

**Response to ‘National Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy’ by Health
Task and Finish Group of the Housing, Social Care and Health
Overview and Scrutiny Board, Solihull Metropolitan Borough
Council**

Solihull broadly welcomes this consultation as a prelude to a national strategy to reduce the harmful impact of alcohol in our society and on our communities and citizens.

It is overdue because this issue requires ‘joined up’ thinking and working across Government departments, statutory and voluntary agencies. We would urge serious consideration of the establishment of a national Director/champion/Tsar to enable and drive this connectivity.

Experience from a related set of issues, namely substance misuse (‘Drugs’), suggests that the approach will require identifiable resources for prevention and treatment initiatives. The research evidence for the proposed structured programmes should be made available and accessible to local authorities, NHS and local residents. This evidence

should clarify which patterns of alcohol use are harmful and amenable to change. It also should clarify the ‘trigger points’ alerting the individual, family and professionals to the change from ‘heavy’ to ‘problematic’ drinking.

We are concerned about the influence of the licensing laws and their application on the patterns of drinking and subsequent harm. Local authorities have considerable experience in the application of licensing regulations in a locally responsive and responsible way. Research evidence concerning the impact of changes in law and arrangements should be made available, especially the experience of Scotland, in order that an appropriate licensing framework may be adopted.

It is clear that the strategy should do more than ‘raise awareness’ of the harmful impacts of alcohol use in terms of anti-social behaviour, domestic violence and ill health with consequent NHS costs. It must identify the triggers and thresholds of harmful effects of using alcohol and the effective individual and social interventions which should be available.

We therefore support the urgent development of this strategy and look forward to an opportunity to test it out in our communities.

DR. DENNIS WILKES MRCGP, MFPHM

JOINT DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

SOLIHULL PCT AND MBC

On behalf of the Health Task and Finish Group of the Housing, Social Care, and Health Overview and Scrutiny Board