Role of alcohol in crime – Transcript

***What role does alcohol play in relation to crime in Scotland?***

**Sir Stephen House** *:* In relation to alcohol, I think it's important to say that the police doesn’t take a position, and I certainly don't take a position, that we should be a teetotal society and completely abstain from alcohol. It has its place in society…

What we have an issue with is people overindulging. I think that's what society needs to take a look at. Minimum pricing is something that we as an organisation support because we think it might help. Is worth trying … At the very least, I think it is worth trying to see what happens, but we also want responsible drinking and we want people involved in the drinks industry to think about that as well.

The vast majority of pubs and clubs in Scotland are well run and they have sensible policies around door staff, around closed-circuit television, the staff are trained to provide first aid and they know that they shouldn't be serving drinks to people who are under-age and they shouldn't be serving drinks to people who have had too much to drink.

I think, actually, the bigger problem we experience in the police now does not come from people who drink in pubs and clubs. But actually the bigger issue around drink and the damage it does to people's health and the violence that it drives is around people buying from off-licences, buying vast quantities of strong cider, lager, and strong but very cheap vodka in particular and going and drinking that in party flats and drinking to excess, where there is no level of control.

If you're in a pub or club and you're old enough to drink, then there is an element of control, there is peer pressure. If you start having too much to drink and falling about all over the place people start looking at you a bit funny, door staff and security staff will intervene and ultimately we'll intervene and the licensee and the staff there should start to refuse people if they've had too much to drink and that's what we expect, and we carry out inspections of licensed premises to make sure that does happen.

But if you're in a party flat, if you've gone out to the off-licence, gone out to one of the supermarkets and bought huge quantities of drink and taken it back and you're having a party behind closed doors, that social control doesn’t exist to the same extent – there is no security staff, there is no CCTV cameras and that becomes much more challenging for individuals and for the police.

But for individuals particularly, because you are under a lot of pressure then in those events to drink, there is no control, people are not paying attention to the clock, there are no licensing hours, so you can keep drinking, and a lot of the violence that we get called to and, indeed, the ambulance service get called to now takes place, often, over the weekend in what we call party flats, which are basically places that are put aside and the drink just flows.

Part of the issue is the drink, in my view, is too affordable, too cheap, and part of the problem is it is being sold to people who are sometimes under-age. We carry out a lot of licensing checks on off-licences to make sure they're not selling to people that are underage and we come down very heavily, and the courts can down very heavily, on people who are old enough to buy alcohol and then provide it to people who aren't old enough have to have alcohol.

[End of transcript]