

Y Pwyllgor Iechyd, Gofal Cymdeithasol a Chwaraeon
Health, Social Care and Sport Committee
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**Barnardo's
Cymru**

Barnardo's Cymru Legislative Scrutiny Response

Health, Social Care and Sport Committee Scrutiny

Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill

4th December 2017



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www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/who_we_are/wales/wales_policy

- **This response may be made public**
 - **This response is on behalf of Barnardo's Cymru**
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1. Information and working context of Barnardo's Cymru

Barnardo's Cymru has been working with children, young people and families in Wales for over 100 years and is one of the largest children's charities working in the country. We currently run 86 diverse services across Wales, working in partnership with 16 of the 22 local authorities.

Every one of our services is different, but each believes that every child and young person deserves the best start in life, no matter who they are, what they have done or what they have been through. We use the knowledge gained from our direct work with children to campaign for better child and social care policy and to champion the rights of every child. We believe that with the right help, committed support and a little belief, even the most vulnerable children can turn their lives around. We aim to secure better wellbeing outcomes for more children by providing the support needed to ensure stronger families, safer childhoods and positive futures.

Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Bill

2. Response overview

To inform this response we have sought the opinions of Barnardo's Cymru service managers and team leaders. Consequently this response is informed by the views of Barnardo's Cymru services and will not be repeating or referencing research well known to the committee.

The weight of evidence makes the case for this legislation undeniable; however, as recognised, the positive effects of the legislation are unlikely to make as significant a difference as hoped for in isolation of other measures and approaches.

In short Barnardo's Cymru:

- supports the principle of the Bill
- suggests that approaches to address harmful and hazardous drinking that exists across income groups is required
- would welcome campaigns to address the issues of acceptance within a generally unhealthy drinking culture, and
- would welcome consideration of a stronger children's rights, exploitation and safeguarding focus in the bill

- believes that it will effect a change on the retail purchase of lower cost higher alcohol by volume drinks.

3. Service input

Whilst recognising the issue being addressed by the bill, Barnardo's Cymru services have highlighted a number of issues that will need to be addressed in conjunction with the bill in order to achieve greater change.

Drinking and Children and Young People

These issues generally fall into two areas, firstly children and young people who drink and secondly those affected by family or parent/carer drinking.

Firstly we must recognise that some young people purchase and drink alcoholic beverages legally and responsibly and as such may be unfairly affected by the bill.

Parents and carers behaviour in relation to alcohol exerts a strong influence on their children's alcohol use. The majority of children and young people understand how to manage alcohol with their parents/carers guidance. This will involve parents taking responsibility for purchasing alcohol for older teenagers as part of managing the quantity and strength of alcohol they drink, by advising on the impact and risks of alcohol and by role modelling safe and responsible drinking for them. All of our services reported that much of the alcohol consumed by children, that they are aware of, is provided by parents, family or is usually available at home. Much of this alcohol would not fall into those categories of drinks affected by minimum unit price and isn't being purchased by the children or young people.

Included in this, however, there were anecdotes relating to families where guidance was unhelpful or misguided and examples of some families providing money to young people without considering the associated risks of how this would be spent.

One team leader with significant experience in substance misuse has reported hearing situations new to her. She reported having met a 15 year old boy who on completion of his domestic chores including walking the dog and cleaning his room is rewarded on a Friday with a bottle of Vodka to share with his mates. The boy thinks this is within good and safe parameters; he has earned the

reward by contributing and he and his mates are not sourcing and consuming in unsafe environments.

The same service reported another 15 year old as having in the region of £400 per month disposable pocket money meaning that alcohol costs were of no particular concern. Both of these boys are from middle income families where parents believe they are acting responsibly.

For many of the children and young people who use substance misuse services because of their own use of substances, it is considered that this legislation will have little effect as alcohol is not usually the drug of choice but one of convenience being utilised if available.

Much is known about the lives of children and young people affected by harmful, hazardous or dependent drinking within the family with significant potential to experience adverse circumstances throughout childhood.

It is also the case that lower income families in general face greater health issues which, when compounded by harmful or hazardous drinking, will make it more likely that the family will suffer the effects of serious ill health and early death.

Barnardo's Cymru supports the intention of this bill to reduce the impact of hazardous and harmful drinking on individuals and that this may have both emotional and practical benefits for the drinker's family.

The Bill and Domestic Violence

This is one of the areas where the weakness of the legislation is most stark. When asked if the bill would help reduce levels of domestic violence, one service manager replied 'That would depend on whether the perpetrator was only violent every time they drank alcohol that was strong and cheap.'

Alcohol generally contributes to experiences, frequency and nature of domestic violence but is not a factor in all circumstances. Domestic violence plays across all income groups leading to the question of what can be done to address equally detrimental effects of alcohol on income groups other than the lowest.

Potential for Unintended Negative Consequences

The responses from Barnardo's Cymru services also highlighted some possible negative impacts. As well as the evident possibility of substituting alcohol with other drugs; services were highlighting the possibility of supplementing family income through prostitution, increases of offending to obtain, increases in exploitation for alcohol and a profitable black market for alcohol.

The legislation could potentially be relatively simple to enforce as this is limited to predominantly licenced and regulated retail activity. There will however inevitably be issues of capacity in trading standards departments to deliver this additional function on much reduced staffing levels.

4. Conclusion

As stated earlier we find that the case for the legislation is undeniable. As also stated the bill might achieve limited progress towards its aims in isolation of other developments. Services highlighted the need for public health education programmes to address knowledge, understanding and culture. They also made comparisons with changes in tobacco use suggesting further restrictions in advertising, consideration of plain packaging and restricted visibility or access on shelves.

Tim Ruscoe
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