

Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill - March 2011

Enable licensing authorities to suspend licences due to non-payment of fees

What is the policy aim?

We are committed to reducing the burden and bureaucracy of licensing and will strike the right balance between the requirements on businesses, the cost to the taxpayer and helping the police and other enforcement agencies address alcohol related crime and disorder. This policy will ensure that licensing authorities do not face additional costs as a result of licence holders not paying their annual fees.

What changes are being proposed through the Bill?

We will make provision for licensing authorities to suspend licences due to non-payment of fees. This will provide a much stronger incentive for businesses to pay their fee in a timely manner and save licensing authorities the time and cost of pursuing non-payment. This measure will not impact on responsible businesses that pay their licence fees on time.

There will be a grace period of 21 days for licence holders to pay their fee. The licence will be reinstated as soon as the fee is paid and the licensing authority must notify the licence holder when their licence has been reinstated.

If an administrative error has occurred or there is a dispute about liability to pay a fee, a licence cannot be suspended under this provision.

What are the benefits to this proposal?

This is a simple change that could save local authorities many thousands of pounds currently spent in recovering unpaid annual fees through councils' own recovery sections and bailiffs. An effective precedent can be found for this approach in the Gambling Act 2005.

Main views of consultation respondents

This proposal received strong support from the vast majority of consultation respondents. This change is hugely welcomed by local authorities who have faced significant costs in the past trying to recover unpaid licence fees.