



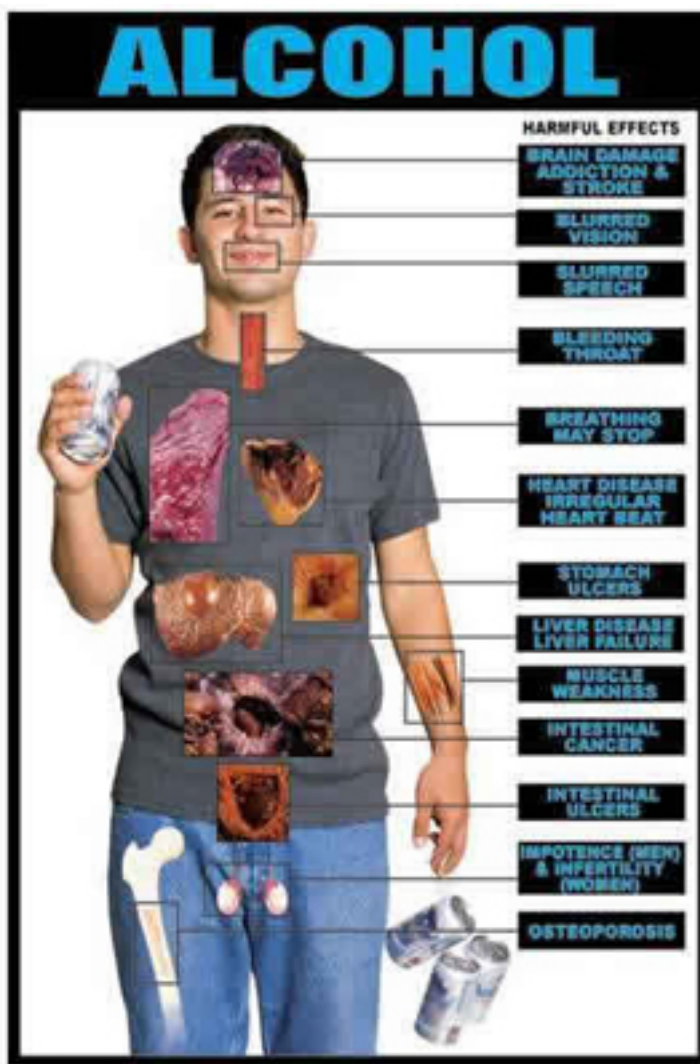
[Alcohol pricing and regulation abuse](#)

Plans for minimum alcohol prices in Greater Manchester have been tagged as pioneering, but [Mark Iddon](#) argues they are based on illiberal instincts rather than evidence.

The proposal to introduce minimum pricing for alcohol in Greater Manchester is to be discussed at a meeting of the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities (AGMA) on Friday 13th August (Salford Advertiser, 5th August 2010). The suggested pricing at present is 50p per unit which would mean drinkers paying at least £4.50 for a bottle of wine, £6.00 for a six-pack of lager and £14.00 for a 700ml bottle of whiskey (Mail Online, 3rd August 2010).

If the proposals, which are backed by many councillors, are approved, then AGMA will meet with the Police with a view to the introduction of a new by-law. Greater Manchester Police Chief Constable Peter Fahy has previously called for more restrictions on alcohol pricing. The proposal would need to be formally supported by the Police in order to be enforced through a by-law. The Government are presently understood to have ruled out the enforcement of minimum alcohol pricing through a national law, but are supporting some local initiatives. Many practicalities are yet to be resolved as to how the laws could be enforced with regard to price checking and the effects on other brand pricing. A by-law would operate within the area boundaries of the AGMA councils which would result in price discrepancies along the boundary areas and the possibility of buying in bulk from outside the council boundary. One councillor has stated that they hope that other councils will follow if they take the lead.

The practicalities of introducing a by-law to facilitate minimum pricing for alcohol being sold in a local geographical area will be very interesting to see laid out. At what point does the price of alcohol being sold get evaluated? At wholesale sources where many business people buy their alcohol for example as bought for personal consumption at below minimum pricing levels? And what of cheap alcohol bought below minimum prices at wholesale sources and served free along with buffet food? As details like these are worked out, the contempt for the ordinary consumer, or citizen, is exposed in all its fullness and myopic inconsistency. The behaviours of persistent or heavy drinkers of medium priced wines or quality beers are not affected by these plans, but the instinct of the 'we know what's best for you' behaviour police will only be encouraged to go further if allowed to.



The stated intention of the proposal is said to deal with problems of drink fuelled disorder and health problems, and is backed by the Government's former chief medical officer, Liam Donaldson along with the NHS supported campaign group "Our Life". A Home Office Online Report 08/03, 'Alcohol-related crime and disorder data: guidance for local partnerships', does find that there is a connection between alcohol and crime and is currently advising of the need to collect data to make this assertion. The report states the presumed cost to the tax payer, of policing and medical care, which may be incurred as a result of 'irresponsible drinking'. However, there is still no evidence that any disorder in the streets is actually a result of low priced alcohol from off licence shops and supermarket promotions. Also, there are longstanding laws which prohibit the sale of alcohol to under 18's and some supermarkets extend this by asking anybody who does not look over 25 for verification of their age under their Corporate Responsibility Policy.

Critics of the proposals have suggested that this is just another tax to punish the majority for the misdemeanours of the few. The problem is actually more profound than that as the proposals give rise to fear by perpetuating myths of a broken and out of control society along with the presumption that officialdom has the right to influence people's behaviour because they know best.

The coercive approach to dealing with social issues in this way avoids people being encouraged into behaving responsibly through more general social interaction, and how to deal with the effects of alcohol specifically. Also, the most effective way in which people will be drawn away from nihilistic and hedonistic practices, is by creating a society where maximising human creative potential is encouraged and able to be realised, and surely these measures reduce that vision and emphasis on personal control?

This is truly misguided legislation proposed by people who are anxious to be seen to be responding to issues by asserting their authority on to the market place. There is no compelling evidence that there will be less disorder on the streets, but further confirmation of our Councillor's contempt for ordinary people in their treating us all like wayward adolescents.

the Manchester Salon welcomes other views for publication to help develop opinions for the September 22nd discussion entitled '[Calling time on choice: minimum pricing of alcohol](#)'