

Britain to call time on 24-hour drinking

The Independent, 25 July 2010

Britain will sound the "death knell" for its 24-hour drinking laws under new government plans which aim to tackle the country's chronic binge drinking problem, reports said Thursday.

The legislation for late licensing, introduced by the previous Labour government in 2005, was meant to usher in a so-called "cafe culture" and encourage more moderate drinking habits.

But critics claim it has instead led to an increase in alcohol-related violence and done little to temper the heavy drinking which makes some British town centres no-go zones on Friday and Saturday nights.

Theresa May, Home Secretary in the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition, is to publish proposals which would increase powers for local authorities to act, the Telegraph and Daily Mail newspapers said.

Authorities would be given powers to introduce a ban on drinking after midnight in entire streets or towns, said the Telegraph.

And some pubs and clubs that do stay open later will be made to pay a levy to cover the extra cost of policing, said the reports.

"When these proposals are implemented, this will be the death knell for 24-hour drinking," a government source told the Telegraph.

James Brokenshire, the crime prevention minister, told the paper: "The government believes that the power to make licensing decisions needs to be rebalanced in favour of local communities."

Other measures aimed at curbing heavy drinking will also be proposed as part of the plans, which the Telegraph said could be announced as early as next week.

These include a ban on supermarkets selling alcohol below cost price and an increase in fines for premises that sell to people under the legal age of 18, said the reports.

Time called on 24-hour binge-drinking

The Telegraph, 21 July 2010

Pubs and clubs will be prevented from opening 24 hours a day under plans by the Home Office to tackle problem drinking.

Theresa May, the Home Secretary, is to publish a consultation paper that proposes increased powers for local councils to take action in areas plagued by alcohol-influenced crime and disorder.

The paper will set out an overhaul of the licensing regime to include a ban on shops selling alcohol at below cost price and a "late-night" levy on some pubs and clubs to contribute towards the additional costs of policing.

There are also moves to give councils and the police greater powers to close permanently those shops or bars that serve children repeatedly. Fines for selling alcohol to those who are underage would be doubled.

Local authorities currently have to deal with each licence individually and often find it difficult to identify a specific pub or club at fault. In practice, problems often relate to the cumulative effect of a number of nearby premises staying open late at night.

Under the plans, which could be announced as early as next week, councils would be given powers to introduce a ban on drinking after midnight in entire streets or towns.

The consultation coincides with the Home Office taking full responsibility for alcohol licensing and enforcement. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which was criticised over some of its handling of the 24-hour opening regime, has been stripped of all involvement.

The advent of round-the-clock licensing in 2005 has been blamed for an increase in violence and alcohol abuse, rather than creating the sophisticated "café culture" for which the previous government had hoped.

The Association of Chief Police Officers and the Police Federation have pressed for a tougher stance on binge-drinking. Police chiefs claim that disorder related to alcohol is one of the biggest challenges facing forces. Almost one million violent crimes are committed each year, and alcohol is linked with half.

The Home Office said that licensing decisions needed to be "rebalanced in favour of communities".

One source said the proposals "spell the end" for Labour's round-the-clock drinking.

Gordon Brown admitted at last year's Labour Party conference that 24-hour drinking was "not working" and an Early Morning Restriction Order was introduced in February, but it was criticised for being available only between 3am and 6am.

The Coalition hopes that its proposal to extend the power to midnight in response to the concerns of a local community will address problems on a far greater scale.

Ministers want licensing authorities to have greater flexibility over the control of opening hours to meet the concerns of local people as part of a wider drive to give the public a greater voice in issues that affect them.

One Whitehall source said: "When these proposals are implemented, this will be the death knell for 24-hour drinking."

“Labour unleashed 24-hour drinking on our communities, then they said they had abandoned it but the truth was we were still saddled with it.

“The whole point of this move is that unregulated 24-hour drinking is brought to an end.”

The consultation document will also propose banning shops from selling alcohol at a loss in order to lure shoppers in and encourage bulk buying. It will suggest that councils can introduce levies on late licences to contribute to policing and that the maximum fine for selling alcohol to a minor be doubled to £20,000.

It is estimated that the total cost of coping with the effects of drunkenness and offending, including policing and health care, was £13billion.

Earlier this year, Mrs May said the licensing regime would undergo a “complete review”.

James Brokenshire, the crime prevention minister, said: “We continue to be concerned about the number of alcohol-related incidents and the drink-fuelled violence and disorder that blights many of our towns and cities.

“The Government believes that the power to make licensing decisions needs to be rebalanced in favour of local communities, so that they can decide on the night-time economy they want.

“We have already committed to overhaul the Licensing Act to give local authorities and the police stronger powers to remove licences from, or refuse licences to, any premises causing problems.

“We will toughen the sanctions for those premises found to be persistently selling alcohol to children.”