

# **Brokenshire Gives Government Both Barrels**

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Leading pub and bar trade body the Association of Licensed and Multiple Retailers (*ALMR*) has today welcomed the support of Conservative frontbencher James Brokenshire who yesterday told the Government that it risks shooting itself in the foot over its proposed mandatory alcohol licensing conditions.

Brokenshire, Shadow Home Affairs Minister, told the Parliamentary Policing and Crime Bill Committee yesterday that the Government's plans don't just risk driving out bad businesses, but could also hit the industry's good operators. He added that it is those industry professionals who are doing their best to comply with law and social responsibility standards that may be forced under by the added costs of these conditions.

Government estimates predict that the minimum cost of the conditions will be between £485 and £1195 per pub per annum, regardless of whether outlets have a history of associated anti-social behaviour. Ahead of this week's debate, the *ALMR* wrote to all members of the Committee stressing that the code risked placing burdens that even the industry's brightest and best operators would struggle to shoulder. *ALMR* warned that the costs could threaten the commercial viability of the vast majority of pubs, leading to unnecessary closures and new job losses in the very places that provide supervised drinking environments that discourage irresponsible drinking.

Commenting, *ALMR* Chief Executive Nick Bish said:

"It's good to see the Conservative front-bench listening. As the leading pub and bar operators, our members are on the front line of dealing with compliance issues. They know that every pound spent dealing with the latest Whitehall diktats is a pound not re-invested in their businesses and their people.

"We need the Government to listen in the same way. If it fails to do so, it risks severely compromising its own objectives. Our industry provides an environment that encourages responsible drinking and discourages anti-social behaviour. These latest proposals could end up tipping even the best operators over the edge. The resulting gap in the market will be filled by supermarkets, which means more drinking in unsupervised environments."

Pressure from the Opposition benches forced Home Office Minister Alan Campbell to provide a number of commitments to the industry. Campbell reassured the Committee that the Home Office would ensure that the mandatory conditions would be necessary, proportionate, and act in a way that does not affect the industry's legitimate operators.

These developments come on the back of the trade's success in ensuring that locally applied conditions will not be block applied on a geographic basis. Instead, they will be applied to specific premises linked to anti-social behaviour. The Committee yesterday accepted Government amendments to the Bill to that effect.

Nick Bish continues:

"These reassurances offer a glimmer of hope for our industry. It is essential that Government has a clear understanding of what excessive and disproportionate regulation will mean at this time. If it does not, there will be not only an economic but also social cost to be paid as a result of its action. Our industry will be closely watching the Government to make sure it keeps its promises."

#### Notes for editors

- *ALMR* is the only national trade body solely dedicated to representing the interests of pub and bar operators, and to providing them with business support and advice. It has almost 100 member companies, operating over 15,000 outlets.
- Ahead of this week's debate, *ALMR* wrote to all non-Ministerial members of the House of Commons Policing and Crime Bill Public Bill Committee on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January, cautioning that *"the Government risks compromising its own policy objectives. It is our firm belief that the vast majority of pubs promote responsible drinking in a supervised environment that discourages anti-social behaviour and that, in the words of the Association of Chief Police Officers "licensees are superb policemen of people on their premises". The recent fall in the number of licensed premises has meant that there has been a dramatic increase in the amount alcohol consumed in unsupervised environments, where excessive and irresponsible consumption is not discouraged."*
- The Committee yesterday discussed Clause 31 and Schedule 4 of the Bill, which covers the Government's plans to introduce a mandatory set of nationally set licensing conditions.
- The session can be listened to on line at <http://www.parliamentlive.tv/Main/VideoPlayer.aspx?meetingId=3432>
- James Brokenshire, Conservative Shadow Minister for Home Affairs and MP for Hornchurch, told the Committee: *"The Regulatory Impact Assessment contemplates that businesses will shut as a consequence of this. That may not necessarily be because it's about driving out bad businesses, it's about the regulatory position which is being put in there that means that some good businesses, that are complying with the law, are being responsible and are seeking to adhere to what might be regarded as good social responsibility practice, may be forced out because of the costs and burdens that are being applied."*

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