

# Justice Plan 2021: Reform of gambling regulation

## Justice Plan 2021 clarifies timetable for changes to gambling regulation and licensing laws

The publication by Minister for Justice Helen McEntee on 22 February 2021 of her department's 'Justice Plan 2021' and "Statement of Strategy 2021-2023" brings some welcome clarity to the timeframe for the long awaited reform of Irish gambling regulation. The Plan also signals the department's intention to undertake a significant reform of Irish liquor licensing laws.

### New gambling regulator

In line with the broad overarching objective to improve justice and modernise the courts system, the Justice Plan highlights the department's focus on supporting the Irish economy through regulatory and licensing reform. During the first quarter of 2021, the department aims to begin a formal programme to establish an Irish gambling regulator. The Statement of Strategy 2021-2023 states that the gambling regulator will be focused on public safety and wellbeing, and will cover gambling online and in person, and will have the power to regulate advertising, gambling websites and apps.

The department aims to finalise the responsibilities of the gambling regulator in the second quarter of 2021, before advertising the position of C.E.O. of the regulator in the third quarter of 2021. The Justice Plan also announced the department's intention to publish a general scheme of legislation to reform the licensing regime and provide for the establishment of the regulator in the third quarter of 2021.

The introduction of a gambling regulator has been anticipated for some time, following the approval by the government of the establishment of the office in early 2019. In December 2020, Minister of State, James Browne T.D. indicated that the government would put in place an Irish gambling regulator by summer 2021. While the Spring 2021 Programme for government stated that consideration was being given to what might fall within the remit of the new gambling legislation, it is unlikely that the legislation itself will be introduced before 2022.

### Updated liquor licensing laws

The Justice Plan sets out the department's intention to also reform the alcohol licensing regime. The licensing reform plans include engagement with the Night-Time Economy Taskforce, a group set up by the Minister for Media, Tourism, Arts and Culture to develop Ireland's night-time economy, to review and modernise the alcohol licensing framework.

### Remote anti-money laundering inspections

The Justice Plan outlines the department's commitment to continue carrying out anti-money laundering inspections. Inspections will be conducted remotely while pandemic restrictions remain in place. The department's anti-money laundering compliance unit aims to carry out 50 remote inspections over the course of 2021. There is no indication whether remote inspections will be targeted at a specific sector, and both bookmakers and private members' clubs may be subject to these inspections, though their high street premises remain closed to the public due to the pandemic restrictions.

For further information please contact [Joe Kelly](#) or [Katie O'Connor](#), Betting, Gaming & Licensing partners, [Máire Conneely](#) Betting, Gaming & Licensing associate or any member of the ALG Betting, Gaming & Licensing [team](#).

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