

NATIONAL ALCOHOL HARM REDUCTION STRATEGY

- The Government's National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy was published on Monday 15th March, almost two years after the project was first launched. The report and associated analysis was carried out by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit.
- An interim report was published in September 2003 providing a detailed cost/benefit analysis of the alcohol consumption. The latest report sets out detailed policy recommendations for tackling identified problems caused by alcohol misuse.
- There report has attracted a lot of media attention but much of it has been misleading and in some cases inaccurate. In particular, a lot of attention has been focused on what the Home Office wanted to see in the report in terms of costs and restrictions on the industry. Most of these were not taken forward.
- This brief is designed to provide an overview of the key aspects of the strategy and their impact on licensed retailers.

Overview

- The report itself is well-balanced, recognising the positive contribution the alcohol industry makes to the national and local economy, the cultural and social life of the country and the fact that moderate consumption can have positive benefits. Moreover, it recognises the fact that the majority of people drink sensibly most of the time and focuses its attention on alcohol misuse rather than alcohol itself.
- Joint action is outlined in four key areas: improved treatment and support for people with alcohol problems; better information to consumers about alcohol misuse; tackling alcohol-related crime and disorder; clamp down on irresponsible promotions.
- The main thrust of the policy recommendations is the creation of partnerships at national and local levels to address problems. The emphasis is on voluntary action and building on existing industry activity rather than the imposition of legal restrictions or new initiatives.
- However, the Strategy does contain a stick to ensure a voluntary approach yields results. Implementation of the strategy will be reviewed in Spring 2007 – and legislation will be taken forward if sufficient action has not been taken in key areas.

Drinks Industry Partnership

- The Strategy envisages involving the drinks industry in a number of new initiatives, including a Social Responsibility Charter for drinks producers at a national level and local Codes of Good Conduct for drinks retailers – both on and off trade. Both of these schemes will be key to delivering on the four main action areas.
- Drinks producers will be expected to build on existing Portman Group initiatives by tightening their advertising and pledging not to manufacture irresponsibly, for example by creating products which appeal to under age drinkers or encourage excessive consumption.
- New initiatives include a requirement to use safer packaging for products, and move away from glass bottles in particular, and put the sensible drinking message and unit information on the product.

- In addition, the Government will consult with the industry on the introduction of a two-part voluntary social responsibility scheme for retailers. The first part will be designed to strengthen and promote existing good practice. All retailers would be strongly encouraged to sign up to the code and receive accreditation.
- The Code would be drawn up jointly by the Government and industry but would be led locally by the Local Authority to take account of specific local initiatives and concerns. Take up of the code and adherence to it would be able to be taken into account in licensing decisions and in particular when licence removal is considered.
- It is envisaged that the Code might include:
 - a commitment to seek proof of age and undertake test purchasing
 - display of information about sensible drinking, unit levels etc
 - sign up to a “designated driver scheme”
 - all bar staff to have minimum training on managing alcohol misuse
 - abiding by the BBPA code on irresponsible promotions
 - a commitment to provide reasonably priced soft drinks and free water
 - designing premises to minimise the risk of harm and disorder eg using the “Safer by Design” scheme and encouraging seating
 - use of safer forms of glass based on yet to be defined industry standard
 - agreement to join radio/text pager schemes linked to police
- There is little new here and the implementing the code will largely mean endorsing and promoting existing industry initiatives. The requirement for a minimum level of training and reasonably priced soft drinks are more subjective and the detail will be developed in consultation with the industry.
- However, the second part of the social responsibility scheme may involve a financial contribution towards the cost of alcohol misuse. If a financial contribution is deemed necessary it will be voluntary in the first instance but is expected to be operational in the first quarter of next year.
- This contribution would be paid into a local fund, collected and managed by the local authority and with funds allocated by the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. Monies may be used for Community Support Officers or wardens, additional cleaning, bus services but would be supplementary rather than replacement funding.
- The content of the code will be subject to consultation with the industry. Whether a financial contribution is deemed necessary will largely be dependent on reaction and response to the proposed code. The clear implication from the Strategy is that a positive response and good level of take up will be sufficient to fend off more onerous legislation - such as paid for policing or a mandatory levy.

Other Initiatives

- Increased use of exclusion orders to ban trouble-makers from pubs and clubs or entire town centres, greater use of fixed penalty notices and tougher enforcement of existing rules on under age sales and serving drunks are envisaged to tackle disorder.
- A national audit of alcohol treatment services will be carried out to identify gaps and better target help at the most vulnerable. In addition new public education campaigns on sensible drinking will complement point of sale initiatives.

BBPA POINT OF SALE PROMOTIONS POLICY

- The British Beer and Pub Association has revised and reissued its guidance on the management of responsible drinks promotions – both on and off trade. The policy has been explicitly endorsed by the Government in its National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy and Guidance to the Licensing Act. It complements existing producer agreements on alcohol advertising and the Portman Group's Code of Practice.
- At the heart of the document is a recognition that responsible promotions are a legitimate business practice. The objective is to provide guidance to retailers to ensure that their promotions do not encourage excessive consumption or fuel anti-social behaviour.

Responsible Promotions

- Retailers should consider carefully the purpose of their promotion. For example it may be to launch a new product or increase trade at particular times of the day. It should then be evaluated against the criteria of the code to ensure that it is managed responsibly.
- Responsible promotions should bear in mind the Government's Sensible Drinking message; should ensure that they do not, unintentionally appeal to children; should not condone or encourage excessive drinking or focus on the effects of intoxication; should not suggest association between alcohol and sexual attractiveness or social acceptance.
- In addition, retailers should ensure that, at the same time as running the promotion, they offer those who don't drink a reasonable choice of alternative products – perhaps including some in the happy hour or promotion – and provide food or bar snacks. They should also promote safe and reliable alternative forms of transport to driving.
- **Happy Hours:** There should be a clear time frame for the event and, if it is to be held in the early evening, retailers should be particularly conscious that customers may be drinking on an empty stomach and ensure food is available. The shorter the duration and the greater the discount, the stronger the incentive may be to drink excessively.

Irresponsible Promotions

- The Policy lists a number of promotions which should not be run:
 - reward schemes redeemable over short period
 - drinking games
 - promotions involving large quantities of free drink
 - entry fees linked with unlimited free drinks
 - promotions that are an incentive to speed drink to get a free replacement
 - promotions linked to unpredictable events eg after a goal
 - rewards for purchase or large quantities of alcohol in a single session
 - promotional material linked to sexual imagery
 - promotions encouraging pub crawls
 - promotions which involve driving
 - material which refers to drinking to recover from previous over-indulgence or the effects of intoxication, or glamourises drunkenness
 - promotions which are degrading, gratuitously offensive or material which is demeaning to any gender, race, religion, age or minority group
 - use of image/symbols/characters which may appeal primarily to children
 - direct or indirect references to drug culture in promotional material
 - association with violence or anti-social behaviour in promotional material