



Home Office

Victoria Atkins MP
Minister for Crime, Safeguarding and
Vulnerability

2 Marsham Street,
London SW1P 4DF
www.gov.uk/home-office

Caroline Lucas MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

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Dear Caroline,

Thank you for your email of 1 February regarding the negative impact of cheap alcohol on our society and potential benefits of introducing Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP).

The Government recognises that alcohol continues to be one of four biggest lifestyle risk factors for disease and death and one of the six main drivers for crime in the United Kingdom. While I am pleased that overall alcohol consumption and alcohol related violent crime in the UK has fallen in recent years, I share your concerns about ill effects of alcohol abuse, which continue to affect certain parts of our society disproportionately.

The Government accepts that the evidence available does suggest that there is a link between the price of alcohol and levels of consumption. This seems to be particularly the case with regard to very cheap products such as "white" ciders which is why the Government is taking action to tackle affordability of cheap alcohol. Most recently, Her Majesty's Treasury committed to introduce a new, higher duty band on cider at 6.9% and 7.5% alcohol by volume from 2019, to tackle consumption of cheap high strength "white" ciders in order to reduce the harm associated with these drinks.

The Government has noted the ruling of the UK Supreme Court on MUP in favour of the Scottish Government and we continue to keep MUP under review.

The Government continues to take a wide range of actions to address problems associated with excessive alcohol consumption. We are already delivering commitments in the Modern Crime Prevention Strategy to improve local intelligence, establish effective partnerships, and equip police and local authorities with the right powers to take effective action. Last January, we launched a second phase of our Local Alcohol Action Area programme in 32 areas in England and Wales. The programme focuses on tackling alcohol related harms through local action and collaboration between industry, police, local authorities, public health and other partners. We have also committed to improve the late night levy in order to increase the use of it, and to raise more funds, by making it more flexible for local areas, fairer to business and more transparent.

The Government is also taking action to reduce alcohol-related health harms. The UK Chief Medical Officers have issued low risk drinking guidelines to provide the public with clear advice about alcohol and its health risks. These recommend that adults do not regularly drink more than 14 units per week. Public Health England's One You Campaign aims to motivate people to take steps to improve their health including reducing alcohol consumption and it continues to work with local authority public health commissioners to ensure that there is a range of effective and accessible alcohol treatment services for dependent drinkers in line with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence guidance.

Thank you once again for taking time to write to me and share your concerns and recommendations.

*Yours sincerely,
Victoria*

Victoria Atkins MP