

Police Commissioners urge Government to think again on cheap alcohol

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By Nigel Burton

THE region's police commissioners have written to the Home Secretary urging the Government not to scrap plans for a crackdown on cheap alcohol.

They fear Prime Minister David Cameron is prepared to drop plans for a minimum unit price for alcohol following reports of a Cabinet split.

In an unprecedented move all three police commissioners for Durham, Cleveland and Northumbria, have written to Home Secretary Theresa May expressing their dismay.

The letter expresses "grave concerns" over reports that the Government is planning to drop its commitment to minimum pricing.

It adds: "We believe such a development would be a major backwards step in our collective attempts to reduce crime in our communities.

"While crime rates are falling... in the North-East, the link between cheap alcohol and crime and disorder is undeniable."

The bill for alcohol-related crimes in the North-East was more than £316m in 2010/11.

The open letter - signed by Ron Hogg, police and crime commissioner for County Durham, and his counterparts Barry Coppinger (Cleveland) and Vera Baird (Northumbria) - says a minimum unit price will "save lives and cut crime by targeting the cheap, mass-produced ciders and spirits consumed by young people and harmful drinkers, while leaving prices in our pubs untouched."

It concludes: "We urge you to follow the independent evidence - for the sake of the people of the North-East and the frontline services that support them."

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