Finance Committee

Alcohol (Licensing, Public Health and Criminal Justice) (Scotland) Bill

Submission from Aberdeenshire Council

Response

1. Did you take part in any consultation exercise preceding the Bill and, if so, did you comment on the financial assumptions made?

Aberdeenshire Council participated in the separate call for Evidence and have provided consultation responses to all relevant consultations relating to licensing. Comments were made in the broadest terms relating to concerns over additional cost and resource implications on local authorities.

2. If applicable, do you believe your comments on the financial assumptions have been accurately reflected in the FM?

The financial assumptions have been fairly reflected in the FM.

3. Did you have sufficient time to contribute to the consultation exercise?

Yes.

4. If the Bill has any financial implications for your organisation, do you believe that they have been accurately reflected in the FM? If not, please provide details.

The Bill would have financial implications for Aberdeenshire Council’s Licensing Standards Officers although it is agreed that the additional duties would be a marginal increase. It is unfair to suggest that the impact of informing and updating all licence holders is a minor administration cost as each local authority will have differing numbers of licence holder thus creating an unfair and differential impact on budgets in different areas. It is difficult to provide comment on the implications of the container marking scheme where the FM does not provide estimates and indeed states that it there will be costs but that it has been difficult to obtain information about what these costs will entail. Aberdeenshire Council agree that the Scottish Ministers should look to raise the maximum licensing fee in order that appropriate costs can be covered. This would have particular relevance for Occasional licences.

5. Do you consider that the estimated costs and savings set out in the FM are reasonable and accurate?

Aberdeenshire Council consider that not enough detail has been provided in relation to actual costings.
6. If applicable, are you content that your organisation can meet any financial costs that it might incur as a result of the Bill? If not, how do you think these costs should be met?

Again, without having more detail, it is difficult to answer this question fully. Should Scottish ministers increase the maximum fee level, then it would be possible for Licensing Boards to meet the financial impacts. If Scottish Ministers do not look at increasing the fee that can be recouped from applicants then additional funding should be made available to Boards in the light of increasing budget pressures.

7. Does the FM accurately reflect the margins of uncertainty associated with the Bill’s estimated costs and with the timescales over which they would be expected to arise?

There are difficulties in interpretation of parts of the Bill – what is constituted as an “active” community council? How is this to be established by Licensing Boards? Should a check be done for each application as to whether or not a community council is still active? The time that may be spent researching this could be more productively used given tight resources. There is also the impact of increased levels of correspondence leading to increased staff resources, printing and postal. In some areas, these costs might be small but in some densely populated areas, there is potential for a much larger bill. The FM does state that there is uncertainty around the proposals in the Bill which is welcomed, however makes it hard to comment where implications are unknown.

8. Do you believe that the FM reasonably captures any costs associated with the Bill? If not, which other costs might be incurred and by whom?

As far as possible to estimate.