



Local Authorities fear cost of new licensing laws

On 7 February 2005, The Licensing Act 2003 came into force, fundamentally changing the operation of licensed premises across the UK. The new legislation replaced the previous licensing laws and created a single combined scheme for licensed premises which are used to supply alcohol, provide entertainment or late night refreshment.

Permission to carry on some or all of these activities will be contained in a single licence, the premises licence. There is now the potential for 24 hour opening, 7 days a week (subject to the impact this will have on the local community). The single premises licence will bring together the existing regimes and cut down on bureaucracy.

A new system of personal licenses is also coming in to force. An individual will only be able to hold one personal licence at any one time but it will enable them to move freely between premises where a premises licence is in force. This ends the old regime of tying people to places where there is already a licence. A personal licence does not authorise its holder to supply alcohol anywhere, but only from establishments with a premises licence authorising the supply of alcohol in accordance with the premises licence.

Applications will now be made to the local authority as opposed to the local Magistrates Court. But many operators, ranging from sole publicans to those with large numbers of licensed premises, have expressed their concerns about the implications and complexities of the new legislation and especially the cost of compliance. Many councils are worried they will be unable to fund the new system and have given warning that the cost of policing it - with regular checks on bars, clubs and other licensed premises could be beyond their reach.