

HOSPITALITY & CATERING NEWS



Scrap local authority licensing committees, lords committee recommends

April 4, 2017

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Chairman of the House of Lords Select Committee on the Licensing Act 2003, Baroness McIntosh of Pickering, said: "The Act is fundamentally flawed and needs a major overhaul. It was a mistake and a missed opportunity to set up new licensing committees when the planning system was already available to regulate the use of land for many different purposes. The planning system is well suited to dealing with licensing applications and appeals, and the interests of residents are always taken into account.

"The Committee was shocked by some of the evidence it received on hearings before licensing committees. Their decisions have been described as "something of a lottery", "lacking formality", and "indifferent", with some "scandalous misuses of the powers of elected local councillors".

"We cannot understand why the Government has decided not to apply the Act to sales at airports. This can lead to dangerous situations, and must be changed.

"Pubs, clubs and live music venues are a vital part of our cultural identity. Any decline in our cities' world-famous night life ought to be prevented and the businesses supported. But the night time economy needs regulating; even in these areas of cities, residents have their rights. The current systems are not being used because they do not work."

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Key points from the report

Integrate licensing with planning

- The Committee found that the Government made a substantial error in placing the responsibility for licensing with local authority licensing committees.
- The evidence received against local authority licensing committees was damning and the committee was extremely concerned by what it heard.
- Planning committees are much more effective, reliable and well-equipped to make licensing decisions, which have a significant impact on local communities and can be "life or death" to businesses, their owners and their staff.
- The Committee recommends that coordination between the licensing and planning systems should begin immediately in all local authorities.
- Fees for licensing should be set locally, not nationally.

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application.

Late Night Levy

- The Committee heard very convincing evidence suggesting that the Late Night Levy does not pay for the cost of policing as intended, and came to the conclusion that in its current form it is fundamentally wrong, in principle and practice. Unless amendments already made prove effective, they should be repealed. So should Early Morning Restriction Orders, which no local authority has yet introduced.



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