



RESPONSE TO SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON FEE FOR APPLYING TO RENEW A PERSONAL LICENCE

Alcohol Focus Scotland (AFS) is the national charity working to prevent and reduce alcohol harm. We aim to reduce the impact of alcohol in Scotland through the implementation of effective alcohol control policies and legislation. Our strategic priorities include ensuring the effective implementation of licensing legislation by supporting licensing boards and forums to promote the licensing objectives. We regularly engage and work with the full breadth of licensing stakeholders: licensing board members, licensing clerks, Licensing Standards Officers, NHS, police, Alcohol and Drug Partnerships, community and trade, members of local licensing forums, and licensing lawyers.

AFS also provides a range of training courses for people in the licensed trade and for those involved in the regulation of licensing to meet the requirements of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005; this includes the Scottish Certificate for Personal Licence Holders Training, Licensing Board Members Training, and Licensing Standards Officers Training.

1. Do you agree that a fee for renewal of a personal licence should be introduced?

Yes

2. Why?

AFS would fully agree that, given the amount of work the renewal process will entail for licensing boards, and existing resource pressures already facing boards, there is a strong case for introducing a fee to help boards cover the cost of administration.

3. Do you agree that £50 is an appropriate new fee level?

No

4. Why?

AFS does not believe £50 will likely be sufficient to help boards cover the cost of administration. This is particularly so when considering the resourcing pressures that already exist within the licensing system, and developments since personal licence application fees were first set at £50 in 2007.

AFS is concerned that the majority of licensing fees are currently set at unacceptably low levels, and it is within this context that the new fee should be considered. A 2014 Scottish Government review¹ of alcohol licensing fees found that the majority of licensing board

¹ Leishman, R., Lees, F., Gilder, P. & Marsh, R. (2014). Review of Alcohol Licensing Fees. Edinburgh: Scottish Government Social Research <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2014/02/8420/1>

respondents were not covering their costs with fee income – the total deficit across the whole of Scotland was estimated to be in the order of £2.6m, in the context of an estimated total spend of £9.5m. This represented recovery of only about 72% of costs. The review also identified that the majority of licensing boards felt personal licence fees were too low.

With cost data submitted for only 15 licensing boards as part of the aforementioned review, robust data on the overall picture across Scotland could not be established and conclusions on whether most boards were achieving cost recovery or were making a surplus or deficit could not be drawn. However, AFS regularly hears concerns from boards and other licensing stakeholders that there is a lack of resources to properly administer the system. For example, during a series of regional licensing seminars, hosted by AFS in 2016, many stakeholders commented that licensing fees were currently insufficient to ensure full cost recovery. This supports the findings of the 2014 review. Licensing boards are also now required to prepare and publish an annual financial report detailing any income and expenditure incurred during the year. The reports for the financial year 2016/17 required to be published by the end of June 2017, and these should help give an indication of the extent to which full cost recovery is being achieved.

There have also been a number of developments since personal licence application fees were first set at £50 (in 2007) that must now be taken into account. In particular, licensing boards will shortly be required to conduct immigration checks on all personal licence holders, which is likely to place further strain on their resources. Furthermore, when taking account of inflation, £50 by today's standards is worth significantly less than it was in 2007.

5. If not £50, what do you consider would be an appropriate fee level?

No comment: Stakeholders with direct involvement in administering the system would be best placed to advise on the specifics of the most appropriate fee level to meet the costs of the renewal process.

6. What evidence, based on cost recovery, can you supply for an appropriate fee level for renewal of a personal licence?

N/A

7. Are there any other comments you would wish to make about the renewal process or proposed fee?

N/A