

Appendix 1

Wednesday, 5 July 2006

VILLAGE HALLS - TEMPORARY EVENT NOTICE LIMITS

Minister of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Shaun Woodward): I am pleased to inform the House that I have carefully considered the responses to the public consultation which took place between 9 August and 5 October 2005 about the temporary event notice regulations made under the Licensing Act 2003. I have also taken into account the Second Stage Research paper on village halls and licensing published on 28 June by Action with Communities in Rural England.

I have concluded that there is no consensus in favour of a further increase of the temporary event notice limits in respect of village halls or similar community premises. In particular, I have noted that residents' associations and local authorities are generally opposed to any further relaxation of these arrangements. The Secretary of State does not therefore plan to change the relevant regulations in the immediate future. For the time being, the limits will remain those approved by Parliament prior to the 2003 Act receiving Royal Assent.

I have also considered the question, raised in response to the consultation, of whether it should be made easier for temporary event notices to be given in bulk, for example, at the start of the calendar year. I have concluded that it would not be appropriate to encourage bulk applications. Temporary event notices may only be subject to challenge by the police on crime prevention grounds. If applications were to be made in bulk in January, the police would have to decide then that they had no objection to a whole series of events stretching many months into the future. If the second or third event resulted in disorder, the police would have lost their right to intervene to stop the fourth and subsequent events from taking place. Against the background of an already liberal regime, I do not consider that it would be right to promote bulk applications. However, I have also noted carefully what has been said by respondents to the consultation and other correspondents about the perceived burden of having to specify a designated premises supervisor on a premises licence granted under the 2003 Act. This individual is required to hold a personal licence. It has been suggested that this is particularly difficult for volunteers involved in village hall and community work. Removing the requirement to specify a designated premises supervisor would require changes to primary legislation. With the approval of Parliament, appropriate change might be made to the primary legislation using a regulatory reform order to be made in due course under the terms of the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Bill which is currently being scrutinised by the House of Lords.

After careful consideration, I am prepared to consider bringing forward such a proposal for Parliamentary consideration subject to the outcome of the public consultation that would form part of regulatory reform order procedures. In anticipation of that public consultation, the Government is not able to give a guarantee now that we would proceed by laying such an order. A great deal will depend on the nature of the responses received.

I expect the Independent Fees Review Panel, which is currently considering a broad range of issues relating to the Licensing Act 2003, to make recommendations in its final Report in November this year which may relate to village halls and similar community premises. I intend to consider any such recommendations with an entirely open mind and if appropriate, would consider expanding the scope of any regulatory reform order that might be proposed.