



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Licensing and Registration of Clubs
(Amendment) Bill:
Methodist Church in Ireland and
Presbyterian Church in Ireland

4 February 2021

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Ms Paula Bradley (Chairperson)
Ms Kellie Armstrong (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Andy Allen
Mr Mark Durkan
Mr Alex Easton
Ms Sinéad Ennis
Ms Karen Mullan
Mr Robin Newton

Witnesses:

Rev David Clements	Methodist Church in Ireland
Mr Lindsay Conway	Presbyterian Church in Ireland
Miss Karen Jardine	Presbyterian Church in Ireland

The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley): I welcome Karen Jardine, the Rev David Clements and Lindsay Conway. Lindsay, I understand that you will make some opening remarks.

Mr Lindsay Conway (Presbyterian Church in Ireland): Yes, Chair. Thank you very much. First, we welcome the opportunity to make a verbal presentation to the Committee. I hope that the Committee found the written submission from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) helpful. I will speak to highlight a few areas of the Bill, Karen will follow, and David will close.

First, I acknowledge the Bill's importance. We are responding not only as a denomination but as a service provider. As some of you will know, the Presbyterian Church's Council for Social Witness manages Carlisle House, which is an addiction centre in Belfast funded by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the Northern Health and Social Care Trust. Added to that, pastorally, all Churches deal with the daily issues related to alcohol misuse.

We are disappointed that the Bill goes much further than the 2016 Bill in respect of Good Friday and Easter Day. In our previous submission, we acknowledged that a modest change was needed. I recall that our approach to the proposed change was commended. PCI wants to put it on record that Easter remains a significant and important time for many people of our denomination and of none across Northern Ireland who register Easter as a time for rest and reflection. We ask that consideration be given to the introduction of protection for workers who choose not to work on Good Friday or Easter Day as they observe their religious rites and ensure that they are able to attend public worship and other activities. Karen will say more about that issue.

Chair, as you alluded to in your earlier remarks, the problem of alcohol misuse never goes away and, sadly, increases year-on-year. Traditionally, Churches have had few allies and, in the past, were very much associated with the anti-drink lobby. However, over the years, that situation has greatly changed. In recent times, clear concerns have come from the health service on alcohol-related diseases and the Department of Justice on alcohol-related crime. I will quote directly from our submission:

"These effects are well documented. In previous public discussions about alcohol licensing, the Churches found common voice with Health and Social Care professionals, many of whom see the strain placed on Accident and Emergency Units and other public services, and with police officers who see at first hand the results of drink-driving, domestic violence and other forms of alcohol related abuse. It is clear to us that public health, community safety and the wellbeing of individuals and families should be the primary concerns in all public policy-making about alcohol."

PCI welcomes the measures that are designed to protect children and young people and to address the excessive consumption of alcohol. Specifically, PCI welcomes the role of the courts and the limits on opening hours. It is important to acknowledge the places where children can be safe in licensed premises.

My plea to the Committee is to consider seriously all the other issues that we have raised in our written submission, such as opening hours, drinking-up times and home deliveries. All those things impact on the legislation. Our last submission paid particular attention to home deliveries and, in particular, the risk that a young person could take a delivery at the door without their identity being checked. We now have a different approach to family outings and the integration of children in other facilities, and greater caution is needed for all that.

That is all that I want to highlight in my opening remarks. I now hand over to Karen.

Miss Karen Jardine (Presbyterian Church in Ireland): Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Committee on these issues. I would like to focus on two aspects, one of which Lindsay has already referred to.

The first aspect is the potential impact of the changes in the licensing regime on staff who work in licensed premises and the duty of care of employers. Initially, in relation to the longer hours and the impact that that might have on staff safety and well-being not only at their place of work but as they travel home from work in the early hours of the morning, the Committee might want to consider a duty-of-care obligation for employers. In that regard and to reflect what Lindsay said about the Easter period, perhaps protections could be provided to allow those who work in the hospitality sector but wish to observe Good Friday and Easter Sunday the opportunity to opt out of working on those days. Legislation exists to allow retail staff to opt out of Sunday working where they wish to do so. There are mechanisms in place there that could be used as a model. I believe that the evidence that you received from Unite the Union raised some of those issues.

The second aspect that I would like to bring to the Committee's attention is the opportunity to review the impact of the legislation — this is a significant change to the licensing regime in Northern Ireland — and how it might be amended going forward. While, undoubtedly, there will be commercial and economic benefits for the hospitality sector, there will be costs for policing, criminal justice and Health and Social Care (HSC), as Lindsay alluded to. The previous estimate of the cost of alcohol misuse was £900 million, but that figure is from 2008-09, over 10 years ago. We do not have more up-to-date figures in order to recognise what a baseline might currently be. A built-in review period — it might be one year or, given the COVID situation, two years — would help policymakers and legislators to have a better idea of the legislation's impact and the balance between the costs and the benefits.

I now hand over to David.

Rev David Clements (Methodist Church in Ireland): Thank you, Chair. We appreciate being able to present to the Committee, and I am glad to be able to do it together with Presbyterian colleagues, not least because they have the resources, the time and, perhaps, the intelligence to put this together better than the Methodists can. I will make a brief comment about the Methodist Church and then two or three points, some of which overlaps with what Lindsay and Karen have said and with the Chair's earlier comment, which was very significant.

The Methodist Church in Ireland has 156 congregations in Northern Ireland, and our mission has always been to seek God and to seek God's blessing on Church and society. We have sought to do that through our ministries, which have included outreach to the poor and marginalised, and by a long and proud history of engagement with social issues in society. The Methodist Church has four missions that operate in Northern Ireland, and a good deal of their time is spent with those who have problems arising from alcohol abuse, particularly with families in which someone is addicted to alcohol. We offer acceptance, compassion, guidance, help and prayer daily. We have an interest in the subject that comes from our ethos and our mission.

The Methodist Church, I suppose, has a tradition of being against drink. Someone once said that the only thing that they knew about the Methodists was that they were against drink. That perception was probably from a generation or two ago, and our Church has drifted along with much of society and other Churches, to some extent, in having a less strict attitude towards alcohol. I say, to address a conflict of interest, that I am teetotal. I regret that none of my children is. *[Inaudible]* children now. Our position has not changed since we made our presentation in 2016-17, when this business was previously being addressed. As Lindsay said, there were, at that time, some changes to lifting restrictions at Easter. We recognised that as something of a compromise. We are sorry that that has been removed in the current legislation. Clearly, we are no longer a Christian country — whether we ever were is a matter for debate, perhaps — and we recognise that the role of Churches in society is less than it was, but it is a shame that the most significant Christian festival or season in the year is no longer given any place in this legislation. We are sorry to see that go.

Our primary concern is the welfare of the community. We recognise the harm that alcohol causes. I was going to point out the statistics that were issued by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) last week, but the Chair has beaten me to it. I am sure that members have read it, but I recommend that you reread Dr Russell's briefing paper to the Committee last September, which dealt with some of the harms of alcohol. We recognise that there are strong voices from the drink and hospitality industries in response to the legislation, and we recognise that this has been a difficult year for the hospitality industry, pubs and so on in particular. We have a good deal of sympathy for them with regard to the impact of COVID. Perhaps that will give a bit of a push to the relaxing of licensing legislation. That may be so; maybe we are swimming against the tide. So be it.

Our concern is not so much with the extension of licensing laws, opening hours and so on, although there are concerns about that, but the overall consumption of alcohol. We recognise that minimum pricing is not part of the Bill, but, when I have the chance, I will make the point again — I think that the Public Health Agency (PHA) has made the same point very forcefully — that we need a minimum pricing policy. It is not a part of the Bill, but I am sure that there are those on the Committee who will be able to address the issue in another context.

There are things that we welcome. Lindsay mentioned the protection for children, which seems to be there, vending machines and so on. We welcome all the things that will limit harm but are concerned about the things that will exacerbate potential harm. I know, because I have seen it elsewhere, that some of you will push back and ask where the evidence is that increasing opening hours increases harm. I am a simple sort of fellow, and I think in straight lines. This is how I work it out: if you increase opening hours, you have to increase staff costs, and, if you do that, the only way to make a profit or break even is to have an increase in the consumption of alcohol. There is limited research on the statistics on that, but common sense says that, the longer pubs, clubs and other places that serve alcohol are open, the more potential there is for harm. It will be interesting to see what the figures are in a year's time. NISRA's figures show that 2019 had the highest alcohol-related death rate on record. That underlines our concerns.

I reiterate that we recognise that the legislation will probably go through. Hopefully, we do not have the situation that we had in 2016-17, when we had a collapse, which is why the thing did not happen. It is a little worse than the situation that we had in 2016-17. However, we recognise that we are a small voice in this and that pressure from industry and so on will no doubt overtake us.

The final word is that we, as a Church, would really like to see a proper policy on minimum pricing that begins to reduce the harmful effects of alcohol in our society.

The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley): Thank you, Lindsay, Karen and David, for briefing the Committee. It is essential that we as a Committee get a balance of views from a broad spectrum of people. It is vital that you are here to brief us. David, I grew up in a household that was very much Free Methodist, so I understand very well how some attitudes have changed, albeit not dramatically. I understand the

ethos behind what you say, certainly on the pastoral side. I understand the majority of your points, which you put across very well.

I want to home in a little. Lindsay, you mentioned Carlisle House. I heard a lady on the radio this morning talking about the lack of services for people in Northern Ireland when it comes to alcohol abuse. I know that that is not part of the Bill, but it certainly feeds in. Carlisle House does magnificent work. I have had cause to be involved with Carlisle House both on a professional level and through a family member. We need to have those services in place. It is my belief that alcohol in itself is not dangerous but that alcohol overconsumption is most certainly dangerous not only to the individual and the family but to society as a whole. Albeit it is not in the Bill, I would like to see more of those services to help people in need.

Karen, I am glad that you mentioned a review, as I was going to ask you about that. Last week, we asked the Public Health Agency and others whether a review mechanism to look at the various extensions would ease their minds in any way, shape or form. You are absolutely right that you are small part and that there is a big industry out there that has been fighting for many years for relaxations. If we were to try to make sure that there was a review, would that put your mind at rest in any way?

Miss Jardine: I suppose that it would be helpful. The changes are much more extensive than what was in the previous proposed legislation. A review was not included in the previous Bill, but it seemed to be implicit in some Assembly debates on the Bill. A review would be helpful for everyone to see what the impacts are not only on the industry but on the policing, criminal justice and health agencies and organisations that have to facilitate the more negative end of alcohol overconsumption and on where resources are taken up. I do not think that the Police Service has yet provided a figure for its estimated costs to the Committee. However, in the explanatory and financial memorandum (EFM), the PSNI states that it anticipates a change to its shift patterns and systems. How will we know what the impact of that will be unless we ask those questions? A review might say, "Everything is working great, so leave things as they are", but it will also help to highlight where some tweaks or mitigations might be required.

The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley): You are not the first person to bring up the issue of staffing. A couple of weeks ago, we had a union in to brief us, and its representative raised issues around staff and their right to observe Easter Sunday. Would you also like a review of that? As a Government and as a Committee, we talk about co-designing everything that we do, but, quite often, the people who are impacted most are not part of the consultation process. Do you want to see that as part of a review as well: that staff are asked their opinion on how it is working for them?

Miss Jardine: Any review would need to be holistic in its approach. I echo some of the things that the Public Health Agency said when they briefed you last week. This needs to be undertaken in a whole-systems approach; we cannot tinker with licensing on the one hand, without realising that that has an impact in other areas that do not necessarily fall under the remit of the Department for Communities. There needs to be some joined-up thinking.

Any review would need to take everything in the round, including the impact on staff as regards their personal safety about getting home and the impact that extended hours will have on their well-being, as well as the issue around Easter observance. That would be helpful, but I do not know whether that can be stipulated in the legislation. However, if there were some way to get a commitment, that would be useful.

Mr Conway: The review would also assist greatly in forward planning for services. Carlisle House and Northlands remain the two main community-based addiction service providers. Already, during the COVID crisis, as you all know, there has been an increase in referrals to both those centres. We have had to meet that by reducing the length of our programmes while increasing the clinical input. A review would assist in forward planning and identifying future pressures. Those beds are committed, and those centres, by their very nature, have to be a certain size. However, they are useful, and their waiting lists are substantial. A review would greatly assist in that as well.

The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley): If members wish to ask any questions, they should indicate.

Before I finish, I want to ask a question about Easter Sunday. Some will ask why it is any more precious than any other Sunday; they will say that all Sundays are the Lord's Day. Can you expand on why you feel that it is more important than any other Sunday in our calendar?

Rev David Clements: I will have a stab at answering that question. We have a mixed community in Northern Ireland these days, but most religions have days that are of particular significance. Hindus, Muslims and Jews have days that are more holy than others. For Christians, you might say that Christmas and Easter are the two most significant festivals. We know that Christmas has been overrun with alcohol misuse, and it would be a shame if Easter followed suit.

Mr Newton: I welcome Karen Jardine, David Clements and Lindsay Conway to the meeting. Much of what they say ties in closely with the advice that we received from the Public Health Agency last week. I recognise Karen from a different role, and I welcome her to her new role.

You have made your points extremely well and they tie in with points that were made previously. There are two things that I want to say directly to the delegation. You face budget pressures on your work in the alcohol abuse field: where do you think that those budget pressures might be and what might their extent be?

Chair, you and the delegation referred to the NISRA report. Dr George O'Neill has commented in the papers today as, I think, the chair of a Belfast GP group. On the basis of what he said, it might be useful to invite him to give evidence to the Committee, if that has not already happened. Given the NISRA report, maybe the delegation could comment on the budget issues that will create pressures.

Mr Conway: The wider budget implications are those that will impact on the health service and accident and emergency departments, especially in these difficult times, and those that will impact on law and order. In our case, the delay in having a regional addiction programme and initiative has added pressure to the work of Carlisle House, and I know that that is also the case for Northlands and other groups. That has to be revisited. There needs to be a regional approach to addiction. Sometimes, at times like these, our services, along with other services, are not only the Cinderella services but maybe the ugly sisters as we try to justify extra funding.

Those budgetary implications surface with the added pressure on accident and emergency departments on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights and with the impact on liver disease and mental health. The debate on law and order includes the high percentage of offences that are committed while under the influence and the impact on families because of behaviours and violence from a domestic abuse point of view.

Mr Newton: Will you comment on the budgetary pressures on Northlands and Carlisle House?

Mr Conway: The funding for Carlisle House comes primarily from the Belfast Trust. The Belfast Trust and the Northern Trust fund all the beds in Carlisle House, so we are limited to the grants that come from the Department through the trusts to us. We also retain one bed for use by other trusts, individuals or public bodies. There is not enough money in the sector for the treatment and aftercare of those in recovery. Recovery is a critical time in addiction treatment. There is the treatment of addiction at the time, but what is really important is recovery, as people return to their communities. We have a seven-bed unit in Gray's Court that assists with that, and people can stay there for up to two years. We have to think through that strategy seriously. Prevention, treatment and aftercare are all vital elements.

Mr Newton: Generally, you fear that a relaxation of the licensing laws will impact significantly on those pressures.

Mr Conway: Yes. David put it well: the simple equation is that increased consumption will lead to increased problems. It is that easy. It just does not make sense. There is greater flexibility in this Bill that was not there in 2016.

Mr Newton: Thank you.

The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley): For members' information, the PSNI will brief us on 25 February.

Karen, I thought that I recognised your face. I thought, "Do I not remember her from the corridors up here?". It is good to see you. All the very best with your position.

Ms Armstrong: Thank you, Lindsay, Karen and David. I very much appreciate your input.

Chair, following on from the guys' presentation, could we as a Committee, if everyone agrees, write to the Minister for the Economy to clarify the position on protecting Christians in the workplace to ensure that they will be protected and that there is a way for them to refuse to work over Christian holidays, so that, if there is any extension to Easter licensing, they are not forced to work at a time that is important to them? It would be appropriate for us to make sure that that is extended and that it is not just Christmas that is protected.

I absolutely agree with you guys on minimum alcohol pricing, which is an outstanding issue. We know that it is not in the Bill, but, Chair, perhaps we should write to the Minister of Health to find out whether there are any updates on what is happening with minimum alcohol pricing from Health's perspective. We could see whether there are any moves forward on that. I know that the Minister is busy at the moment, but we can certainly ask the question.

Folks, you mentioned funding for your services, and they are essential services. Is there a way in which we can encourage the trade to take more responsibility? I am thinking about potential funding. I wonder whether, at the time of licence renewal or if there had been a breakdown and enforcement had to be taken against a place that sells alcohol, there could be an element of funding or fines. Fines are a bit difficult because you do not know how many fines there would be, but, if there were a commitment from the industry to support addiction services, would you guys want to see that happen, or is that the wrong way to look at this? Is that just saying that you have the problem and it is the problem that then pays for the solution? I am really interested in your thoughts on that.

Mr Conway: That is not a new concept. It was discussed many years ago, I think. One of the Guinness foundations endeavoured to address the issue. I am not sure whether the Methodist Church was involved in those discussions, but it raised an ethical dilemma, especially for the Churches.

When you think of the proceeds of crime initiative, we benefit from that in Thompson House, which is our hostel for ex-offenders. That is the same. That has developed as a concept over the years and is worth revisiting, because that was a good use of money from proceeds of crime, and I think that your suggestion is along the same lines. It is worth revisiting because we live in different times and there is a different approach.

The other issue is a levy. If a levy, penalty or whatever was clearly associated with the treatment of abuse, that would be an easier formula to follow but that *[Inaudible.]*

Ms Armstrong: My only worry with that is that, if it were based on enforcement, there would not be a set amount of money. We want to stop the abuse at source, if you know what I mean.

Thank you very much, folks. There is a lot to think about. I can agree with you on many issues, and there is a lot for me to consider. There certainly could be areas in which we could make proposals or amendments to tighten up legislation. Addiction is a huge issue, and the Committee will look at gambling, hopefully later in the year. We absolutely have to address that for Northern Ireland.

The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley): On the back of Kellie's comments, we know that a levy is placed on the gambling industry for addiction services, but I do not know how successful that has been. I sit on the all-party group on gambling, and it has flagged up issues around that. I suppose that that could be explored. Big industries are making lots of money off the backs of people, and many of those people and their families suffer greatly for that. I am glad that Kellie brought that up: I had not thought about it. It could be explored. Maybe it will not go into the Bill, but we need to look at that.

Mr Durkan: Good morning to the crew that has come in with the presentation. Thank you for such a thoughtful submission. You clearly recognise the levels of public support for modernisation, and your critiques accommodate some level of change.

I want to pick up on two points in particular that Kellie also picked up on. They are about workers' rights and addiction. A number of the concerns that you raised about how the Bill would affect workers in the industry chimes with what we heard from Unite the Union two weeks ago. In your experience, do members of your Churches face any pressure or difficulties when it comes to not working on religious holidays? In the pub and hospitality sector, are you aware of any issues where staff among your British counterparts find it difficult to resist pressure to work over Easter, for example?

Rev David Clements: I will make a stab at that by saying that I am not aware of a lot of members of my congregation or my previous congregations working in the industry. That may be partly because of

the Methodist ethos in which they have been brought up. The issue that I encounter more often is of people in essential services such as healthcare having to work over holidays. That is a different category, but there is increasing pressure where, if you do not have the legal right to say no to a certain thing, you could be in a difficult position. I dare say that most people probably just go with it and say that their job is more important than going to church on Easter Sunday, so they will buckle. That ought not to be the society in which we live.

Miss Jardine: I will add in a point about younger people. Ultimately, younger people who work in bars and restaurants might not feel confident enough to ask not to work, but, if there were some protection in law, that would maybe give them that extra bit of confidence to do that.

Mr Durkan: On that basis, I have no difficulty with supporting Kellie's proposal — if it was a proposal — to write to the Economy Minister on the issue. It is important that everyone here is afforded protections.

You guys provide support to individuals with addictions and their families, and it is clear that there are issues around funding. A couple of members floated ideas on how to get more funding, and the idea of a levy is fair enough. However, I am not sure how that could be pitched or whether it could be part of the Bill. Would it be fair to put it on individual licence holders when massive multinational corporations make the real money here? Kellie suggested writing to the Health Minister to seek an update on minimum unit pricing, and I propose that we add funding for addiction services to that letter. That is grossly underfunded and grossly under pressure. You mentioned Northlands. I was in with the guys last week *[Interruption.]*

The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley): Hold on. Somebody is answering a phone call, and we can hear it. I do not know from where that is coming.

Mr Durkan: It was not me this time.

The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley): No, we are not blaming you. We can hear background noise.

Sorry, Mark, back to you.

Mr Durkan: It is important that, in our correspondence to the Health Minister, we reinforce the call for increased funding for addiction services.

Ms Mullan: Thank you all for coming this morning. I commend you for the work that you do. I will take on board the concerns that you have raised this morning.

This is more of a comment than a question, because some of the questions that I wanted to ask have been asked. I very much want alcohol to be consumed in a controlled and safe environment. All of us here are aware of the increase in drinking at home, even before COVID. I fear what the impact will be when we come out of this situation and see it at first hand. There was a heartbreaking story on my local radio station this morning. An 18-year-old girl, along with her grandmother, talked about losing her 41-year-old mum a couple of weeks ago. She highlighted the lack of services in Derry. As Mark said, investment is needed. I really worry about that when we come out of this.

Karen and Lindsay, you touched on an all-systems approach. I very much welcome that. We need immediate support and investment from the Department of Health. The consultation on tackling alcohol and drug harm closes tomorrow, and there will be work on a new strategy. Lindsay, touching on funding, said that addiction services were the Cinderella services. In Derry, the only place at which people can present is A&E. As I said, it is heartbreaking. I support Mark's proposal on increased funding, and we need that immediately. We need to start tackling this because we are failing so many people at the minute. Sorry, I know that that was a bit off track, but I thought that it was important to highlight it.

You made really interesting points about staffing. I think that you, Karen, talked about staff going home at night. I live in a city where there is no public transport after a certain time and taxis late at night are like hens' teeth. We need all Departments to come together so that there is a collective approach to protecting the safety of workers.

Thank you so much for your contribution today. It has certainly opened my mind to all of the additional elements that we need to work on.

Mr Easton: Thank you very much for your presentation. You have given me much food for thought. We certainly need to look at protecting those of faith who, if the changes go ahead, might not want to work on a Sunday or at Easter. Do you feel that your services could be swamped if they go ahead? You commented on society changing. Yes, it certainly is, but that is not necessarily a good thing. Just because society is changing does not mean that we, as politicians, have to go along with that. We have to have an approach whereby we try to protect society from harm. Do you feel that your services could be overstretched if the changes go ahead?

Mr Conway: The outworking of addictions, combined with COVID, will be a real issue. The timing of the Bill is not good in that context. We predict a tsunami, a word that has been used quite a lot over the past few days in relation to mental health issues, and addictions come under that programme of care. In the future, we will have to manage that tsunami in partnership with our colleagues in the Department and the trusts.

I think that society is responding. There is no research to support this, but, anecdotally, the consumption of alcohol has remained the same, if not increased, during the COVID crisis. That is clearly illustrated by supermarkets, off-licences, home delivery and so forth. Yesterday's 'Belfast Telegraph' stated that Amazon had stopped delivering alcohol to Northern Ireland because of protocol difficulties. I do not know whether that is a good news story or a bad news story. All of those issues will have an impact on society. There has been a big impact on family life, some of which has been for the good, in that it has brought families together. However, COVID has added to the pressures on families, and, sadly, there has been a significant increase in child and adult abuse.

In some ways, society now has a different view on alcohol. We were very much a culture in which alcohol was seen as the demon drink, and, at times, we did not teach our young people that safe drinking may be achievable. Research has pointed to binge drinking having come from that culture. That time bomb had been ticking for some time. We now approach it in a more balanced way, but, as I said, the timing of the Bill is not good. What the increase in licensing hours might mean for the night culture and so forth is an unknown quantity.

Rev David Clements: May I make two comments in response to Alex's question? First, it is not good for us to exaggerate the position. Increasing drinking-up time by half an hour, opening at Easter and the other bits and pieces in the Bill to which we object will not make a massive difference. They will not help — they will do some harm — but there will not be a massive difference. We need to keep that in perspective.

Secondly — this is a negative — there is an enormous amount of alcohol harm in society. It is a big issue in such areas as health and criminal justice. I reiterate the point with which I concluded my presentation: harm reduction and minimum pricing are needed. However, perhaps those issues do not fit easily into the Bill. It may be for the Department of Health and other Departments to pick those up. The changes in the proposed legislation are not good, but they will not make a catastrophic difference or bring a tsunami of harm. Nonetheless, the tsunami is still there: it is the underlying increase in the use and abuse of alcohol in our culture. I echo what someone else said earlier — I am not sure who it was — which was that we do not know what the outcome will be in a year's time, post COVID. Although much less alcohol has been consumed in restaurants, pubs and so on, my gut feeling is that the amount of alcohol consumed in homes has increased significantly. Who is to tell what health impact that will have in a year's time or five years' time?

Mr Easton: Thank you very much.

The Chairperson (Ms P Bradley): Minister Swann committed to holding a full public consultation on minimum unit pricing. Back on 29 July 2020, he said that he would do that within the year. Following today's briefing, the Committee can follow up on that with the Department to see where it is and what plans there are to get it started.

Members have made several proposals. One proposal was to ask the Economy Minister to look at working hours for people of faith, and we can certainly do that. Another was that we ask the Health Minister about increased funding for advice services. Those are actions that we can take as a Committee following on from this witness session.

Thank you, Lindsay, David and Karen for briefing us today and for your submission. Thank you very much. Bye-bye.

Miss Jardine: Thank you.

Rev David Clements: Bye-bye.