

**RESPONSE OF THE COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS OF THE  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND TO THE COMMITTEE FOR COMMUNITIES  
CALL FOR EVIDENCE ON THE LICENSING AND REGISTRATION OF  
CLUBS (AMENDMENT) BILL**

OCTOBER 2016

**Introduction**

1. The Presbyterian Church in Ireland (PCI) has over 225,000 members belonging to 539 congregations across 19 Presbyteries throughout Ireland, north and south. The Council for Public Affairs is authorised by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland to speak on behalf of the PCI on matters of public policy. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill.
2. The PCI has an interest in alcohol policy as a provider of services and pastoral care to those with addictions and their families. The PCI operates a residential substance misuse treatment centre, situated near the centre of Belfast, which offers a range of services, advice and information, treatment programmes, and ongoing support services funded by the Health and Social Care Trusts. We also provide supported accommodation for people in early recovery who were homeless or living in circumstances detrimental to their recovery. Congregations offer a range of Pastoral Support to individuals and families directly affected by alcohol misuse.

**Comments on the Bill**

3. The PCI is not opposed to the clauses as introduced that provide for additional opening hours, recognising that these represent modest changes. The PCI also notes that the extension of 'drinking-up time' for a trial period is designed to reduce binge drinking and allow a more gradual dispersal of customers at the end of the night, and we are therefore supportive of this measure.
4. The PCI welcomes the various measures set out that are designed to protect children and young people and address the excessive consumption of alcohol.
5. We are encouraged by the proposed restrictions on the advertising of drinks promotions in supermarkets and hope that this will lead to a reduction in impulse purchases.

**Further comments**

6. Alcoholic drinks are consumed by a large proportion of the population and many of those who consume alcohol do so responsibly in moderation. It is important to recognise, however, that alcohol, when misused, has serious adverse effects for individuals, families and wider society. 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.

7. The trend has greatly changed in recent years, with the majority of alcohol now consumed at home. It is therefore vital that, as our society considers how to prevent and address alcohol abuse, responsible attitudes to alcohol are engendered, and that the total availability of alcohol from all types of licensed premises is appropriately controlled.
8. Expert reports consistently emphasise the need to address a variety of areas in order to effectively tackle alcohol abuse. These include pricing, labelling, availability, advertising, drink-driving measures, and early intervention and treatment. We understand that the current cross-departmental strategy to reduce alcohol and drug misuse may come to an end next year. We believe this is an issue which demands continued formal and focused cooperation between service providers, the Executive Departments and the UK Government. Whilst reports suggest that progress has been made in recent years, there is still much work to be done, and we would welcome a reenergised public discussion on addressing the misuse of alcohol.



Very Rev Dr T Norman Hamilton (Convener of the Council for Public Affairs)



Rev Trevor D Gribben (Clerk of the General Assembly)