



Minimum Unit Pricing for Alcohol in Wales

Response to the Health and Social Care Committee Report

In June 2025 the Health and Social Care Committee submitted its report on Minimum Alcohol Pricing for Alcohol in Wales. This report follows the Committee's agreement to hold a short inquiry to inform a response to the Welsh Government's own consultation as part of its report on the operation and effect of minimum unit pricing for alcohol in Wales.

The report includes 9 recommendations. This is the Welsh Government's response to those recommendations.

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1. Introduction

The Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill was passed by the National Assembly of Wales in June 2018 and received Royal Assent on 9 August 2018.

The Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018 provided the legal framework for introducing a minimum price for alcohol in Wales. The specific minimum unit price, set at 50p per unit of alcohol, was later established through the Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Minimum Unit Price) (Wales) Regulations 2019, which came into force on 2 March 2020.

Together, the Act and the 2019 regulations set the minimum price at which alcohol can be supplied in Wales to a person in Wales and established a local authority-led enforcement regime. This includes powers to bring prosecutions, undertake investigations, and enter premises. The legislation has made it an offence for a person who is an alcohol retailer to supply alcohol from qualifying premises in Wales, or to authorise the supply of alcohol from qualifying premises in Wales, at a price below the applicable minimum price for the alcohol, punishable by way of a fine.

The aim of the Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018 is to tackle alcohol-related harm, including alcohol-attributable hospital admissions and alcohol-related deaths in Wales, by reducing alcohol consumption in hazardous and harmful drinkers. The Act is targeted at protecting the health of hazardous and harmful drinkers, including young people, who tend to consume greater quantities of low-cost and high-alcohol content products.

I would like to thank the Health and Social Care Committee for its call for written evidence and for considering the responses submitted. This work contributed to our commitment under Section 21 of the Act, which requires Welsh Ministers to lay a report before the Senedd about the operation and impact of the legislation as soon as practicable after the first five years of its implementation.

I have set out my responses to the report's individual recommendations below.

2. Response to the 9 recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should bring forward regulations providing for the continuation of minimum unit pricing for alcohol in Wales.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government accepts this recommendation, and we are consulting on the continuation of minimum unit pricing. I intend to introduce regulations to this effect ahead of March 2026. The recently published Operation and Effect report supports the continuation of minimum unit pricing.

Financial implications – This work will be accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that

As part of any ongoing minimum unit pricing policy, the Welsh Government should continue to monitor and evaluate its implementation and effect. This should be stronger, and larger in scale than the previous evaluation and should include a longitudinal quantitative analysis of key outcomes, including hospital admissions and alcohol-related deaths.

Response: Accept

Minimum unit pricing is one of a multitude of health policies implemented by the Welsh Government to help tackle inequality and improve health outcomes. We would consider any ongoing monitoring or evaluation should be proportionate, targeted and address any gaps in knowledge.

While we have considered its implementation over the first five years, culminating in the publication of the final reports from the independent evaluations in January 2025 and Operation and Effect Report in July 2025, I am keen to focus on the quantitative impact. For example, looking at sales and purchasing data, consumption, morbidity, hospital admissions and alcohol-related and alcohol-specific deaths. Working with the target population will also be valuable in informing future policy decisions

Financial implications – Yes, the above work would be determined by available budget.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should review the current minimum unit price for alcohol and, in setting any new price, should consider the administrative advantages of alignment with the minimum unit price in Scotland.

Response: Accept

The current Welsh Government consultation on the future of minimum unit pricing in Wales includes a proposal to increase the minimum price per unit of alcohol to 65p, which would align with Scotland. While this is the main proposal being consulted on, the consultation document also outlines a range of alternative pricing scenarios, including maintaining, reducing or increasing the current minimum price. These options are underpinned by modelling and analysis conducted by the Sheffield Addictions Research Group (SARG). Any decision on the future level of the minimum unit price will be subject to careful consideration of the consultation responses and further consideration by Welsh Ministers.

Financial implications - This work will be accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should establish a mechanism to regularly review and adjust the minimum unit price for alcohol, particularly in response to inflation, in order to ensure its continuing effectiveness.

Response: Accept in part

The SARG modelling report states the uprating of the MUP in line with inflation will be a key consideration to ensure the policy remains effective over time.

Subject to the outcome of the Welsh Government consultation about continuing the policy, this issue will be explored further, using the SARG modelling to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the potential impacts and practicalities of such a mechanism.

While the Welsh Government recognises the importance of maintaining the value of the MUP in real terms, we believe it is prudent to consider this in greater depth before committing to a formal mechanism. This approach aligns with the position taken in Scotland, where similar considerations are ongoing.

We will therefore explore the viability and potential benefits of a review mechanism without pre-empting the outcome of this process or committing to implementation at this stage.

Financial implications - This work will be accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that

The Welsh Government should ensure that any future monitoring and evaluation of minimum unit pricing for alcohol considers the impact of the policy on dependent drinkers on low incomes.

Response: Accept

While the Welsh Government accepts this recommendation, the primary focus of minimum unit pricing is to reduce alcohol-related harm at a population level. However, we recognise the importance of understanding its impact on all groups, including dependent drinkers on low incomes who may be vulnerable to changes in alcohol pricing.

There was a significant emphasis on dependent drinkers and those on low incomes in the original evaluations, notably in the work undertaken with drinkers and service providers/users. The early years of implementation coincided with significant external pressures, including the COVID-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis. These factors have had a profound impact on individuals and communities, particularly those already experiencing disadvantage. As such, any future monitoring and evaluation of minimum unit pricing will continue to consider the wider context in which the policy operates, including the potential compound effects on dependent drinkers with limited financial means. This will form part of the Welsh Government's ongoing commitment to evidence-informed policy and proportionate monitoring and evaluation of public health interventions.

Financial implications – Yes, whilst this work could be incorporated into any future evaluation as per recommendation 2, this will be determined by any future available budget.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that

As part of any continuation of minimum unit pricing, the Welsh Government should bring forward an updated substance use strategy as an important component in a whole-system approach to reducing alcohol-related harm.

Response: Accept in part

Minimum unit pricing is one of a number of strategies adopted by the Welsh Government to address alcohol and substance misuse in Wales.

We have set out clear actions to strengthen our approach to substance misuse in the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and the Suicide Prevention and Self-harm Strategy, which were published in April. This is because substance misuse is a key risk factor for poor mental health and suicide, and our aim through the two strategies is to integrate actions and support for substance misuse as part of the wider approach:

Mental health and wellbeing strategy: delivery plan 2025 to 2028 and

Suicide prevention and self-harm strategy: delivery plan 2025 to 2028

We invest more than £67m to provide services for those affected by substance misuse and we have maintained this budget against a challenging financial backdrop. The majority of this annual funding is provided to the Area Planning Boards (APBs) which are required to undertake annual needs assessments. These assessments are critical in identifying emerging trends, service gaps, and population-level needs. They inform local commissioning decisions and ensure that services are tailored to the specific challenges and demographics of each region.

Our approach is also informed by the Welsh Emerging Drugs and Identification of Novel Substances (WEDINOS) programme, and the system continues to adapt to new or emerging drugs. For instance, last year a scenario planning exercise was held with APB leads and other partners to look at how each area would respond to the threat of synthetic opioids/nitazenes. APBs are also adapting services to address ketamine use, with treatment pathways specifically for those using the drug and some areas introducing joint assessments.

We continue to develop our approach to substance misuse in Wales in response to emerging intelligence about patterns of substance misuse.

Financial implications – Any work in relation to a revised strategy or that set out in the response to the recommendation will be accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that

Any future evaluation of minimum unit pricing should consider the impact of the policy on children and young people, including under-age drinking and the impact of alcohol on the lives of children and young people in households with one or more alcohol-dependent parents or guardians.

Response: Accept

The final contribution analysis report from the independent evaluation published in January 2025 included a recommendation that any continuation of the policy should be accompanied by ongoing and further evaluation. This should include a regard for the impact of minimum unit pricing on children, young people and families.

In the Operation and Effect Report, which was published on 10 July 2025, we responded to this recommendation, by setting out that this area would be considered if the minimum unit pricing legislation is continued – as set out in response to the committee's recommendations one and three.

However, this would need to be considered alongside a range of interventions and comparable studies already being undertaken within the wider children and young people arena, including our response to recommendation nine.

We ensure our services provide early intervention and prevention, so longer-term harms are prevented, before they occur. This includes preventing exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences.

The Substance Misuse Action Fund includes a ring-fenced allocation for children and young people – this was increased by £1m in 2024-25 to £6.25m and maintained in 2025-26, in recognition of growing demand.

We have published a Substance Misuse Treatment Framework for Children and Young People – this is a guidance document and is designed to inform and assist health, social care and criminal justice planners to design and deliver high-quality treatment services, working with those at risk of initiation, or experience of historic or current problematic drug and/or alcohol use.

Financial implications - Yes, whilst this work could be incorporated into any future evaluation as per recommendation 2, this will be determined by any future available budget.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that

If the Welsh Government continues with minimum unit pricing, it should continue with, and strengthen, its public health messaging about:

- the purpose of the policy; and
- the broader impact of excessive alcohol consumption on physical and mental health.

Response: Accept

The Welsh Government accepts this recommendation as part of our ongoing commitment to the importance of clear and effective public health messaging in relation to minimum unit pricing and the broader impacts of alcohol consumption on physical and mental health.

Communications will be a strong element of any work required if the minimum unit price is increased as a result of the consultation about whether minimum unit pricing should continue in Wales.

However, it is important to note that minimum unit pricing represents just one component of the Welsh Government's broader alcohol harm reduction agenda. This includes a range of initiatives and policies, including the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Wales. As such, any minimum unit pricing communications strategy will need to be developed in co-ordination with wider public health messaging and across a range of health policy areas.

Financial implications – This work will be accommodated within existing budgets.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that

As part of any ongoing policy, the Welsh Government should consider commissioning a large scale public attitudes survey to monitor ongoing public attitudes to minimum unit pricing.

Response: Accept in part

We would look to consider existing options available to Welsh Government to monitor public awareness and attitudes in a proportionate manner, including the possibility of further exploring behavioural change resulting from minimum unit pricing.

A targeted and focused social listening exercise using relevant tools could possibly provide a more accurate reflection of public attitudes and could consider young people within this, supporting recommendation seven.

Financial implications – Yes, there would be a financial implication and would be determined by any future available budget once a preferred approach was agreed.