

Levy to deter thousands of pubs from opening late

More than 10,000 pubs and clubs will stop serving after midnight thanks to the Government's drive to end 24 hour drinking.

The Telegraph, 22 January 2012

A quarter of premises with late licences are expected to curb their opening hours to avoid having to pay a new levy designed to help tackle alcohol-fuelled disorder, according to Home Office estimates.

Under a new power that comes in to force in Autumn, local authorities will be able to impose an annual "late night" levy of up to £4,440 on pubs and clubs that open after midnight.

It is to ensure venues contribute to the costs of tackling drink-related violence and disorder which stems from extended drinking.



The move is one of a series of measures that will end Labour's 24 hour licensing regime.

Another measure will give councils the power to impose a blanket ban on opening between midnight and 6am in targeted areas, such as entire streets or towns, where there has been repeated problems.

And it emerged yesterday that the mere threat of having to pay a levy is likely to deter thousands of pubs and clubs from staying open.

There are currently around 120,000 premises licensed to serve alcohol, of which just over 40,000 can stay open past midnight.

The Home Office estimates that the levy will lead to one in four late night premises – around 10,000 – cutting their opening hours so they are no longer eligible to pay it.

Figures in 2010 found Labour's 24-hour drinking laws led to the number of licensed premises in Britain reaching record levels.

About 166,000 outlets are allowed to sell alcohol, the highest figure since official records began in 1905.

The increase has been driven by the relaxation of drinking laws in 2005 which effectively made it easier to get a licence and harder to oppose one.

Lord Henley, the crime prevention minister, said: "Where there is a vibrant late night economy, with premises open in to the early hours, then the local authority should have the flexibility to charge for a contribution towards any additional policing that this generates.

"Taxpayers should not simply be left to pick up this cost. People who enjoy a night out often visit a variety of premises and it is appropriate that the costs are shared between these businesses."

The Home Office impact assessment said the average premises will pay around £800 but larger premises could pay as much as £4,440.

It predicts the levy will raise around £142,000 a year for the average local council, enough to pay for up to an extra 4,000 police hours.

It said: "Police forces have indicated that they would feel justified in spending the levy money on tackling a wide range of offences, on account of them being alcohol related.

"These can include violence against the person, sexual offences, robbery, theft of or from a motor vehicle, drugs, public disorder and complaint or nuisances."

Authorities will also be allowed to keep 30 per cent of levy revenues to spend on other areas related to alcohol-fuelled problems.

That could mean more taxi marshals and so-called "booze buses" in town and city centres, the impact assessment said.

Booze buses have been piloted in London. They contain medics and park up in busy nightspots to deal instantly with those suffering from the effects of drinking too much.

The Home Office is currently consulting on what premises should be exempt from paying the levy, including country pubs, hotels and restaurants.

Along with the levy, local councils will also have the power to impose early morning restriction orders (EMROs) to ban the serving of alcohol between midnight and 6am.

The aim would be to impose them in certain areas where there has been repeated trouble and will effectively end 24 hours drinking there.