

Fifty councils join campaign to ban smoking in public

By Jill Sherman
Whitehall Editor

MANY of England's biggest cities and nearly 50 councils are lining up behind Liverpool to back a ban on smoking in enclosed public places.

Sheffield, Manchester, Leeds, Bristol, Newcastle upon Tyne and 33 London boroughs are all supporting smoking bans in pubs, clubs and restaurants in an attempt to put further pressure on the Government to introduce a national ban.

The leaders of the London boroughs voted last week to put forward a private Bill in Parliament to try to get a local ban through. The Bill is being drafted by the Association of Local Government (ALG) and has to be submitted to Parliament by the end of next month if it is going to have a chance to be included in the next legislative session.

A spokesman for the ALG said that the Bill would be adoptive, which would allow any London borough to impose a local ban if it wished. But it would make little sense if one council went ahead and a neighbouring one decided against.

On Wednesday Liverpool voted to do the same, although its private Bill would

apply only to the Liberal Democrat-run city council. It has been racing against its northwest rival Manchester to impose the first English ban. Rates of smoking in both cities are among the highest in the country.

Several councils in the North East and the North West are also supporting a ban, though many of them are likely to wait until the Government's White Paper on public health comes out next month before they take further action.

The Welsh Assembly has already supported a ban. The Government is widely expected to call for some restrictions on smoking in public places but may not go as far as a total ban.

Three councils in Greater Manchester — Bury, Stockport and Manchester — have voted in favour of an all-out ban and in five others — Wigan, Oldham, Salford, Rochdale and Bolton — the leaders have given their support. Around Merseyside, Wirral, Sefton and Knowsley, and St Helens have all expressed support.

But business would prefer a nationwide policy rather than authorities carrying out their own plans. Big chains of hotels and restaurants are

lobbying hard against giving local councils the flexibility to impose different criteria in different places.

The legislative process is fraught with difficulty and it could take years for local bans to come through. But local authorities can introduce by-laws to impose further restrictions in their own areas. They could also decide to give licenses or planning permission to new buildings, such as casinos, on the proviso that they imposed a smoking ban or gave ancillary contracts to non-smoking firms.

Most health campaigners are hoping that Tony Blair will take the lead and introduce a comprehensive ban in most public places in Labour's next manifesto. Legislation could then be introduced early in the next Parliament.


Local authority representatives say that jobs in the smoking industry are unlikely to be a huge factor when making decisions about smoking bans as the industry now employs only about 3500 people in England.

The anti-smoking campaign group estimates that exposure to other people's smoke in the workplace causes 700 premature deaths a year in Britain, three times those killed in industrial accidents.

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