

L I C E N S I N G

Hospitality and Licensing update - *Modernising NI Liquor Licensing*

A Bill aimed at modernising liquor licensing legislation in Northern Ireland has passed the final stage in the Assembly. The Bill, announced yesterday by Communities Minister Deirdre Hargey, will introduce later hours of service for pubs and hotels and remove restrictions on Easter opening hours. The Bill also seeks to curb harmful aspects of alcohol consumption by prohibiting self-service of alcohol and by placing restrictions on off-sales alcohol promotions and loyalty schemes.

The majority of the changes will be introduced from 1 October 2021, when the Bill itself takes effect. However, some measures will not come into force until 6 April 2022.

Late pubs and hotels will benefit from later hours of service (until 2.00am up to 104 nights per year), as will smaller pubs and clubs (until 1.00am up to 104 nights per year). These establishments will also gain an extension to “drinking-up time” which is set to increase from 30 minutes to 1 hour.

Taprooms will now be subject to a new category of licence whereby local alcohol producers can sell their products directly to customers in limited circumstances. Further changes will allow cinemas to apply for a liquor licence in Northern Ireland for the first time. Sporting clubs will also be permitted to use their facilities for events up to six times per year. Some licensed premises will see a tightening of restrictions with supermarkets facing limitations on in-store alcohol advertising.

Moving forward, the Department for Communities will now undertake a full statutory review of NI licensing legislation. The review itself will begin within the next year and will include an inquiry into the impact of the “surrender principle” i.e. that no new licence may be granted without another licence being surrendered.

This Bill signifies a substantial liberalisation of licensing legislation in Northern Ireland and ultimately will bring the jurisdiction into closer alignment with the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

Please contact our [Licensing team](#) for further information.

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