

To: SOCIAL WORK COMMITTEE		Subject: CONSULTATION PAPER ON PLAN FOR ACTION ON ALCOHOL MISUSE
From: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK		
Date: 23 August 2001	Ref: JD/GMcI/MW	

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT / INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. To advise the Social Work Committee of a consultation paper issued by the Scottish Executive on the Plan for Action on Alcohol Misuse and to seek homologation of the Council's response, which is attached as an appendix to this report. A copy of the consultation paper has been placed in the Member's Library.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. The Scottish Executive are planning to develop a shared national Plan for Action on Alcohol Misuse. As part of the process the Executive launched an extended consultation exercise to find out:
- What concerns organisations and individuals have about drinking in Scotland
 - Views about what needs to be done by all concerned
 - What action organisations can contribute as part of an agreed Plan for Action
- 2.2. The Director of Social Work was requested by the Chief Executive to co-ordinate the Council's response to the consultation exercise which had to be submitted by the Scottish Executive by 29 June 2001.

3. PROPOSALS / CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1. The consultation document details the growing problems caused by alcohol misuse and sought answers to a series of questions relating to:
- the definition of alcohol misuse
 - patterns and trends
 - priority groups whose level of drinking needed to be reduced
 - objectives and activities for tackling alcohol misuse
 - possible changes to the law
 - gaps in services
 - tackling gaps in services.

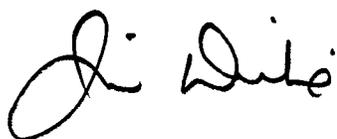
- 3.2. A number of Council Departments provided comments on the consultation paper, which assisted the Director of Social Work to formulate his response on behalf of the Council
- 3.3. In responding to the consultation document the opportunity was taken to highlight a number of relevant issues, in particular, the need for more investment in alcohol misuse services, improved education for the public particularly children, on the effects of alcohol misuse and a recognition that people who are socially excluded may use alcohol as a means of masking the problems which they experience.

4. FINANCIAL / PERSONNEL / LEGAL / POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. At this stage in the process there are no policy or legal implications which need to be addressed by the Council. However, once the Plan for Action on Alcohol Misuse is finalised, a report will be prepared for submission to Committee detailing what steps are required in order to comply with the plan.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1. Committee is requested to
- i) homologate the response submitted by the Director of Social Work on behalf of the Council
 - ii) on production of the Plan for Action on Alcohol Misuse, request the Director of Social Work to bring forward a further report, detailing the response required by the Council
 - iii) otherwise note the contents of the report.



Jim Dickie
Director of Social Work
1 August 2001

For further information on this report please contact George McNally, Manager of Social Work Strategy (TEL: 01698 332063)

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APPENDIX 1

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*Director of Social Work
Jim Dickie*

Ms J McLeod
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Dear Ms McLeod

Consultation Paper on Plan For Action on Alcohol Misuse

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the above paper on behalf of North Lanarkshire Council. For ease of reference I shall respond to the questions in chronological order:

Question 1 How Should We Define Alcohol Misuse

I believe its important to have a nationally agreed definition of alcohol misuse, one which is recognised not only by statutory agencies but also the general public. I would suggest a possible definition:-

“The consumption of alcohol at a level which can cause damage to the individuals health and well-being; can cause the individual to act in a manner which endangers the lives and safety of other people in the community, or prevents the wider community from enjoying a peaceful environment.”

Question 2 What Concerns You Most About Current Patterns and Trends in Drinking in Scotland

There are many concerns relating to patterns and trends. The major area of concern I believe is the developing “drink culture”.

Drinking alcohol appears to be a growing and major feature at events associated with entertainment and leisure. There does not appear to be a common sense approach to the consumption of alcohol, and there appear to be growing problems with underage drinking, damage to health, links to crime and violence, with consequent costs to communities and the public purse.

The licensing Authority have concerns about the availability of alcohol to the under 18's. It is acknowledged that responsible licensees take all practical steps to prevent the sale of alcohol to under age persons, however there are many and varied ways in which they can access alcohol, and it should be a prime consideration of any action plan to address this problem.

Question 3 **Are There Any Priority Groups or Individuals Whose Drinking We Should Try To Influence and Plan For Action**

Clearly we have to educate the younger members of society on the consequences of alcohol misuse. This task must, of necessity, be undertaken in our schools, beginning at primary level. However, there is also a requirement to educate those parents whose actions and lifestyles are poor and dangerous examples which could be followed by their children.

Question 4 **What Specific Objectives and Activities Designed To Achieve These, Would You Like to See In The National Plan For Action**

I would support all of the examples which are given in the consultation paper. However, there are a number of other practical steps which may assist in reducing the level of alcohol consumption.

- (1) I would suggest that alcohol is in many instances, used as a means of escaping from reality. People who are socially excluded because of factors such as poverty, unemployment environment and health will seek solace and refuge that can be experienced through alcohol consumption. It is therefore important that the proposed action plan addresses the issue of social inclusion as it is an important factor in the desired reduction of alcohol misuse.
- (2) To affect patterns of alcohol consumption by individuals or groups and to affect overall levels of consumption, this could be assisted by:-
 - A) Confirmed enforcement of by-laws prohibiting drinking alcohol in public places.
 - B) Abolition or tight control of “happy hours” in licensed premises.
 - C) Greater enforcement of hawking and trafficking.
 - D) Review of telephone and Internet sales of alcohol.
- (3) To reduce misuse of alcohol by people of all ages and the promotion of sensible drinking could be aided by:-
 - A) Abolition or tight control of “happy hours” in licensing premises.
 - B) Compulsory training for all licensees and licensed club management.
- (4) To make sure that existing law relevant to alcohol is enforced properly and consistently. This could be achieved by:-
 - A) Compulsory training for all staff including licensees and licensed club premises.
 - B) Additional funding for Police forces.
 - C) Additional funding for Licensing Board Initiatives.

Question 5 **Would You Like To See Changes In Aspects Of The Law Relevant to Misuse of Alcohol**

The Council would like to see a number of changes to produce a system of licensing more reflective of the modern view of the place of alcohol in Scotland.

- i) The manner and style of drinking in licensed premises has changed significantly since the introduction of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976. It is felt that the strict categorisation of licenses with the consequent restrictions in the way each type can be operated is not conducive to creating facilities suited to modern demands. The Council would wish to see the introduction of a general liquor licence in relation to premises which would impose conditions appropriate to the desired use of the premises and to the element of control or restriction which the Licensing Board would like to see.
- ii) The Council are concerned about the existing provisions to enable a Licensing Board to suspend a licence - 1976 Act Section 31. Particularly there is no power to implement an immediate suspension pending hearing nor is there a power after the hearing to implement a suspension order until an appeal to the courts is finally determined. This can create a situation where the intentions of a Licensing Board can be postponed for many months, years in some cases where higher levels of appeal are taken.
- iii) Some Licensing Boards in Scotland impose mandatory training and re-training on licensees. They do this by virtue of adopting a policy whereby a licensee or applicant for a new licence will not be deemed to be a "fit and proper person" to hold a licence unless a training certificate is produced. The Council would welcome the introduction of a direct statutory requirement to demonstrate appropriate training.
- iv) On a similar theme there is no direct power to require that servers in licensed premises are trained by way of formal, recognised training courses. The Council would welcome a registration system for servers, possibly by way of introducing an additional licensed activity through the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982.
- v) The Council believes that many Councils are hampered in their pro-active initiatives by the funding gap caused by the nationally set levels of fee income which Licensing Boards generate from applications. The Council would surmise that fee income at present fails to cover existing expenditure levels. The Council would therefore welcome either a delegation of fee-setting to local level akin to the provisions of Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 or else a radical re-assessment of application fee levels by the Scottish Executive. It could be mentioned in passing that the licence fee for a large entertainment complex with turnover in excess of six figures is roughly the equivalent of the average fee in Scotland paid by a licensed window cleaner.
- vi) The Council would welcome the ability to control by condition of licence "happy hours" and similar promotions.
- vii) The Council would welcome a review of the system of "remote" off-sales.

Question 6 Of The Objectives You Suggest At Question 4, Which Require Action (Either Singly Or Jointly) By Government Statutory Bodies, Industry, Employers, Communities, Individuals Or Others.

- 1) There needs to be greater recognition that social, economic and environmental circumstances can lead to alcohol misuse. Social Inclusion/Social Justice plans need to take account of the problem and provide appropriate responses and service developments
- 2)
 - A) requires Police enforcement activity with periodic review of public areas by the Council.
 - B) requires primary legislation enforced by Licensing Boards.
 - C) requires Police enforcement activity.
 - D) requires Scottish Executive review with possible primary legislation.
- 3)
 - A) requires primary or local legislation.
 - B) requires Licensing Board regulation and licensed trade co-operation.
 - C) requires licensing Board regulation and licensed trade co-operation.
- 4)
 - A) requires Licensing Board regulation and licensed trade co-operation.
 - B) requires Scottish Executive and/or Council spending commitment.
 - C) requires Scottish Executive and/or Council spending commitment.

Question 7 What Gaps Do You Identify In Action That Is Currently Being Taken

The major gap which currently exists relates to the level of investment which is being made available to counter alcohol misuse. The Scottish Executive have recently made available a £100 million funding package to tackle drug misuse.

Alcohol misuse and its impact on individuals, families, communities and public services, whilst not being ignored, does not appear to have the same priority as drug misuse. This apparent imbalance does nothing to promote the need for greater public concern about the problems of alcohol misuse. There is a need for greater financial investment in services in the field of alcohol misuse.

Question 8 What Can Your Organisation Or Sector Do To Address The Gaps

The addiction services provided by North Lanarkshire Council, Social Work Department are combined drug and alcohol services. Whilst welcoming the allocation of additional drugs rehabilitation monies, care will need to be exercised that the provision of services to people with alcohol misuse problems is not affected by the Department in conjunction with its partners attempts to meet the drug target figures set by the Scottish Executive.

Alcohol misuse is a major cause of deaths and illness. It must have a similar commitment and priority to that of drug misuse services.

Question 9 **What Support Structures Will Be Needed To Deliver The National Plan For Action**

There needs to be real and lasting investment to allow relevant service development.

Bodies such as the local Alcohol Misuse Coordinating Committees need to be reviewed, and their status and position should be enhanced, (for example, their work should be combined with the Drug Action Teams). Both organisations should become fully integrated and drug and alcohol misuse should be treated with equal importance.

There should be awareness raising initiatives aimed at statutory bodies, industry and employers, highlighting alcohol misuse and the role which can be undertaken by the bodies concerned to help tackle this growing problem.

Local strategies should be developed which reflect the priorities of the National Action Plan and targets for reducing levels of alcohol misuse, education, training, treatment and rehabilitation should be established in a similar way to that of drug misuse issues.

Question 10 **What Measures Should Be Taken to Ensure The General Public And Specific Groups Get Information About National Plan For Action When It Is Ready From Your Own Organisation, Or From Others.**

- i) There should be a National publicity campaign to draw attention to the Action Plan and its objectives.
- ii) Most local authorities produce their own Council Newspaper which is delivered to all households in their area. Councils should be requested to publish articles on the plan, which help to inform and educate the public on the dangers of alcohol misuse.
- iii) The Action Plan should attempt to set out the true costs to public services and industries of alcohol misuse. This information should be promoted in the public domain as a means of highlighting the seriousness of the problem.
- iv) The Action Plan should be developed in a manner which facilitates service delivery at a local level. Services should be promoted in more imaginative ways to ensure that the public know where services are located and how they can be accessed.

I trust these comments are helpful to you and they assist in the production of the National Plan, which I await with interest.

Yours sincerely

Jim Dickie
Director of Social Work