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Rt Hon Jack Straw MP
Richmond Chambers
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Thank you for your letter of 22 July to the Secretary of State at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport on behalf of Councillor Ron O'Keeffe of 28 East Park Road, Blackburn, BB1 8DW. I am replying as the Secretary of State with responsibility for this area of policy.

The harms caused by alcohol are estimated to cost the NHS alone around £3.5 billion per year, not to mention the wider costs of alcohol related crime in England and Wales of some £11 billion. This is unacceptable and I am determined to tackle the situation. We have already introduced a radical package of measures to overhaul the Licensing Act 2003, including giving local areas more powers to deal with problem premises such as the Early Morning Restriction Order and the Late Night Levy. We have also banned the worst cases of very cheap and harmful alcohol sales and continue to challenge the alcohol industry to do more to promote responsible drinking. We have welcomed the recent announcement of a set of pledges, made as part of the industry's ongoing commitment to the Government's Public Health Responsibility Deal. This represents real progress towards the goals of removing one billion units of alcohol from the market by 2015 and providing labelling on products which includes health warnings and unit

information. The pledges also include commitments on the responsible advertising and marketing of alcohol and tackling underage sales.

In April 2012, the Government legislated to give health bodies a say in licensing processes, by making them responsible authorities. This means that health bodies are automatically copied into all licensing applications and can make representations if they have concerns that one or more of the licensing objectives will be undermined. There is lots of international evidence to show that controls on the density of licensed premises can reduce the impact of alcohol-related harms including crime and health problems. This is why the Government consulted last year on introducing a health-related licensing objective linked to (and limited to) Cumulative Impact Policies (CIPs). If implemented this would have allowed licensing authorities to take wider alcohol-related health harm, such as liver disease and alcohol-related deaths, into account when developing CIPs. The consultation made clear that local processes and data collection were insufficient, meaning that it was unclear how the proposal could be implemented in practice. However, the Government remains very interested in this policy. A number of Local Alcohol Action Areas, with support from Public Health England, are looking at the necessary processes and feasibility of introducing it whilst exploring other ways that health data can be used in the licensing process. So far, a total of ten areas have offered to help with this work.

Lord Brooke's Bill seeks to amend the 2003 Act to make 'protecting and improving public health' a fifth licensing objective for all licensing decisions and functions (not just CIPs). However, there are a number of complexities, as touched upon above, which mean it is not as simple as it might seem to change the law in this regard. In both Scotland (where 'protecting and improving public health' has been a licensing objective since 2007) and England and Wales, licensing decisions must be made with reference to the specific premises concerned and it is difficult to establish direct causal links between health harms and particular premises. Legal challenges in Scotland and previous consultation have shown that there is an evidential gap and it is therefore important that we do not pre-empt the evidence gathering work in the Local Alcohol Action Areas.

I hope that this clarifies the Government's position.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Theresa May', written in a cursive style.

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP