIO: Health and Wellbeing

SUBJECT: Tackling Cheap Alcohol and Alcohol
Harm in our Communities

WARDS: Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the work to tackle the harm caused by alcohol in our communities and to seek Board support to participate with other similarly minded authorities across the North to build support amongst the public and politicians for the introduction of Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP).

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) That the report be noted; and
- 2) That the Board supports the decision for Halton to participate with other similarly minded authorities across the North to build support amongst the public and politicians for the introduction of Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP).

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Alcohol is one of our biggest public health challenges faced by Halton, with rising levels of harm linked to increases in consumption over the past few decades. Nationally, one person is killed every single hour by alcohol, 1.2 million people are admitted to hospital due to alcohol related causes every year and countless others see their health damaged. It is not just dependent drinkers who experience alcohol harm and there is a sizeable cohort of people who drink at risky levels but who do not necessarily understand the potential health, personal and social consequences of their behaviour.

3.2 We also know that alcohol does not just harm the individual drinker; it plays a significant role in child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, family breakdown and crime and disorder - it is a factor in around half of all violent crime. Alcohol misuse tears apart families and damages entire communities - its impact is felt across the board and there is not a neighbourhood in the UK that remains untouched. The Government has estimated that alcohol costs our country more than £21bn each year due to its impact on health, crime and

society. Halton suffers disproportionate harm when compared to the rest of the country, with estimated costs to the NHS alone of over £10million each year. 27% of the adult population in Halton are estimated to be drinking at increasing and higher risk levels. There are 2,152 hospital admissions caused by alcohol each year, with 32 adults dying as a result of alcohol consumption. Estimates suggest that in Halton 6,839 crimes, including thefts, criminal damage and violence are caused by alcohol each year.

3.3 Bodies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and Public Health England have all stated that the most effective way to reduce alcohol harm is to reduce the affordability of alcohol. Currently, alcohol is 64% more affordable than it was in 1987. Beer sold in supermarkets has become 188% more affordable over the same period.

3.4 To address similar issues to those faced in Halton, Scotland introduced a minimum unit price for alcohol (MUP) in May 2018, after a long legal battle against sections of the alcohol industry. The Welsh Government has also legislated for MUP, which is expected to be introduced in 2020. MUP is linked to the strength of the product and works by setting a floor price below which a product cannot be sold. In that way, it increases the price of the cheapest drinks which are most typically consumed by increasing and higher risk drinkers.

3.5 Research from Sheffield University indicates that Halton would see significant benefits from the introduction of a 50p MUP in England:

- The NHS locally would save £256,200 per year,
- Alcohol related hospital admissions would fall by 130 per year
- 65 deaths would be avoided over the ensuing 20-year period.
- 196 fewer associated crimes would be committed per year

3.6 That same research clearly shows that MUP impacts on those people drinking at high risk levels, while leaving the average moderate drinker virtually untouched. It is also worth noting that most of the harm prevented would be found in more deprived groups. Despite not drinking more than high income groups, they suffer the greatest harm. It is also worth noting that previous research has shown that less than 1% of products sold in pubs would be affected by a 50P MUP.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Given the disproportionate levels of harm experienced across the North of England, the view expressed at Stakeholder meetings showcasing the research, held in Warrington and Durham late in 2018, was that the NW and NE should work together to influence national MUP discussions. As a working group, the aim is to facilitate and encourage willing participant local authorities to work together to influence the national debate on MUP.

4.2 In light of the harms caused in Halton by the widespread availability of cheap alcohol and the improvements in alcohol related health and crime promised by the above research, work is now underway to start the process of building public and political support for MUP and to seek to engage with politicians and Parliament. The Health & Wellbeing Board is asked to support the call to urge the Government in Westminster to introduce MUP in England without delay.

4.3 The original research project into MUP was founded in legal advice which identified the Sustainable Communities Act (SCA) as a possible locally driven route for implementation of a national MUP should there be no appetite from Central Government at this point. The Board is asked to support, should the Government be unwilling to introduce MUP, joining a group of North West and North East Councils to take local action on this issue. Such an approach would enable consultation with local people on making a bid to introduce MUP at a regional/sub-regional/local level by making a bid using the Sustainable Communities Act.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications for the Board at this time.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Reducing the harm caused by alcohol will support an improvement in the life chances of children and families living in Halton by reducing avoidable ill health, through a programme of prevention and early intervention activity.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

NA

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Nationally, one person is killed every single hour by alcohol, 1.2 million people are admitted to hospital due to alcohol related causes every year and countless others see their health damaged. This work will support the Borough in tackling the significant harm to health caused by alcohol and contribute to a healthier Halton.

6.4 A Safer Halton

We know that alcohol does not just harm the individual drinker; it plays a significant role in child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, family breakdown and crime and disorder and is a factor in around half of all violent crime. Alcohol misuse tears apart families and damages entire communities and this work will support the Borough in delivering its priority to create a safer Halton for all residents.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

NA

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

The proposals are not so significant at this time as to require a full risk assessment.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

There are no known equality and diversity implications arising as a result of the proposed action at this time.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

| Document | Place of Inspection | Contact Officer |
|-------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| MUP Halton | Enclosed | Eileen O'Meara |
| MUP FAQ | Enclosed | Eileen O'Meara |