

COUNCILLOR BARRY COPPINGER

Our Ref: BC/MEH/DAVIES1 12.08.05

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Mr Chris Davies
Members' Office Manager
Members' Office

Dear Mr Davies

I fully support the move of licensing to a single local licensing authority role with the proposal to make the decision making process more accountable through the use of democratically elected Licensing Committees.

However, it has been brought to my attention that this democratic accountability is not being fully achieved due to the restrictions put on Ward Councillors in representing their residents' views on licensing applications in their community.

My main concern is that the Licensing Authority is specifically advised against seeking representations from the public, and residents who live in the area affected by a licensing application are only made aware of an application by way of a public notice in the local press, and signage placed on the premises by applicants.

In Middlesbrough we have taken the additional step of informing Ward Councillors and Community Councils of each application. However, Ward Councillors are unable to make representations to the licensing committee in their own right and must wait to be asked by residents/businesses to represent their views. In practice, the public notice and premises signage is not sufficient to make residents aware of the application.

In addition to this, Ward Councillors living in close proximity to licensed premises are unable to make a representation or attend Licensing Committee if they are deemed to have a prejudicial interest, for instance because they reside in close proximity to the premises in question. In these circumstances, Ward Councillors may only make a written representation to the licensing department.

In order to realise full local accountability, I would like to propose that the Council contacts the Department for Culture, Media and Sport requesting a review of the guidance relating to the consultation process that local licensing authorities can undertake, in order to enable the licensing authority to contact residents directly regarding applications in their community. This will ensure that any local needs and concerns are fully and properly considered by the licensing committee. Obviously, such a change in process could have associated additional costs which would require additional funding from Central Government.

This is a period of significant change within licensing, and I would be grateful if you would consider this approach to fulfil the wider community interest in licensing decisions.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barry Coppinger'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial 'B' and a long, sweeping tail.

Councillor Barry Coppinger
LABOUR COUNCILLOR FOR GRESHAM WARD