**Embargoed until 00.01 on Wednesday 22 May 2013**

**Police officers feel the real impact of alcohol misuse**

North East police officers are feeling the first-hand impact of alcohol misuse with over 80% being subjected to an alcohol-related assault during their career – and one in five being assaulted six or more times.

The latest perception findings from Balance, the North East Alcohol Office, also reveal that new recruits are warned that they will probably be the victim of an alcohol-related assault before the end of their first year in the force.

The findings are part of a new Balance report, *The Impact of Alcohol on Policing in the North East,* which surveyed 1,100 frontline officers across the region’s three forces – Cleveland, Durham and Northumbria - to further understand alcohol’s impact on the frontline and to gain their perceptions on the issue.

The report also revealed that:

* 97% feel at risk of physical assault when policing the night time economy.
* Almost 9 in 10 officers believe cheap alcohol contributes to alcohol-related crime and disorder
* A majority of officers (6 in 10) said alcohol related crime and disorder takes up at least half of their time while 1 in 10 say it constitutes 80 -100% of their workload.
* On a weekend evening shift nearly every single person being dealt with or arrested is intoxicated through alcohol misuse.
* Officers often have to deal with alcohol related anti-social behaviour from children as young as eleven years old.

During 2010/11 more than £316m was spent dealing with an estimated 213,000 alcohol related crimes. This equates to £75.1m in Durham, £81.8m in Cleveland and £159.6m in Northumbria force areas.

In England and Wales alcohol misuse contributed to a cost of £7.6bn for crime and licensing.

Inspector Colin Dobson, from Durham Constabulary's Alcohol Harm Reduction Unit said: “While crime rates are falling in the three force areas in the North East, the link between cheap alcohol and crime and disorder is undeniable.

“We have to deal with problems relating to alcohol on a daily basis and our officers see first-hand the major impact that this is having on individuals and our communities – as well as the personal risk to our officers. Almost 9 in 10 officers said that they believe cheap alcohol attributes to alcohol related crime and disorder. This needs to change.

“We, along with thousands of others across the North East, believe that a minimum unit price on alcohol is needed to reduce alcohol consumption in the region – and also reduce crime in our communities.

“The freedom sections of the alcohol industry are being given to sell certain products at pocket money prices is at the expense of vulnerable communities and our frontline public services. Each year in the North East millions of pounds are being spent to deal with over 200,000 alcohol related crimes – and this picture is being repeated across the country.”

Around half of all violent crime in England and Wales is alcohol-related and studies have shown that as alcohol consumption increases, so does violent offending. People who drink before going out for the night are more likely to be involved in a fight and around half of all violent incidents take place at the weekend when binge drinking is at its peak. Alcohol is also linked with 39% of domestic violence cases.

Colin Shevills, Director of Balance, said: “Alcohol is having an impact on every part of our society – and policing is no different. It is costing our forces in terms of time, expenditure and vital resources – it is also putting officers at risk.

“One of the main factors is that alcohol continues to be too affordable, too available and too widely promoted. We know that the more affordable alcohol is, the more people consume. We therefore urge the Government to stand firm on its commitment to introduce a minimum unit price on alcohol.

“A minimum unit price will make cheap, strong alcohol less affordable to the vulnerable younger and heavier drinkers who are more likely to drink it and suffer the consequences. If set at 50p, research carried out by the University of Sheffield indicates that after ten years, every year in England it will cut crimes by 48,500. It would only cost a moderate drinker an extra 28p per week and wouldn’t affect the price of a pint in a community pub. We believe it is a price worth paying.

“Here in the North East we know that it is needed and it is wanted – evidence also tells us that it works. Importantly most people in the region have backed call for the introduction of a minimum unit price. It is supported by our police, it is supported by the majority of the North East public, it is supported by our GPs and it is supported by our publicans.”

Research carried out by the University of Sheffield indicates that after ten years, every year in England a minimum 50p per unit will:

* save 3,393 lives
* reduce hospital admissions by 97,900
* cut crimes by 45,800
* cut unemployment by 27,100
* save 296,900 working days lost through absenteeism
* reduce the amount younger and heavier drinkers consume.

It estimates that moderate drinkers could be expected to pay just 28p a week extra on their weekly alcohol bill for these benefits, if a minimum 50p per unit were introduced.

Moderate drinkers stay within the recommended daily limits of no more than 2-3 units, or a standard glass of wine, for a woman and 3-4 units, or a pint and a half of regular strength beer, for a man. Drinking at or above these limits on a daily, or almost daily basis, increases the risk of a range of health conditions including cancer and stroke.

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**Notes to editor**

Balance is the North East of England’s alcohol office, the first of its kind in the UK. It aims to encourage people in the North East to reduce how much alcohol they drink so they can live healthier lives in safer communities.

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