

**INDEPENDENT LICENCE FEES REVIEW PANEL MEETING
3 AUGUST 2005, DCMS**

Present:	Sir Les Elton	(Chair)
	Clive Allen	Surrey-Heath Borough Council
	Duncan Bowdler	Co-Operative Group
	Francis Patton	Punch Taverns
	Brian Wilson	Commission for Rural Communities
	Paul Woods	Newcastle City Council
	Brian Leonard	DCMS, Director Industry
	Wendy Shales	DCMS, Panel Secretariat
	Susan Moore	DCMS, Minutes

1. Welcome and Introductions

1.1 Brian Leonard welcomed the Panel to its first meeting and thanked them for contributing to this very important review of the licensing fees. He provided a brief overview of the background to the Licensing Act 2003 and the fees regulations. Following publication of the regulations in January 2005, Ministers agreed that there would be an independent assessment of the fees regime. The Panel were asked to consider:

- what can be done under present legislation;
- what might be considered for future legislation.

2. Terms of Reference

2.1 An amendment was discussed by the Panel in order to achieve greater breadth from the review process.

Post meeting note – the proposed amendment was a material change to the Panel's ToR, and it was agreed that the current ToR would be clarified to make explicit the breadth of their consideration. When the Interim Report was submitted it was agreed that substantive amendment/s might form part of the recommendations.

3. How the Panel will Operate

3.1 Panel members agreed to work together constructively in order to accommodate the large number of stakeholder interests in the fees regime.

3.2 Sir Les reminded Panel members of the importance of their independence and neutrality in the review process, whilst bringing their own particular expertise and understanding to discussions and considerations.

3.3 Draft minutes of Panel meetings would be circulated, and once agreed, placed on the DCMS website. Individual comments would not be attributed unless specifically requested. Panel members would be encouraged to send through agenda items to the Secretariat in good time for the next meeting.

3.4 All press enquiries that Panel members received concerning the Panel's work would be directed to the DCMS Press Office in the first instance. The Secretariat will provide a press officer contact for all media enquiries.

3.5 Other interested parties would be asked to address their enquiries, in writing, to Sir Les, c/o the Secretariat.

3.6 The Panel agreed it was important to seek "best practice" from licensing authorities when considering the fee levels. This should take account of:-

The receipt and processing of licence applications during transition, (a one-off exercise).

effective and efficient administration, inspection and enforcement activity.

careful thought regarding other issues as deemed appropriate.

3.7 The Panel discussed the issue of the review being wider than fees alone, including for example the cost of training.

4. Timetable for Action – Interim Report

4.1 A provisional timetable for the production of the Interim Review by the autumn had already been circulated to Panel members in advance of the meeting. It was noted that a month had been lost due to the cancellation of the first Panel meeting on 7 July.

Written Evidence

4.2 Panel members agreed a tight timetable for the receipt of written evidence for the Interim Review, although it was envisaged that many stakeholders would be able to provide preliminary comments fairly quickly, and then provide more substantive evidence later in the review process. The Panel agreed the draft list of c70 stakeholder organisations which would be included in the consultation process. A small number of additional organisations including the Rural Shops Alliance would be added to the list (final list attached).

4.3 Secretariat to ask the Local Government Association for a comprehensive list of licensing authorities. – Not held at this stage

Oral Evidence Gathering Exercise

4.4 The Panel also agreed a shorter list of key stakeholder organisations (c20) representing a wide range of interests who would also be invited to give oral evidence to the Panel. Those meetings would be arranged by the Secretariat during late August/early September. Written evidence received from those stakeholders would be condensed and circulated to all Panel members in advance of the meetings by the Secretariat.

4.5 Panel members also agreed they would meet the Hampton Review Implementation Team (Cabinet Office) as part of the interim review.

4.6 The format of the meetings would allow free flow of evidence without specific questions, although the Panel would ask any questions considered appropriate.

4.7 Sir Les would Chair and be present at each oral evidence meeting with at least two other Panel members.

Collation of Evidence

4.8 All the evidence received (written and orally) would be collated and sorted into various subject areas by the Secretariat. The Panel would then consider that in the round at the next full Panel meeting, prior to commencing the drafting of the Interim Review.

4.9 An invitation had been received from Westminster City Council for Panel members to join their enforcement team during inspections. Panel members would confirm with the Secretariat whether they wished to take up this offer. It was agreed that a member of the Secretariat would accompany the Panel.

4.10 Sir Les noted that, if the Panel thought it would be beneficial, some analytical research could be commissioned. However, at this stage it was felt any work of this nature would be better utilised later in the evidence gathering process.

5. Date of Next Meeting

5.1 The next full Panel meeting will be held at 12.30 on 23 September in DCMS.