



Media Release

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Drinks proposals cautiously welcomed by leading NW campaigners

Home Office proposals to outlaw irresponsible drinks promotions should be welcomed by the public in the North West, a majority of whom drink moderately, according to the region's leading health campaigners Our Life.

But, warned Dr Alison Giles, Chief Executive of Our Life, which led the Big Drink Debate, the region's biggest ever alcohol survey: "We'll be looking closely at the detail to make sure that these proposals go far enough to stem the rising tide of public order and health harms."

"This consultation gives moderate drinkers a chance to say no to those who promote excessive drinking which leads to enormous personal distress for families blighted by alcohol harm and costs us hundreds of millions to essential public services such as A&E and policing."

A massive 30,000 people from across the North West took part in the Big Drink Debate last summer. 80% of respondents said that low prices and discounts increase the amount that people drink and almost half said that they avoid their town centres because of concern over the drunken behaviour of others.

"It is unacceptable that nearly half our population believe that their town centres are no go areas. It's about time that we put an end to the promotion of drunken behaviour by small sections of the on-trade by supporting this code.

"This is a chance for people living in the North West to take more control in shaping the kinds of places they want to live, including town centres that can be enjoyed by everyone, not just the drunken few."

Dr Giles added that action to curb very cheap supermarket alcohol will also be vital. "We know that 65.4% of Big Drink Debate respondents buy most of their alcohol from supermarkets and that this contributes significantly to harm through people drinking before hitting their town centres."

Our Life will be launching a campaign to enable and encourage thousands of people from across the North West to take part in this consultation. It will also be working in partnership with police, local authorities, fire services and NHS organisations, to maximise positive responses.

Assistant Chief Constable of Cheshire Police, Garry Shewan, who leads on alcohol issues on the North West Alcohol Forum, said: "We as a region have been calling for decisive action in this area for some time and we welcome the opportunity to reiterate our position on the matter. We cannot afford to look at price and promotion in isolation, we have a duty to educate and inform communities about the collective responsibility needed to halt the decline in our communities caused by alcohol-related violence and anti-social behaviour."

Wendy Meredith, Director of Public Health for Western Cheshire Council and NHS, leads on alcohol issues for the NHS across the North West. She said: "Excessive drinking is not only harmful to individuals and their families, but also puts a huge pressure on NHS services. NHS staff are often at the front line dealing with the short term consequences – accidents, alcohol poisoning, domestic violence, assaults - as well as the long term effects such as chronic liver disease. We would urge all our partners across the public and private sector to support the proposals set out in the code of practice."

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Notes to Editors:

1. Our Life has been established as a social enterprise to offer creative ways for the NHS, local government, the public, business and voluntary organisations to work in partnership to make sure that the North West becomes one of the healthiest regions in the country;
2. The North West has the worst drinking levels in the country for people drinking at hazardous or harmful levels (1.33 million adults);
3. In the North West, one person is admitted to hospital every seven minutes for an alcohol-related condition;
4. More than 73,000 recorded crimes across the North West last year were related to alcohol – of these 50,000 were violent offences; The estimated costs of alcohol-related and alcohol specific crime in England is £12billion.

The Big Drink Debate questionnaire was compiled by the North West Public Health Observatory, who analysed the responses. The Big Drink Debate was funded by Our Life and Department of Health and Government Office in the North West.