

**“ALCOHOL – MEETING OUR RESPONSIBILITIES,
MAKING A DIFFERENCE”**

BUSINESS DESIGN CENTRE, LONDON, 6 FEBRUARY

Rt Hon Jacqui Smith MP, Home Secretary

1 / Introduction

Good morning. I am delighted that so many of you could join me here today.

I would like to start by thanking Jan Hart from Islington Council and Chief Inspector Robert Strong, who have been leading the charge locally in the battle against alcohol-related crime. And thanks also to everyone in the licensed trade who have been working to make change happen on the ground.

Your work is really making a difference. Seeing the impact you are having is an example to us all, and it gives me real confidence that together we can do more to tackle the harm caused by alcohol misuse.

Today, I want to address the damage that alcohol misuse can do – to individuals, to the people around them, and to the communities they live in.

I want to set out my views on the action that’s being taken – across government and industry – to tackle alcohol harms, and the progress that we have made so far.

And I want to go further – and stress my belief that it is now time to do more, together, to build on the good work that is already being done.

The Government has set out a clear and unambiguous message on the harm caused by alcohol. We know the role alcohol plays in violent assaults. We see the effects of drink-fuelled behaviour on crime and anti-social behaviour.

And we understand that communities simply do not want to have to put up with it. So we have made it our priority to deliver real and tangible reductions in the harm that alcohol causes:

- less alcohol-related violence;
- fewer people experiencing drunkenness and rowdiness in their area;
- fewer admitted to hospital for acute alcohol-related illnesses; and
- fewer children drinking alcohol.

These aims have been signed up to right across government departments. They are ambitious, and we expect to be held to them.

To meet them will require nothing less than a significant shift in culture – not just in the way we develop the partnership between government, industry, local government and policing, but also in the way we approach alcohol as a society.

Of course, governments can set targets – and governments can even meet them! But making progress isn't the preserve of government alone.

It takes all of the partners in this room – central and local government, working with frontline practitioners and the drinks and retail industries, both on- and off-trade – to accept responsibility for helping to make a difference.

I know that's a view held by many here today. We all have to feel that personal responsibility for tackling alcohol harm, and that sense of personal responsibility should lead us to a shared purpose.

It's not just a question of tough enforcement or effective intervention; not just a question of responsible retailing or advertising.

Important as each of these aspects are, they will only truly make a difference if we work together to identify and address the dangers of problem drinking.

2 / The problematic minority

As adults, many of us enjoy a drink. The vast majority of us do so without hurting ourselves or others, without disrupting the people and communities around us.

My focus is squarely on the serious harm that alcohol misuse can cause – on that problematic minority of drinkers who cause the violence, the disorder and the disruption.

Nearly half of all violence in this country is associated with alcohol. In 46% of all violent assaults, the victim believed the offender to be under the influence. Just over a quarter of people think that drunk and rowdy behaviour is a problem in their area.

At its most extreme, we have seen the case of Gary Newlove. A tragic and needless death, which has brought into sharp focus how serious the consequences of alcohol misuse can be.

And it has raised once more concerns about the apparent ease with which young people can get their hands on alcohol – concerns which I share.

There are three distinct groups I am determined to tackle – children drinking in public; binge drinkers; and those who sell alcohol irresponsibly.

2a / Underage drinking

Overall, as our National Alcohol Strategy has found, younger people are drinking less.¹ But those who are drinking, are drinking more and they are doing so more often.

There is alcohol education in schools, but we need to make sure this is as effective as possible in alerting children to the dangers of drinking.

We have now reached a worrying tipping point – where more 13 year olds have drunk alcohol than have not.

This is clearly a cause for concern.

Last autumn, we ran a half-term holiday campaign to confiscate alcohol for under-18s drinking in public places. Over the course of 4 weeks in just 23 local areas, nearly 3,700 litres of alcohol were confiscated – that's the equivalent of about 6,500 pints.

We are now extending this approach, and during the next half-term holiday there will be a new campaign, involving 175 police Basic Command Units across the country.

¹ National Alcohol Strategy, p18

It is time to send the message that it is no longer acceptable for children to drink in public places. Their alcohol will be confiscated.

If the current laws on confiscation from underage drinkers prove inadequate, I will consider the case for new legislation to make it clear that we do not want to see children drinking in public.

If it's illegal for under-18s to buy alcohol, then they shouldn't have it in public either. If necessary, I will change the law to make it clear we won't tolerate them drinking in public.

I want police officers to be able to use discretion when it comes to confiscation, and not be prevented from doing so by having to prove they have reasonable suspicion that children are about to consume.

No-one would look at a group of kids drinking in public and say that that was right and that it shouldn't be stopped – not only for the good of the children themselves, but also for the good of the community.

This is not about criminalising young people unnecessarily – that could be wholly counter-productive. But it is about taking action where there is a problem.

When I talk of taking personal responsibility, nearly half of the alcohol obtained by young people appears to come from the family home. It's clear that parents have to hear the message as well.

The idea that you can hand your kids a six-pack of lager and tell them to disappear off for the evening – with no thought to the consequences – frankly baffles me.

We know that poor parenting is a risk factor in juvenile anti-social and criminal behaviour. We also know that positive parenting can protect children and young people and prevent them from being involved in such behaviour.

We will support parents who find it difficult to fulfil their responsibilities. But where they are unwilling or unable to fulfil their parental responsibilities, others should not have to suffer

If poor parenting is identified as an issue when alcohol is confiscated from underage drinkers, I want to see a greater use of Parenting Contracts.

If there is more we can do to strengthen these procedures, and if we can do more to bring home to parents the implications of giving children drink straight from the fridge or the cupboard, I want to see that happen.

2b / Binge drinking

As well as enforcement, government has a role in making it very clear to society that irresponsible and violent behaviour is simply not acceptable.

And as Home Secretary, I'm not prepared to see this type of behaviour continue. Being drunk and incapable is not an excuse for the sort of things the police have to deal with at the end of the night.

The second group I want to address today is young binge drinkers, the 18-24 year olds whose capacity for alcohol consumption seems to be matched in extreme cases only by an appetite for destruction.

I'm in no doubt that most of this age group, like the rest of the adult population, know how to enjoy alcohol sensibly.

But I also know that we must do more to tackle the all-too-audible minority who start by binge drinking on a night out, and end by fighting in the street, damaging property, disrupting the peace of our neighbourhoods and taking for granted the time and resources of the police, ambulance and hospital services.

This group is far more likely than any other to be involved in crime. Despite making up only 6% of the sample in a recent Home Office survey, they accounted for a third of all offences and a quarter of all violent offences.

Later this year we'll run a multi-million pound national campaign that will take our current work to a whole new level. It will set out, in no uncertain terms, the dangers of with binge drinking, and raise awareness on recommended units of intake and the dangers of regularly exceeding those levels.

When the campaign starts, no-one will be in any doubt that we are committed to tackling the culture of binge drinking.

2c / Irresponsible retailers

I've so far focussed on the young – on underage drinkers and on those who are old enough to know better.

The third group I want to mention are those who sell alcohol irresponsibly – to young drinkers and others. Alcohol retailers, pubs and clubs should manage their establishments safely, and deal with their customers in a responsible way.

I know how much more retail businesses are now doing to stop underage sales. But the case for strong enforcement powers is clear – more than 3000 individuals were fined for selling alcohol to under-18s in 2006, and nearly 1200 offenders were taken to court for underage sales offences.

In 2005/6, nearly a fifth of all violent incidents took place in or around pubs and clubs. Nearly half of all violent crime takes place at the weekend, with the majority of it occurring between midnight and 6am.

We know this can be tackled – and, from evidence of great work happening across the country, we also know how to do it.

- The Citysafe scheme in Liverpool is helping pubs and clubs to replace glasses with plastic alternatives, and has introduced a radio-link so they can share information about potential problems. It's also using handheld metal detectors to discourage the carrying of knives or other offensive weapons.

Citysafe is a working example of businesses taking their responsibilities seriously, and working in partnership to make a difference. But there are many others.

- In Cambridgeshire, the 'Think 21' campaign run by Trading Standards and the police with local retailers is working with parents and young people to raise awareness of alcohol harm – and it's led to a significant reduction in underage sales.
- In the South East, local A&Es and police are now making the links between where people are drinking too much and where they get injured, meaning they are able to take action against problem premises.

For local authorities, of course, the Licensing Act is a powerful tool to get retailers to literally put their houses in order.

- The last underage sales campaign caught 22 premises selling alcohol to under-18s three times. They face a £10,000 fine, a 3 month ban on sales, and a review of their licences. A further 224 were caught twice, and could now face licence review.
- In Birmingham, the police and council worked together to restrict the opening hours of a city centre nightclub associated with 70 incidents of crime and disorder.
- And in Brighton, police and Trading Standards used the new review power to tackle persistent underage sales by supermarkets and shops, resulting in the suspension of some licences and better training for staff all round.

In two months' time, all CDRPs across the country must have a local alcohol action plan in place. We want them to take the best examples of what's already working, learn from them – and adopt and adapt them to meet their own local challenges. So we're today publishing the alcohol strategy toolkit to help them do just that.

Likewise, the police and others working on the frontline to keep our streets and communities safe need to know they have the right tools to tackle the problem.

Today I am writing to every Chief Constable and local authority Chief Executive to set out the full range of powers available to them to move people along, to stop drinking in areas where it's been a problem, and to close down dodgy premises.

And alongside this guidance to encourage better partnership, the time is right to redouble our efforts on alcohol arrest referrals, with new funding to make sure that people arrested for alcohol-related offences face up to the consequences of their actions and receive help to deal with the problems that drinking can cause.

Current arrest referral projects are showing how this approach can dramatically cut re-offending – by as much as 50% in Gloucester in the year after interventions started to take place.

Over the coming year we will build on the potential of the current projects, with up to 10 more projects across the country.

We make a difference by working together – police and local councils, trading standards and retailers, government ministers and parents. But as I said in my opening remarks, enforcement is only one part of the picture.

To be truly effective, we need to work in partnership, with a renewed sense of purpose.

3 / Alcohol industry

The alcohol industry has shown itself ready to begin that task. It has taken important first steps since the Government launched its first alcohol strategy in 2004.

Many of you here today represent companies who are working with us incredibly hard. I am clear that you are key partners in our joint efforts.

Many bottles are now carrying information on the number of units, so that people can better work out how much they are drinking.

The industry's Drinkaware Trust has been developed. Its consumer website receives more than 85,000 visits a month and is referenced on most alcohol advertising, labelling and point of sale promotions.

I've already mentioned the success of Think 21, but there are other initiatives – including Best Bar None, Pubwatch and Challenge 21 – that deserve our welcome and encouragement.

These are all signs of how the industry is doing more than simply facing up to its responsibilities. It is helping, genuinely, to lead the way on problem drinking and on the problems drinking causes.

We have also seen all parts of the industry work together to develop a set of Social Responsibility standards. These standards are there to assist producers and retailers to promote the broader social responsibilities that are key to responsible sales and the responsible enjoyment of alcohol.

The standards set out the precautions retailers need to take to prevent underage sales and to clearly describe the alcoholic nature of their products.

But as research by Alcohol Concern has found, there are still too many licensed premises that aren't managed responsibly. It can't be right that you can still find promotions for 50p shots until midnight or 'all you can drink for a tenner' nights. And people are increasingly asking whether the approach to alcohol sales, marketing and promotions is as responsible as it should be.

I want to continue working in partnership with industry. I want to work with them to stop sales to the underage and to take a long, hard look at how they promote alcohol, particularly to the young.

It's in everyone's interest for a licensed premises to be run well, and for it to work with other partners to reduce the risks to the wider community of irresponsible drinking.

So I want to know if industry should be doing more, and I am now asking KPMG to review industry practice to test how well the standards agreed by the industry are being met by the industry.

I have asked the review to report in March. If it finds that more needs to be done to encourage or compel action, or that the standards need to be strengthened, then I am prepared to act to ensure this happens – and at this stage I am not ruling out the possibility of statutory regulation.

There are clear and growing signs that drinks companies are taking their responsibilities more seriously.

Last year, Diageo, one of the UK's largest producers, ran a full-scale advertising campaign aimed at young men and women with a very simple message – everyone has a choice on a night out.

This morning, the company is publishing an evaluation of the impact of the campaign – showing not just a high public recognition of the campaign, but a clear understanding of its messages. In fact, 3 out of 5 people interviewed said they were more likely to consider drinking responsibly as a result.

Industry attitudes are shifting, and I've no doubt that they can help to shift consumers' attitudes too. Just as Diageo has a Global Brand Director for Guinness, it now has a Global Brand Director for Attitudes to Alcohol. That's an emphasis and focus that I want to see more of across the industry.

Let's be clear – I'm all for companies using their marketing and industry expertise to get the message across and raise awareness of the need to drink responsibly. That's the point of partnership, and why partnership works.

5 / Next steps

Today I have set out my views on how we can all do more to tackle the problems associated with irresponsible attitudes to alcohol.

I do so in full recognition of the good work happening across the country and the meaningful progress that many in the industry have already made.

We know we can change what happens on our streets – local partnerships have shown that.

We know what we expect of pubs and clubs, and shops and supermarkets – and where we need to do more.

I am now asking every area and every retailer to learn from the best and make their alcohol approaches better. And I am asking individuals to think carefully about their own attitudes to alcohol as well.

There remains more work for government to do – not only to meet its ambitious targets to reduce alcohol harms over the next 3 years, but also in the immediate future.

The review of the Licensing Act is due to be published later this month, and among the issues it will look at is the impact of the Act on crime and disorder. Without pre-empting the findings of the review, I do not expect the impact of changes to licensing hours on crime and disorder to have been as dramatic as some have suggested.

We are also continuing to investigate the way in which retailers offer and advertise cheap alcohol. The Department of Health is currently reviewing whether there is a direct relationship between the price of alcohol, the way it is promoted and advertised, and alcohol harms. When it reports later this year, it will be important to consider our course of action.

In the meantime, I am sure that the will is there to do more, and to step up our work to limit alcohol harms. I look forward to making more progress, more quickly, in the months ahead.

Thank you.

[3200 words]