



UK Government

National Licensing Policy Framework

For the hospitality and leisure sectors

England and Wales

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Home Office and the Department of Business and Trade

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Foreword

Over the past 20 years, the licensing regime has enabled over 200,000 businesses to operate, including over 145,000 'on-trade' venues such as restaurants, pubs, cafes, nightclubs and entertainment venues. Many committed professionals work within the licensing regime to process applications, hear residents' concerns, and support businesses and entrepreneurs. Plenty of good practice exists, with authorities working collaboratively to foster vibrant, inclusive and safe places.

The 4 statutory objectives – public safety, prevention of crime and disorder, prevention of public nuisance, and protection of children from harm – remain vital. However, when 1 in 5 high street properties stands empty in some areas, licensing must also support broader ambitions: business investment and growth, high street revival, businesses supporting rural communities, festivals and events, local jobs, and community cohesion.

Hospitality and leisure businesses have made a significant contribution to local economies and communities, helping to create places where people want to live, work, visit and invest. If we are to support them, we need to provide these key sectors with the ability to invest and adapt so that they can provide the types of services that people today want, need and deserve.

To achieve this, we need a licensing system that is flexible and responsive – a tool for enabling innovation and investment, not just managing risk. Licences should be granted on the terms sought, with conditions that are necessary and proportionate, ensuring they are fit for purpose and support the evolving needs of businesses, consumers and communities. Licensing decisions should complement, not undermine, planning and regeneration efforts. By making licensing predictable and proportionate, we aim to boost local economies and support local communities, create good jobs, keep costs down for consumers, and help meet the government's target to reduce administrative costs of regulatory burdens by 25%.

This Framework sets out a strategic vision for a modern licensing system, one that safeguards the public while empowering businesses to adapt, invest, and succeed in a changing world.

Introduction

We aim to ensure a responsive and enabling licensing system for hospitality and leisure businesses that not only protects and safeguards communities, but supports:

- investment in existing and new venues – providing a wide range of cultural and social experiences, from dining experiences to theatre and live music to family friendly experiences
- Extended consumer choice – giving local communities and visitors greater freedom over where, when and how they enjoy leisure time
- Regeneration – unlocking the potential of day and night-time economies helping drive investment, employment and vibrancy in the places and communities that need it most

- Better regulation – reducing unnecessary bureaucracy and enabling businesses to adapt quickly to changing consumer expectations

This is the first iteration of the National Licensing Policy Framework. It recognises and builds on existing good practice by licensing authorities and licensees across the country, providing a high-level strategic steer for how the current licensing system should operate, both in safeguarding communities and enabling responsible hospitality and leisure businesses to succeed.

The framework has been developed in response to the call for evidence on the Licensing Policy Taskforce proposals, which showed strong support for the overarching objective of a consistent, transparent licensing system which empowers local authorities while promoting economic growth, cultural development, public safety and community wellbeing.

This new strategic steer from government should help to achieve these aims. We will monitor its impact carefully and in discussion with a range of stakeholders, consider whether other steps, such as making growth of the hospitality sector a statutory licensing objective, may be needed to help deliver these outcomes

We have heard from hospitality businesses that disproportionate licensing conditions can stifle their growth and reduce options for consumers. We are therefore asking licensing authorities to explicitly consider the need to promote growth and deliver economic benefits in their decisions and setting this out in the first National Licensing Policy Framework.

The government is committed to working in partnership with local authorities, hospitality and leisure businesses, and other stakeholders to develop future iterations of the framework. This will include responding to wider recommendations of the Licensing Taskforce. While some reforms may require legislation in due course, the government does not wish to delay progress. This framework has therefore been developed at pace to provide immediate direction and start seeing impacts on the ground.

Scope of the framework

The government wants to ensure that hospitality, leisure, cultural and night-life venues are supported to thrive in a safe way. This National Licensing Policy Framework therefore applies exclusively to on-trade premises - that is, premises authorised under the Licensing Act 2003 for on-sales of alcohol, regulated entertainment or late-night refreshment. This includes, but is not restricted to pubs, bars, restaurants, cafés, and hotels as well as entertainment and cultural venues such as theatres, cinemas, concert halls, festivals and events. For the purposes of this framework, the premises includes beer gardens and licensed pavement areas.

The framework does not apply to off-trade premises, which are licensed primarily for the sale of alcohol for consumption off the premises. This includes, but is not limited to, off-licences, supermarkets, convenience stores and specialist retail outlets selling alcohol for takeaway. The guidance under section 182 of the Licensing Act 2003 continues to apply to all premises. Other statements of government policy may be material when preparing plans for deciding applications, such as licensing circulars and Written Ministerial Statements.

A national framework for a balanced licensing system

This National Licensing Policy Framework sets out the government's strategic vision for a modern, consistent and pro-growth premises licensing system for England and Wales and how this should be applied in practice. It aims to align licensing practices with national priorities including economic growth, cultural development, jobs, regeneration, public safety and community wellbeing. It also can guide local statements of licensing policy and related strategies with wider government priorities for the economy and for society.

The framework builds on the Licensing Act 2003 and guidance issued under section 182 of the Licensing Act 2003 and aims to provide a strategic steer to help support the original intention of the Act, including supporting the viability of hospitality and leisure businesses so that they can invest and adapt to changing consumer demand.

Supporting a changing hospitality and leisure landscape

Hospitality and leisure businesses remain central to community life, with traditional venues such as cafes, restaurants, theatres, pubs and nightclubs remaining important social spaces. However, consumer preferences have evolved significantly in recent decades. There has been a marked shift away from alcohol-centric socialising toward more diverse, experience-led activities - including live music, interactive entertainment, and health-conscious offerings such as low and no-alcohol drinks.

This changing landscape presents both opportunities and challenges. Businesses need the flexibility to evolve and invest - in their premises, programming, and service models - and a licensing system that supports innovation while maintaining public safety. The Licensing Policy Taskforce highlighted the need for this framework to support a more consistent, transparent and pro-growth licensing system.

The framework should enable responsible operators to diversify, with proportionate and responsive regulation. It recognises the value of entertainment and late-night refreshment in sustaining vibrant, inclusive high streets and town centres, while upholding the licensing objectives as set out in the Act.

Status and legal effect

This framework is non-statutory guidance designed to support consistent, lawful and proportionate licensing. Licensing authorities must have regard to the Secretary of State's Guidance under section 182 of the Licensing Act 2003 and to their Statements of Licensing Policy. The framework does not displace those duties, create new legal obligations, or restrict authorities' discretion to determine each application on its merits.

Authorities should, however, take this framework into account as guidance. At the next review, authorities should explain in their statement of licensing policy how they have had regard to it. Where any inconsistency arises between this framework and the 2003 Act or section 182 Guidance, the latter prevails. Decisions must be necessary and proportionate, non-discriminatory and consistent with the Regulators' Code.

General references to licensing policies in the framework should be applied in a way that is proportionate to the type of plan being produced, considering existing legislation and policy. The government recognises the importance of licensing policy being applied at a local level but notes this framework should allow for broader government priorities to be considered in licensing decisions.

Strategic direction for a modern licensing system

As described, the National Licensing Policy Framework sets out a clear and forward-looking vision for a licensing system that protects communities while enabling responsible businesses to grow, adapt and thrive. It reaffirms the importance of the 4 statutory licensing objectives as the foundation of a safe and well-regulated hospitality and leisure sectors.

But the framework also recognises the need to go further. Licensing policy must reflect the evolving role of hospitality, leisure and entertainment in modern society, and support wider government ambitions around economic growth, public health, and cultural vitality. It must be enabling as well as protective: deliver licences that are granted on the terms sought, with conditions that are necessary and proportionate, ensuring they are fit for purpose and support the evolving needs of businesses and communities.

To that end, the framework provides a strategic steer for licensing authorities, central government and industry to work together in support of:

- business resilience and growth – licensing should be proportionate, evidence-based and responsive, giving responsible operators the freedom and flexibility to meet changing consumer expectations, diversify their offer, and invest in innovation
- place-making and regeneration – licensing and planning policy should work in harmony to support vibrant, mixed-use areas, revitalise high streets, and unlock investment in the night-time economy. Licensing should be a tool for shaping successful places, not just managing risks
- cultural and community life – licensing should help facilitate live music, theatre, dancing and other forms of entertainment that enrich local identity and bring people together — whether in rural villages or city centres
- consumer choice and tourism – licensing should support a diverse range of venues and experiences that reflect the UK's rich hospitality and leisure offer and meet the needs of both domestic and international visitors

Licensing is only about regulated activities within licensed premises. It should continue to play a key role in supporting safe day and night-time environments and ensuring that venues operate responsibly and contribute positively to their local area. Licensing should promote safe, regulated environments for socialising, and as part of the statutory objectives, protect children by preventing underage exposure and access to alcohol. It can also support the availability of low and no-alcohol options and encourage venues that are inclusive and family friendly.

This framework invites licensing authorities to take a strategic, place-based approach that supports long-term success for businesses and communities alike.

Implementation

As with the whole framework, this section is advisory and non-statutory. The recommendations show how the government's strategic steer can be implemented within

existing powers and resources. We are aware some licensing authorities have already adopted good practice, which the government commends.

Predictability, consistency and supporting growth

Licensing authorities should use this framework to guide the revision of their Statements of Licensing Policy, inform training, and review local approaches to ensure consistency, transparency and alignment with national strategic aims.

Strategic alignment

Licensing policies should complement local economic, cultural, and night-time economy strategies, and work in harmony with planning policy to avoid conflict. This includes applying the Agent of Change principle, ensuring new developments near existing licensed premises take responsibility for mitigating impacts such as noise, rather than placing undue burdens on established venues. Authorities are encouraged to embed this principle in local licensing guidance and collaborate with planning colleagues to protect the viability of pubs, music venues, cultural spaces and events.

Framework hours

Many authorities publish evidence-based guidelines (“framework hours”) indicating typical opening and closing times for different premises types. These are reference points, not blanket conditions, and each application is still considered individually. Premises should be granted licences under the terms sought, with the existence of guideline hours alone not grounds to refuse.

Service standards

Service standards set out expected timelines for processing applications, helping applicants understand what to expect. Authorities without these practices should consider adopting them to improve predictability and transparency, while retaining case-by-case decision-making.

Permissive by design

The Licensing Act is designed to be enabling, not prescriptive. In line with good practice, many authorities are already taking a light-touch approach to regulating compliant and responsible businesses, focusing on supporting entrepreneurship, innovation, investment and customer experience. Licensing policies should be framed to encourage operators to demonstrate how they will manage risks to the licensing objectives to a reasonably practicable level, rather than imposing unnecessary constraints.

Proportionate and evidence-led decision-making

Licensing decisions should be based on clear, relevant evidence and proportionate to the risks identified. This includes both specific risks (for example, noise complaints, crime hotspots) and broader contextual risks, such as the known prevalence of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in the night-time economy. Decisions to proceed to a hearing should also be evidence-led. The Taskforce made recommendations about hearings and appeals which the government will be examining in due course.

Avoiding blanket conditions

Conditions must be tailored to the specific premises and risks and should not duplicate requirements under other regimes (for example, planning, fire safety, environmental

health, or Martyn's Law where applicable). Model conditions may be used as drafting aids but should not be defaults/prerequisites and risks creating a blanket regime by proxy. Where Cumulative Impact Assessment Policies are used, these should be evidenced-based, not blanket bans.

Licensing decisions should apply a necessary and proportionate approach. This means that any conditions or steps taken must be reasonable in relation to the risks identified without placing undue burden on the business. Modest, contributory measures may be appropriate where they support safer, more inclusive environments. Authorities should cite specific data, locality intelligence, or patterns linked to the premises or area.

Keeping licences specific and fit for purpose

Some licensing authorities already take a proactive and pragmatic approach to keeping licences up to date and fit for purpose. This includes conducting regular visits to licensed premises and operating licence simplification processes that help remove outdated, unnecessary or overly restrictive conditions, particularly minor ones that no longer serve a clear purpose. Where conditions do contribute meaningfully to public safety or the licensing objectives, they should be retained.

Licensing should be enabling, not unnecessarily burdensome, and authorities are encouraged to take a light-touch approach when engaging with responsible operators. Simplification efforts should be collaborative, with licensees supported to demonstrate how they manage risks effectively, and with a focus on maintaining safe, well-regulated environments without unnecessary red tape.

Risk-based regulation

Many licensing authorities already take a risk-based approach to licensing, focusing their efforts on addressing the most significant risks to the licensing objectives. However, some businesses report that this is not always the case. This framework supports and encourages a risk-based approach, recognising that most licensed premises operate responsibly and do not require intensive oversight.

In line with existing good practice, businesses should consider:

- targeted oversight – authorities should consider triaging premises visits and licensing decisions so that compliant, low-risk premises, including non-contentious Temporary Event Notices, are subject to a lighter-touch approach. This allows licensing teams to focus their resources on problem premises or locations, using graduated, problem-solving enforcement where issues persist. Where possible, visits and inspections should be co-ordinated, including licensing, environmental health, trading standards and planning
- smarter use of data – licensing authorities should make use of available data such as crime reports, complaints, ambulance demand, and licensing reviews to inform local policies and individual decisions. This evidence should be used to identify patterns, prioritise interventions, and support proportionate responses. Authorities should record concise reasons for any measures imposed, showing how they are evidenced, appropriate and proportionate to the specific risks identified
- business certainty – where consistent with local policy, evidence, and legal limits, authorities should look to grant longer-duration permissions, such as pavement licences, to provide greater certainty for businesses. Short-term or restrictive permissions should only be used where there is a clear legal or evidenced reason to do so

- light-touch for responsible operators – licensing should be permissive by design. Authorities should avoid unnecessary prescription and instead support operators to demonstrate how they are managing risks to the licensing objectives to a level that manages risks effectively and proportionately. This approach fosters innovation, reduces regulatory burden, and builds trust between regulators and businesses
- graduated enforcement – where issues arise, authorities should adopt a graduated response, starting with informal engagement and support, and escalating only where necessary. Enforcement should be proportionate, transparent, and focused on resolving problems rather than penalising businesses unnecessarily

This approach ensures that licensing remains focused, fair, and enabling – supporting responsible operators while maintaining public safety and confidence.

Partnership working first

Many authorities are already aware that effective licensing depends on strong local partnerships, and there are many good examples. It is a matter of good practice that licensing authorities work collaboratively with planning teams, responsible authorities, businesses and communities to ensure that licensing decisions support wider local priorities and deliver safe, vibrant places to live, work, study, visit and invest. Licensing authorities should consider the following:

- strategic coordination with planning – licensing authorities should engage proactively with planning teams during plan-making and site allocation processes. Licensing policies should be aligned with Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans, and regeneration strategies to avoid policy conflict and support coherent place-making. This includes applying the Agent of Change principle. It is important that licensing decisions do not undermine planning decision, which take primacy.
- integration with neighbourhood planning – licensing committees should consider the aspirations of Neighbourhood Plans when determining applications. These plans reflect community priorities and can help guide licensing decisions that support local identity, cultural life, and economic development.
- alignment with mayoral strategies – where licensing authorities operate within areas covered by a Mayor or Mayoral Strategic Authority, they should have regard to the Mayor’s strategic plan, including Local Growth Plans and cultural or night-time economy strategies. These plans set out long-term priorities for investment, regeneration and public safety, and licensing should support their delivery.
- early engagement and mediation – in line with the Section 182 guidance, authorities should encourage early dialogue between applicants, responsible authorities, and objectors before formal hearings or appeals are initiated. Mediation and informal resolution can reduce conflict, improve understanding, and lead to more constructive outcomes. If not already doing so, licensing teams may wish to offer facilitated pre-application discussions or mediation services where appropriate.
- collaborative problem-solving – licensing should be seen as a shared responsibility. Authorities are encouraged to work with businesses, community safety partnerships, public health teams, and cultural organisations to co-design solutions that manage risks while enabling growth and innovation.

- transparent and inclusive processes – partnership working should be underpinned by clear communication, shared evidence, and inclusive engagement. In line with existing good practice, authorities should ensure that all stakeholders, including residents, businesses, and community groups, have meaningful opportunities to contribute to licensing policy and decisions.

Licensing is most effective when it is embedded in a wider ecosystem of local governance and place-making. By prioritising partnership working, authorities can ensure that licensing supports safe, inclusive and economically resilient communities.

High streets and communities

The role of hospitality and leisure businesses

Hospitality and leisure businesses are central to creating safe, vibrant high streets and supporting community health and wellbeing. Licensed premises provide regulated spaces where people can socialise safely, reducing risks associated with unregulated environments. They also generate employment and offer inclusive spaces for communities to come together, strengthening social cohesion and contributing to mental and physical health.

While licensing applies only to licensable activities within licensed premises, many businesses voluntarily adopt measures that go beyond statutory requirements, demonstrating leadership in promoting safer streets and healthier communities. This should be recognised and commended.

Tackling crime and anti-social behaviour

Licensed premises play a vital role in creating welcoming spaces for people to socialise. Good licensing authorities and operators are committed to tackling crime and anti-social behaviour and recognise that these risks need to be managed in a way that is reasonably practicable to ensure venues remain safe, inclusive, and enjoyable for all. The police play an important role, with dedicated licensing officers supporting and advising compliant businesses as well as taking necessary and proportionate action against irresponsible businesses to keep the public safe. In particular, the government recognises the contribution made by policing to the licensing regime.

The government is committed to reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, including halving incidents of violence against women and girls. The deployment of additional neighbourhood policing officers and staff will support these goals, alongside local partnership working.

Many operators already demonstrate strong leadership in this space, adopting a range of voluntary measures to promote safety and prevent harm. The government recognises and commends this good practice and encourages all operators to consider how they can contribute to safer environments. It is not the role of licensing officers to prescribe the adoption of voluntary schemes safety measures, unless there is clear evidence that such steps are necessary to promote the licensing objectives. However, authorities can encourage the uptake of good practice, particularly where it can help mitigate known or emerging risks.

Responsible operators should be supported to demonstrate how they are managing risks to the licensing objectives to a reasonably practicable level.

Community health and wellbeing

Hospitality and leisure businesses are more than places to eat and drink, they are hubs of social life that underpin community cohesion. By creating safe, inclusive environments and supporting wellbeing initiatives, they contribute significantly to safer streets, healthier lifestyles and stronger communities. This is not only good for communities, it is good for business, particularly given the increasing demand for low and no-alcohol drinks and for more food-led and experiential hospitality.

Responsible licensed premises therefore play a positive role in protecting public health and supporting healthy communities. By providing regulated environments, they help reduce excessive alcohol consumption and prevent injuries or risky behaviours caused by intoxication, providing welcoming spaces that help address isolation and loneliness.

There are lots of examples of voluntary good practice, including supporting people to drink within the [UK's Chief Medical Officers' low risk drinking guidelines](#) of 14 units of alcohol per week spread over 3 or more days with several alcohol-free days each week, and promoting customer wellbeing, including:

- health-conscious offerings – expanding menus to include a range of low and no-alcohol beverages and healthy food options, providing customers with information to support informed decisions
- activity-led social experiences - hosting events such as live music, quiz nights, board games, and cultural evenings encourages social interaction that is not centred solely on alcohol consumption, helping to moderate drinking
- inclusive safe spaces for all – creating welcoming environments for families, non-drinking social groups, and individuals seeking alternative leisure options or just company
- partnerships with local organisations – collaborating with charities and health bodies to tackle loneliness and promote wellbeing – for example, coffee mornings for older residents or hosting community fitness classes. Additionally, engaging with local public health teams to understand local patterns of alcohol-related harm and explore joint intervention
- supporting government/sector-led/charity initiatives – many operators work closely with organisations such as Pub is the Hub, the Inn Crowd, and the Centre for Ageing Better, showing how the sector contributes to wider social goals, including tackling loneliness and isolation
- promoting low-risk drinking – to help create these inclusive environments, avoiding promotions that encourage excessive consumption, such as “all-you-can-drink” offers and supporting campaigns such as THINK! “Drink a Little, Risk a Lot” to highlight the dangers of drink driving. Operators should protect children by preventing underage sales and good operators should monitor and recognise the signs of intoxication so that they can intervene early

In line with the principles of proportionate regulation, these should not be mandated through licensing conditions. However, where licensed premises do not comply with their legal obligations and licence conditions, the government fully expects licensing authorities to take the appropriate action.

Monitoring, evaluation and review

The government recognises the importance of monitoring the impact of the National Licensing Policy Framework. In response to the call for evidence, many stakeholders, particularly licensing authorities, emphasised the need to avoid creating new reporting burdens or resource impacts, especially given the non-statutory nature of this first iteration. While some respondents called for more robust monitoring, the prevailing view was that a proportionate, light-touch approach is appropriate at this stage.

Accordingly, the government will track the impact of this framework using existing data and feedback mechanisms, without introducing new reporting requirements. This will include stakeholder feedback on the framework's impact and data on on-trade premises, feeding into future iterations and informing whether further action is needed, including reserving the right to make it statutory.

Licensing authorities may, as part of their normal policy cycle, take a light-touch look at their own outcomes using data they already hold and routine feedback from responsible authorities, operators and communities. There should therefore be no impact on licensing authority resources.

The framework will be reviewed 6 months after publication to assess early impact and whether further clarification is needed. If the strategic steer is not having the intended effect on consistency, predictability and enabling growth alongside the licensing objectives, the government will consider options to strengthen the approach (for example, clearer expectations, examples or statutory changes) and engage further with partners. The framework is then likely to be subject to further periodic reviews.

As the framework develops, the government will work with stakeholders to consider whether a more detailed set of monitoring tools is needed, ensuring any future approach remains proportionate and evidence based.

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