

6693

The Rt Hon David Willetts MP
Minister for Universities and
Science

The Rt Hon Nick Clegg MP
Chair of the Home Affairs Committee
70 Whitehall
London SW1A 2AS

19 March 2012

Dear Nick,

ALCOHOL STRATEGY

Theresa May's letter of 14 March sought clearance to publish a cross-Government Alcohol Strategy.

We recognise the importance of tackling the crime and social disorder related to certain patterns of alcohol consumption and equally the health harms associated with excess alcohol consumption. As a Government, we have already demonstrated a firm intention to tackle these problems in a variety of ways. For example, we have tightened up the Licensing Act in areas where we thought it necessary. We have also taken a raft of new powers which the Home Office will be implementing in April and in October this year, including measures such as the 'late night levy' and Early Morning Restriction Orders. We are confident that the package of measures that we are already bringing forward will have good impact on reducing drinking levels and associated problem behaviours, but we should of course look at what else we might do.

Overall BIS welcomes the proposals that Theresa sets out to reshape the Government's approach to alcohol, particularly the recognition that success will depend on long term and sustained action by local agencies, industry, local communities and Government working together. We do, however, think that we should consider the risk that some of the proposed measures might have a negative impact.

We know that the Prime Minister and others have been particularly concerned that very cheap alcohol (which can take the form of supermarkets selling alcohol below cost as a loss leader, 'two for one' and similar promotions etc) is a significant part of the problem. We agree that it is very likely that very cheap alcohol is a factor in some people drinking more than they otherwise would and that crime, social disorder and damage to health can follow from this.

However, it is important to consider the risk that setting a minimum unit price (MUP) for alcohol might not have the impact that the Home Office believes. Issues that will need to be resolved include:

1 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0ET
www.bis.gov.uk