



Alcohol Health Alliance
c/o Royal College of Physicians
11 St Andrews Place
Regents Park
London NW1 4LE

Miriam Davidson
Director of Public Health
Darlington Borough Council
Town Hall
Feethams
Darlington
Co Durham
DL1 5QT

28 April 2016

Dear Ms Davidson

Consultation to end council's funding of Balance, the North East Alcohol Office

Darlington Borough Council's proposal to end the funding of Balance, the North East Alcohol Office from 2017/18 has been brought to my attention and I would like to respond as Chair of the Alcohol Alliance, of which Balance is an active and highly influential member. I have completed the formal consultation form but wanted to write to you personally to highlight the influence the North East exerts on the alcohol agenda at the national level through the joint funding of the Balance programme.

As a member of the AHA Balance helps to shape strategies and campaigns through its position on both the Steering Committee and our Communications and Advocacy Group. Its contribution is particularly valued in the fields of advocacy, marketing and communications. For example, Balance was instrumental in helping to shape the AHA's response to the new CMO drinking guidelines and has been critical in supporting our recent campaigns around price, health labelling and drink driving. It also plays an important role in making sure we have access to the views and experiences of local stakeholders, particularly in relation to topics such as alcohol licensing and the impact of alcohol harm on the emergency services.

Outside the AHA, Balance is represented on PHE's Alcohol Leadership Board, which I jointly chair. As a result, the exemplary work being carried out by the North East is heard by a wide range of representatives around the table, including from several Government departments, the Local Government Association and a number of medical bodies.

At a regional level the data speaks for itself. I understand that alcohol related hospital admissions fell by 5.1 per cent in the North East from 2011/12 to 2014/15 at a time when admissions continued to rise in every other region in England, a pattern replicated in Darlington. I know that recent cancer

campaigns have increased awareness of the risks associated with drinking, thus allowing more people to make informed choices about their drinking, at the same time as building public support for policies such as minimum unit price. As the President of Alcohol Concern, I am also aware that, working with Balance and others, Darlington has been very active in promoting Dry January and I think it is no coincidence that the only region which prioritises and tackles alcohol harm by working closely together has seen the highest sign up rates in the country.

As someone who knows and regularly visits the North East I am very aware of the financial pressures and difficult decisions Darlington and other North East councils face. However, I would urge the council to consider very carefully before ending all funding for an approach which I firmly believe will become increasingly important in helping to reduce the demand on the NHS and other public services. If we were to follow the evidence base it is clear to me that, rather than the North East approach to tackling alcohol harm being under threat, other regions would be following your example.

Thank you for allowing me to respond to what on the face of it seems like a local matter but which I believe has wider implications. If it is helpful I would be more than happy to have further discussions with yourself or your councillors regarding the contribution Balance makes.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ian Gilmore". The signature is written in a cursive style and is followed by a long, horizontal, slightly curved flourish.

Professor Sir Ian Gilmore
Chair, Alcohol Health Alliance