Response

Costs

As the Financial Memorandum identifies there will be financial costs for local authorities arising out of parts of the bill. In particular Licensing Boards will have an increased call on staff resources as a result of the increased consultation and neighbour notification required for some applications for premises licences or variations. There will also be some additional costs if the Board decides to implement a bottle marking scheme following a request from the police. The Financial Memorandum expects that these costs will be absorbed by the local authorities. Paragraph 48 of the FM estimates the average cost of the increased notification to be £5600 pa per board. However Fife is one of the largest authorities by both area and population so it is reasonable to estimate that the cost will be greater in Fife. Fees for alcohol licence applications are governed by regulations and paragraph 35 of the FM says that most authorities charge the maximum and that the Scottish Government could be asked to raise the ceiling on the fees that could be charged.

In short there will be increased costs to Fife Council and Licensing board arising out of the provisions of the bill but they are not huge amounts. We are being asked to absorb these by using existing fees paid. This is difficult at a time of budgetary pressure and perhaps the Government should look at increasing the limit of the fees allowed to be charged for applications.