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Councils will be given powers to crack down on cut-price deals

NEW WAR ON CHEAP ALCOHOL

By **Sean Poulter** and **James Chapman**

LOCAL authorities will be given powers to crack down on cheap alcohol as experts warn young people are getting drunk for a few pence.

A major report today lays bare the easy availability of cut-price booze that is wrecking the nation's health and fuelling violence and anti-social behaviour.

Experts found strong cider can be bought for as little as 10p per unit, while lager is on sale at just 26p a pint.

Ministers want to allow councils to block alcohol offers at supermarkets and off licences if they are dramatically undercutting prices charged at pubs.

The Coalition aims to rip up competition law and tell supermarkets to reach agreement on a ban on 'bargain basement' drink deals.

The big four supermarkets - Tesco, Asda, Sainsbury's and Morrisons - say they will support efforts to end cut-price promotions. David Cameron has already voiced his support for stopping stores selling what he described as '20 tins of Stella for a fiver'.

Several shops use alcohol as a 'loss-leader', selling at a loss to encourage shoppers into the store to buy other products.

Mr Cameron is backing plans by ten councils in the North West to create a by-law making it illegal to sell alcohol for less than 50p a unit. 'I think the idea of the councils coming together on this is a good one and we will certainly look at it very sympathetically,' he said.

Giving councils such powers is likely to require a change in the law, because current competition regulations do not allow

The secret behind **Flexible Felicity's splits** - at 64!



Pure passion: Actress Felicity Kendal with dance partner Vincent Simone **SEE PAGE 17**

Now Osborne plans to scrap child benefit from age 16

By **James Chapman** Political Editor

GEORGE OSBORNE will axe child benefit for over-16s, leaving two million families worse off, Coalition sources say.

Despite opposition from Lib Dem MPs, the move will come as the Chancellor squeezes Britain's bloated welfare budget in the most painful cuts since the Second World War.

He has already frozen child benefit for three years and prompted fierce controversy by announcing it will be scrapped for higher rate taxpayers from 2013, raising more than £1billion a year.

Reducing the maximum age at which child benefit can be claimed from 18 to 16 would raise more than £2billion extra.

As 35 leading businessmen, including Marks & Spencer chairman Sir Stuart Rose and BT chief executive Ian Livingston, backed the need for immediate cuts, Mr Osborne insisted there would be no retreat from the Government's £83billion deficit reduction programme, which will mean four years of austerity.

He declared: 'We have to see this **Turn to Page 6**

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om, it will eventually turn white



Picture: RICHARD WALKER/IMAGEUPPER

Sweet dreams: Flic Everett and husband Simon Buckley

Sleep school? It worked like a dream for us

by Flic Everett

A nice visual metaphor for insomnia because Guy wants us not to fight it. 'We like to control things,' he says. 'But sleep is a natural process and you can't force it. Pulling against it feels as if we're doing something to solve the problem. But how much energy are you using?' 'A lot,' we mutter, like naughty school-children. Now let the rope go. How much energy are you using now?' 'Obviously, none. 'So, what do good sleepers do to get to sleep?' he adds. Of course, the correct answer is 'nothing'. 'Insomniacs do everything.' There's a lot of embarrassed shuffling as we're asked to list all the things we've tried in order to get to sleep. One girl watches TV, others listen to music. Simon likes to have the cat next to him. I have to read for

at least an hour — the problem is, if the book's exciting, I can't stop. Dr Meadows calls these 'sleep hygiene rules'. Routines are all very well, he says, but they don't work. 'As soon as it becomes familiar, it stops working.' Instead, he's going to teach us the art of mindfulness — which is all about accepting insomnia, instead of leaping up for herbal tea, or lying in a ferment of panic about the next day. Insomnia is a monster, he tells us, showing a slide of a cartoon monster. 'It feeds on your fear of how it will affect you. So we try to fight, or destroy it, and panic builds.' Actual insomnia is defined as three or four nights of poor sleep a week, and affects 10-25 per cent of the population. 'Causes include stress, pain, babies, anxiety, illness, depression, hormones...' he lists. 'It can make you perpetually grumpy. People feel angry, depressed, anxious, frustrated, lonely.' It's true, a great deal of Simon and my sleep

problems are driven by the fear of keeping each other awake. That's why the most helpful thing we learn is that not everyone needs eight hours' sleep. Deep down, I know I can survive perfectly well on five hours. But having been drip-fed the idea that less than eight causes health problems and will destroy my career, I work myself into a state of panicky misery as I lie wide awake. Dr Meadows' different approach, of 'mindful sleep', requires us to accept that our body doesn't want to sleep, sit with the discomfort, and focus only on the moment — not on our passing thoughts and fears. In one exercise, he hands us each a raisin. Some people eat them, so he gives out more. Then we're required to do nothing but study our raisin, for several minutes, focusing on how it looks, feels, and smells. The experience is too much for one woman, who bursts into tears. It requires practice, says Dr Meadows.

Pill poppers
In England alone, there are ten million prescriptions for sleeping pills every year

'You may feel discomfort, but a thought will come in, so notice it, be mindful of your senses — acknowledge your "thinking" mind, that analyses and judges, then go back to observing.' So when I lie awake thinking 'I'll never pay my bills,' he suggests I welcome the thought, give it a nick-name — 'hello, nasty money thought...' then let it pass, 'like a cloud,' and wave it on its way. After a few more exercises, including mindful breathing, where we focus on nothing but our own breath, it's pretty clear that the key to dealing with insomnia is accepting it. Afterwards, having been forced to examine the causes of my insomnia, I realise it's my desperate need for control in my life that's stopping me letting go and falling asleep. Like a police dog, I'm never off duty, and feel compelled to respond to every stimulus — whether it's the catflap, snoring, or an hour-long mental projection about the taxman coming to get me. In response, Simon gets increasingly protective about his sleep — yanking the duvet back, sighing, snapping 'what is it NOW?' when I lean over to check whether he's awake... no wonder we've given up. 'Sleeping in a spare bed is a way of controlling the situation,' says Dr Meadows. 'Many people can sleep alone, but can't share a bed, which involves mindful willingness to accept the discomfort.'

THAT'S all very well, till your partner starts snoring as if they're driving a herd to the country fair. But he even has an answer for that. 'We're configured to predict snoring,' he says, 'so it's the anticipation of it that keeps you awake as much as the reality. You get caught up in reacting to the noise, rather than just listening to it.' If jabbing Simon in the ribs, hissing "for God's SAKE! Wake UP!" counts as reacting, he has a point. Simon, too, found the workshop helpful. He hates going to sleep, as there's always something more interesting he'd rather be doing. 'Learning that I might not need as much sleep as I thought was great,' he says, 'and also, focusing on being "mindful" of what I can hear or see, without analysing everything, is useful, too.' To compound the likelihood of a decent night's sleep, Rockcliffe Hall has a Dream-time treatment using natural Ila products in its spa. First, we try the giant hot tub, then have a quick steam, and I even swim a few lengths in the pool in the hope of finally exhausting myself. That night, Simon and I talked more openly than we had in years about intimacy, communication, sleeping, not sleeping and fear. It's not something we normally sit around doing and reminded me of some Californian encounter group in 1973. But it must have worked. I fell asleep immediately and for the first time in months, didn't ping awake before dawn with my heart racing. If Simon snored, I didn't hear him. I thought perhaps it might be due to extreme tiredness and the fantastic hotel bed but a week has passed, and my sleep has improved dramatically. I did wake up a couple of times, but I lay there till I felt tired again. I've tried not to rely on my bath/herbal tea/reading schedule and focused on breathing instead. Most importantly, we've both relaxed about the consequences if we can't sleep. 'It won't kill you,' said Dr Meadows, and it turns out he's right. In fact, it's been so much better, we've been thinking about sharing the bed again, now we know we can cope with insomnia and that's a real achievement. ■ ROCKCLIFFE HALL, Hurtworth-on-Tees, Darlington, 01325 729 999, rockcliffehall.com or londoninsomniaclinic.co.uk

GREEN QUEEN
by Julia Stanger

VEGAN GLAMOUR

IT'S been 47 years since the cosmetics line Beauty Without Cruelty gave us vegan, fragrance and paraben-free glamour, and there are now 90 products in the range. I've always been a fan of their mascaras made using Japanese fruit wax.

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LIGHT UP

DORSET-BASED lighting company TMO (Turn Me On) uses locally sourced wood and natural materials to produce a stunning selection of lamps. This Oak Table Lamp, with a luxurious deep red silk shade, is just fantastic.

■ £250, tmoighting.com

CHOC-HEAVEN

MY DAUGHTER'S eyes lit up when she saw this Organic Chocolate Making Kit with cacao butter from Ecuador and Mexican Dark Agave nectar. Yum! The kit is fun, easy to use and the result is delicious.

■ £14.99 from biggreensmile.com