

7. MINISTER OF JUSTICE – SALE OF LIQUOR ACT – DRINKING AGE

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The purpose of this report is to advise the Council that the Minister of Justice, the Hon Mr Goff, has just released a report prepared by the Ministry of Justice entitled "Some Statistics on the Possible Effects of the Sale of Liquor Amendment Act 1999 (Lowering the Drinking Age)." A copy of the Minister's letter and the report are attached to this report.

Councillors will recall that the 1999 Amendment Act introduced a number of changes, the more significant being lowering the age of liquor purchase to 18 years, introduction of identification cards, permitting Sunday trading, permitting sale of beers (as well as wine) in supermarkets, permitting off-licence sales on Sundays and devolving a number of functions to the District Licensing Agency (territorial authorities).

In the matter of the "age of purchase", this Council in its submissions on the Act supported the lowering of the age limit to 18 years on the proviso that an identification card system was introduced. This occurred.

The Minister has asked agencies to provide comment on the findings of the report "...and provide views on excessive consumption of alcohol by some young people and appropriate responses to this issue." He intends, once the responses are received, to further discuss the issues and strategies to address the problem with appropriate groups. His office has indicated that responses be forwarded by 19 April 2002.

The report contains information from national drinking surveys in 1995 and 2000, highlighting an increasing binge drinking problem among some young drinkers, some evidence of increased purchase of liquor by minors from off-licence premises; overall reduction in alcohol consumption, but an increase in consumption of spirit based drinks such as ready-to-drink beverages (RTDs). He comments that there may be a need for more analysis of the link RTD consumption appears to have to the increase in alcohol consumption by young drinkers and what the nature of response to this should be. He adds that altering the minimum drinking age is only one option, and a range of measures might be necessary.

The author of the report also concludes and comments that "the statistics presented in this paper show a mixed and partial picture of the possible impact of lowering the drinking age", and, "further and more complete data from 2001 onwards, is needed to better assess the impact of the law change."

It is suggested that more in-depth consideration of this report is required and that a working party be formed to carry this out and report back to the April meeting of this Committee. It is not just the simple matter of deciding on whether to raise, or not, the age limit. There is a wider general overview as well as specific issues to be considered. Below are some matters that might be included in of the working party's consideration.

- (i) Making the distinction between consumption and purchase of liquor.
The Act limits the age of purchase, not the age of consumption.
The excessive consumption by some is the problem.
- (ii) Enforcement strategies.
Implementing a "tougher" enforcement regime and what that might involve.
- (iii) Raising the age limit of purchase at off-licence premises only, ie, supermarkets and bottle stores.
This option has been discussed.
- (iv) Requiring more stringent sales procedures at off-licence premises, ie, separate checkouts at supermarkets, require supermarket checkout operators to be at least 18 years.
- (v) Controlling/removing from the market place/lowering alcohol content of certain beverages/products, eg RTDs.
- (vi) Reviewing the present "education" programmes in place.
The form; the audience: are the present initiatives working?
- (vii) Whose problem is it, and to what extent can/should the involved parties carry out effective measures?

- (viii) The effect raising the age limit may have on the industry.
Many of the difficulties experienced prior to the Amendment Act may return.
- (ix) Would anything really be different today if the age limit had not been raised?

It is suggested that the working party comprise four or five Councillors (with representation from the Children and Youth, and Transport Subcommittees). There are members of this Committee on these sub-committees. Additionally, the Council's Youth Advocate would seem appropriate to be included as part of the officer support to the working party.

While the working party's report will be returned to the 12 April Committee meeting, because the Minister has requested response by 19 April, the matter will not be able to be endorsed by the full Council on 24 April. It is respectfully suggested that this might not matter on this occasion, as the Minister has stated that he "intends to further discuss the issues and strategies to address the problem with appropriate groups". It could be that this Committee decides to include as part of the response that this Council wishes to be included as one of the "appropriate groups", and that this response is from this Committee only, because of the timeframes involved.

**Recommendation
from Chair:**

1. That a working party comprising Councillors Wells, Keast, Cox, Ganda, Sheriff and Withers be formed to consider and prepare a report to the April meeting of the Regulatory and Consents Committee on the Ministry of Justice's "Some Statistics on the Possible Effects of the Sale of Liquor Amendment Act 1999" report, together with officer support that shall include the Council's Youth Advocate.
2. That the response to the Minister of Justice shall include the endorsement that this is a Council Committee report (because of timeframes) and that the Council wishes to be part of the future consultation he intends on the matter.