

Introducing Minimum Unit Pricing to Leicester – A briefing.

What is Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP)?

MUP is suggested as being an effective way of increasing the price of alcoholic drinks by implementing a minimum cost per unit of alcohol. MUP would mean that alcohol could not legally be sold for less than the set level per unit so the more alcohol a drink contains the greater the cost to the consumer.

Public Health England are proposing that the MUP is set at 50p. Although there is potential for all alcoholic beverages to be affected, most impact would be on 'cheap' drinks that have a high alcohol content (such as cider/spirits). This is because other alcohol and drinks sold in pubs are likely to have a higher price per alcoholic unit than the proposed 50p which means the cost will be unaffected.

Why do we need an MUP?

Overconsumption of alcohol is a problem in the UK and alcohol is the most common cause of liver disease in England, which has increased by 400% since 1970. There is an established relationship between cost of alcohol, consumption and harms. The lower the cost of alcohol, the greater the levels of consumption and the greater the number of alcohol related harms. Introducing MUP would invariably raise the cost of low price alcohol such as cider and strong spirits, the drinks favoured by people with severe alcohol problems. Modelling suggests that MUP will lead to less overconsumption of alcohol and less alcohol related harm. It also shows that MUP would impact would be felt most strongly by heavy drinkers and that a 50p MUP would reduce harmful consumption by 5.4% within this group. This is compared with a 1% reduction amongst moderate drinkers.

Is there any evidence that it works?

In some Canadian provinces the government controls alcohol prices using a similar structure to MUP, data from British Columbia show that a MUP reduced consumption and alcohol related hospital admissions. Scotland has recently introduced MUP but it is too soon to assess any impact.

The impact of alcohol related harm in Leicester

There are estimated to be 3,914 dependent drinkers in Leicester who are in need of treatment, this a rate of 15.1 per 1000 the adult population, higher than the national rate of 13.81 per 1000 (Public Health England, 2018). Data on Alcohol admissions and alcohol-related benefit claims further indicate high levels of alcohol –related problems in Leicester which are higher than the national and regional average.

Public Health England estimate that the local spend on adult alcohol is £2,423,000 and the spend on combined drug and alcohol is £5,837,000.

Drugs and alcohol are identified as key drivers of crime and disorder (Home Office Modern Crime Prevention Strategy, 2016), around 40% of all violent crimes are alcohol related, this is almost 500,000 violent incidences per year. Drug and alcohol misuse are related to other issues such as child protection, impaired driving, anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse. In terms of alcohol

violence and disorder in the night time economy are largely the result of binge drinking. Although some people involved are dependent drinkers this does not apply to all.

Leicester has high levels of alcohol specific mortality; overall we have the 33rd worst rate in England (2014-16); the situation is particularly bad for males where Leicester has the 18th worst rate (24.2 per 100,000 compared to 14.2 in England.)

What is currently happening in Leicester?

Licensing

Licensing authorities identify and take action against premises selling alcohol that fail under-age purchase tests by revoking licences or imposing conditions on the ABV of some alcoholic drinks. However, this action is reactive as it takes place after a breach of licensing conditions has occurred and the authority to gather evidence to prove that this is the case.

It is a mandatory condition of all licensed premises 'that no alcohol is sold or supplied for consumption on or off the premises for a price which is less than the permitted price'. The legislation explains how to calculate the permitted price, which is a complex formula and the permitted price is usually low.

Public Space Protection Orders

The public space protection order came into force in December 2017 for 3 years. The order gives the police the power to request that people drinking in public places; stop drinking alcohol and surrender any alcohol when asked to. Failure to comply with these requests can result in fines of fixed penalty notices.

Treatment Services

There are a range of services for people in Leicester with alcohol issues. The most significant is Turning Point's integrated alcohol and drug service which delivers open access information, advice and treatment across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Last year 337 people were referred or self-referred into Turning Point for alcohol or drugs and alcohol addiction or dependency.

Alcohol treatment offers opportunities for adults to stabilise, reduce and achieve abstinence from alcohol. Evidence shows that getting dependent drinkers into treatment programs reduces levels of offending. These benefits are probably less likely for binge drinkers

There are also more tailored services for specific groups-'No. 5' (Hill Street) run by Inclusion health care that delivers the 'Recovery hub' for street drinkers and a specialist Housing related support programme for those in the early stages of recovery run by Home group. Access to inpatient detox and residential rehab programmes outside Leicester is also available. The majority of referrals into these alcohol only service are from self, family and friends (39% against a benchmark of 56%) and then health services and social care (37% against 26% benchmark). (Public Health England, 2018). The majority of referrals into the alcohol only service are new (no previous journeys) making up about 42% (2016-2017), 22% had been referred into services for the second time and 35% had been in services up to 4 times previously. (Public Health England, 2018).

Anticipated impact of introducing MUP

Introducing MUP will support the actions that are currently undertaken and further reduce harmful drinking levels. Owing to their nature action on licensing and PSPO's are reactive actions, happening at the same time or after the drinking takes place. Likewise although the treatment options are successful in reducing alcohol related crime, the majority of people self-refer into these services. Before self-referring people have to be aware that they need help with their drinking and be willing to seek out and accept the help. The emphasis in the current set up is on the person to be proactive.

Introducing MUP will have a direct impact 'problem drinkers' who tend to purchase inexpensive drinks with a high alcoholic content. Moderate drinkers are unlikely to be affected by MUP as the drinks they favour will already be priced above the 50p MUP suggested. Likewise drinks purchased in bars and restaurants are likely to be unaffected as they will already have a unit price that exceeds the proposed 50p increase.