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**DURHAM  
COUNTY  
COUNCIL**



13 January, 2003

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Head of Consultation Policy Team  
Strategy Unit  
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Received  
20-1-2003  
Jing.

*Dear Mr. Greening,*  
**National Alcohol Strategy**

This Authority at its Cabinet meeting on 9 January considered the consultation document. In doing so they were briefed by a report from the Drugs, Substance and Alcohol Working Group that comprises officers from all departments and is chaired by myself as the lead corporate officer. The relevant Cabinet member with a brief for strong and safe communities is also a member.

The discussion at Cabinet was lengthy and lively. A range of comments in bullet point form are attached to this letter for your information, but the key strategic points agreed are as follows.

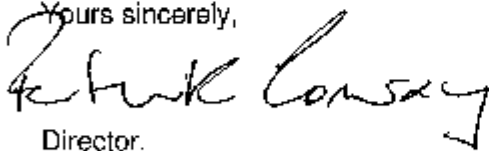
- a) An holistic approach to drugs, substance and alcohol misuse needs to be adopted. Durham County Council, in establishing the Working Group mentioned earlier in the letter, has recognised inter relationships between a range of departments, that are essential if solutions and a deliverable action plan, are to be produced. Consequently, services engaged in leisure and culture, economic development, consumer protection and trading standards, as well as education, social services and treatment agencies, are critical to this approach.
- b) Therefore action plans should be co-ordinated, for alcohol misuse is arguably responsible for considerable levels of social and family dislocation, and is inextricably linked to substance and drugs misuse.
- c) The Strategy suggests a cross cutting approach. However, we would wish to see a greater input to the action plan preparation from certain departments of state – DTI, DFES, DCMS. As the draft notes, health issues are frequently the symptom and not the cause.
- d) Local Authorities are well placed, because of their broad service responsibilities to develop actions consistent with broad strategies. They are key to Drug Action Teams and Crime Reduction Partnerships and lead on a range of local initiatives. Durham County Council has been investigating, in recent months, the 'carrier bag culture', particularly among young people whereby alcohol, often bootlegged, is the critical determinant in anti social behaviour and health problems.



- e) The draft recognises cultural and behavioural issues. Durham County Council believes these are fundamental to understanding the distinctive British approach to drink. It would be helpful to learn further from other cultures, particularly our European neighbours, about this issue.
- f) There has to be an honest assessment about contradictory approaches to alcohol consumption. On the one hand there is concern about health, anti-social behaviour and crime. Equally the Exchequer benefits from increasing tax revenue and economic regeneration policies almost always have a leisure dimension that invariably includes the 'party city' approach to recreation.
- g) In the same way that cigarette marketing is regulated, it is considered alcohol advertising should be reviewed, particularly that targeted at young people. Also, sponsorship deals for high profile sporting events and designer clothing requires examination.
- h) Changes in licensing laws could materially assist in combating binge drinking during a short period. However, the Council believes licensing authorities are in a position to influence local practice, particularly in relation to pricing policies (happy hours, special offers, two for the price of one), and promotional activities. Clearly, the low cost of alcohol per unit, aggressively promoted by drinking establishments, encourages consumption. It is considered local authorities should be actively encouraged to undertake this proactive approach.
- i) Central to any successful strategy will be the Alcohol industry itself. Whilst being a major part of the economy, the sector nonetheless has social and moral responsibilities. Therefore representation of the industry must be centrally involved in the next stage of strategy preparation.
- j) Inevitably, resources will be required. As local authorities, through the various services provided, are central to delivering any strategy, it is important ODPM play their part, and this work is reflected in future FSS settlements for local government.

I trust these comments will be helpful and if I can be of further assistance, please advise.

Yours sincerely,

  
Director.

- It is important that Performance Management targets are introduced for Alcohol Treatment services. Targets are only in place for Drugs Treatment services at the moment.
- Alcohol industry should be involved in addressing the problem of marketing, licensing, pricing etc of the product.
- There should be a focus on providing environments/ facilities/activities for young people which do not involve alcohol.
- Address the aggressive marketing of young people; media advertising; and sponsorship deals with high profile sports and designer clothing.
- There is a need to address the contradiction of maintaining tax revenue from alcohol versus addressing alcohol misuse problems.
- Excessive taxation results in bootlegging which increases supply, especially to young people. The recent relaxation on import of alcohol has also increased supply.
- Why do people drink excessively? What are the social and peer group factors? These questions need to be considered before you can propose solutions.
- There is a passing mention of international experience, but learning about how other cultures have avoided the problem in the first place or dealt with it, and the formal research arising from these experiences needs to be given more prominence.
- There is no mention of the responsibility of employers, especially in raising awareness of alcohol related issues.
- There is only a passing reference to the links with domestic violence. This needs to be strengthened.
- The links with related strategies should be more prescriptive.
- The area of prevention in relation to young people is neglected e.g. are drinking habits susceptible to change if alternative 'normalising' agents are put in place as an alternative attraction.
- The consultation does not seem to have engaged other government departments as full partners, although clearly there are links to the work of DfES, DfT and DCMS, which have key roles in this through education, transport, the media, and libraries as mediated information resources.