

Peers look to minimum unit alcohol pricing effect

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[Peers are looking to how the policy works in Scotland](#)

Minimum unit pricing for alcohol should be introduced across the UK if it proves a success in Scotland, a Lords committee has urged.

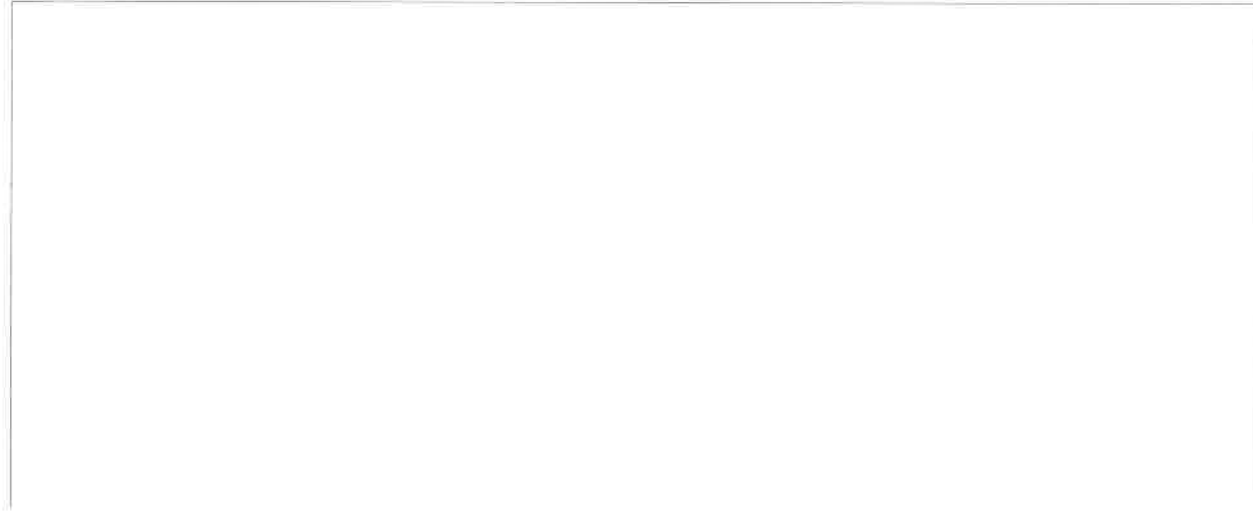
If the decision of the Holyrood parliament to introduce a 50p base level for alcohol units survives legal challenges, and is shown to be effective in cutting down excessive drinking, it needs to be rolled out nationwide, the Lords Select Committee on the Licensing Act 2003 has stated.

Peers have also called for a major overhaul of how licensing decisions are made after hearing evidence that some councillors were guilty of a "scandalous misuse" of their powers.

The committee called for the Licensing Act to be redrawn in order to abolish local authority licensing committees, and hand their role to planning watchdogs at councils instead.

Committee chairwoman Baroness McIntosh of Pickering, said: "The Act is fundamentally flawed and needs a major overhaul.

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"It was a mistake and a missed opportunity to set up new licensing committees when the planning system was already available to regulate the use of land for many different purposes.

"The planning system is well suited to dealing with licensing applications and appeals, and the interests of residents are always taken into account.

"The Committee was shocked by some of the evidence it received on hearings before licensing committees.

"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'."

Referring to evidence that councillors had refused to listen to arguments at hearings, or to stand down when family members were involved in the situation, the report stated: "These are scandalous misuses of the powers of elected local councillors, and they are not the only ones we were told of.

"The Derbyshire Police wrote: '...it has become too political with councils being frightened of making a tough decision for fear of an appeal against them by big brewing companies, etc. On two occasions I have had councillors state that they have agreed with the police, however, sided with the pub company for fear of an appeal.'"

The Lords committee said: "The evidence received against local authority licensing committees was damning and the committee was extremely concerned by what it heard.

"Planning committees are much more effective, reliable and well-equipped to make licensing decisions."

Lady McIntosh also called for relevant legislation to apply at airports, and warned regulations covering late night opening do not work.

"We cannot understand why the Government has decided not to apply the Act to sales at airports. This can lead to dangerous situations, and must be changed.

"Pubs, clubs and live music venues are a vital part of our cultural identity. 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 establishments to provide a disabled access statement when applying for a licence.

Local Government Association licensing spokesman, Chris Pillai, described the recommendation to scrap council licensing committees as "unnecessary and ill-advised".

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

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

"It will always be possible in any system to pull out examples where things haven't worked as well as they should have, and we agree that there is scope for the planning and licensing frameworks to link together more closely.

"However, putting planning committees in charge of licensing decisions will not tackle current flaws in the Licensing Act, and completely fails to take account of the pressures the planning system is also under."

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