

Background note from Adfam/Alcohol Concern

Alcohol and Families Alliance

The establishment of the Alcohol and Families Alliance is in response to a recognition that:

- Alcohol issues are peripheral to children and families policy, while children and families are peripheral to alcohol policy. As a result the issue is rarely, if ever, addressed at policy level.
- No one central government department holds responsibility for this area and so there is limited central recognition or guidance.
- Localism further dilutes the ability to develop a recognition of the problem and the development of effective responses.
- While there is a widespread and growing concern, those organisations with a role in seeking to influence policy come at the problem from different angles and with different perceived solutions. Such a diversity of approaches, while rich in content and expertise, can only hinder the development of cohesive policy-making and there is a pressing need for the organisations to share their knowledge and understanding in order to advocate coherently and effectively for policy initiatives.

Evidence cited by the Office of the Children's Commissioner suggests that:

- Children affected by parental alcohol use are identified much later than those affected by drugs and then often only later when other problems arise (e.g. care proceedings).
- The focus to date has been largely on children 'at risk' rather than the larger number who are 'in need'.
- Professionals are ill-equipped and find it challenging to work with families where alcohol is a factor.
- We do not fully understand the full scope of the problem and how this may vary for different groups of children and for all levels of alcohol consumption.

Alcohol Concern and Adfam have agreed to work in partnership to establish, support and lead an Alliance of organisations with an interest in the issues surrounding children and families affected by the misuse of alcohol.

This Alliance will act as a resource for influencing policy on alcohol and families, forging a consensus across the voluntary and statutory sector, thus bringing an informed voice to

driving change for these families. Organisations joining the Alliance will be drawn from the families, childrens and substance misuse sectors.

Using the model of the Alcohol Health Alliance, the partners are committed to lead an Alliance which would embrace statutory as well as voluntary organisations, with the purpose of identifying and developing strategies and activities to influence policy in this area.

Principles

The Alliance will operate on the principles that:

- The misuse of alcohol can have serious and detrimental effects on the health and well-being of children and families.
- The damaging effects of alcohol on children and families are not confined to those incurred by drinkers diagnosed as hazardous, dangerous or dependant.

The Alliance will organise up to four meetings a year, focusing on key issues and identifying practical policy recommendations. It will be chaired by an independent expert in this field.

An Advisory Group will support the Alliance and take responsibility for taking forward the recommendations. The advisory group will:

- Act as an advisory body to the Alliance to ensure its activities and agenda accurately reflect the issues, concerns and needs of children and families affected by alcohol misuse
- Agree applications for new members
- Agree the agenda for full meetings
- Act as an advocate for the Alliance sharing findings and information across members' own organisations and networks

Early discussions have identified:

- The need for training across all professionals working with families, with an emphasis on training as part of social work qualification.
- The need to articulate the message about the potential impact on children and families of 'low-level' drinking; this is not necessary a child protection problem or a Troubled Families issue.
- The need to highlight the link between alcohol and other causes of social concern, for example, poverty, domestic violence and mental health; responses to other stresses in families.
- The need to hear the child's voice across all relevant areas of concern, including children's perceptions of when parental drinking is 'going wrong'.