

Breaking

Doctors can withdraw life support from baby Charlie Gard against his parents' wishes, a High Court judge rules

UK should follow minimum alcohol price, say Lords

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Minimum unit pricing for alcohol should be rolled out across the UK if Scotland's scheme is successful, a Lords committee says.

The 50p per unit minimum **was approved by MSPs in 2012**, but has faced legal challenges from the drinks industry.

The committee on the Licensing Act 2003 also called for an overhaul of local licensing panels after hearing of "scandalous misuse" of powers.

Chair Baroness McIntosh of Pickering called the act "fundamentally flawed".

- **Health advisers back minimum alcohol price**
- **Why does Scotland still not have minimum pricing?**

The Lords Select Committee said that if minimum pricing was shown to cut down on excessive drinking, it needed to be adopted nationwide.

But while the government waited for legal challenges to conclude, there were other areas of the act that could be addressed, such as abolishing local authority licensing committees and giving the powers to planning committees.

"The [Lords select] committee was shocked by some of the evidence it received on hearings before licensing committees," said Baroness McIntosh.

"Their decisions have been described as 'something of a lottery', 'lacking formality', and 'indifferent', with some 'scandalous misuses of the powers of elected local councillors'."

Derbyshire Police told peers that the system had become "too political", with councils "frightened of making a tough decision" in case of appeals by big drinks companies.

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But a spokesman for licensing at the Local Government Association said scrapping the panels would be "unnecessary and ill-advised".

Chris Pillai added: "Figures from 2016 show that of the more than 21,000 licence applications made to council licensing committees, less than 1% were challenged.

"This reflects the fairness and sound basis licensing committees are using to make their decisions."

He agreed with the peers that planning and licensing could work more closely within local authorities, but said the proposed changes would "not tackle current flaws in the Licensing Act" and failed to take into account pressures on the planning system.

Support for nightlife

The select committee's report also warned that the act was not working in regulating late night openings.

"Pubs, clubs and live music venues are a vital part of our cultural identity," added Baroness McIntosh. "Any decline in our cities' world-famous nightlife ought to be prevented and the businesses supported.

"But the night time economy needs regulating; even in these areas of cities, residents have their rights. The current systems are not being used because they do not work."

The report also called for the act to be implemented at airports and for establishments to provide a disabled access statement when applying for a licence.