

Changes to licensing areas will reduce number of bars and off-licences

Large parts of the Capital will be classed as having too many businesses selling alcohol under radical plans to curb the number of new drinking premises in areas of the city.

But the plans agreed by the Edinburgh Licensing Board have been labelled a “huge missed opportunity” after councillors voted against proposals to include parts of Leith as areas of “over-provision”, despite warnings from police and the NHS about problems with public safety and health related to alcohol.

Previously, only Cowgate and the Grassmarket were designated as offering over-provision of licensed premises – but under the new licensing statement, the Old Town, Princes Street, Leith Street, Tollcross, Deans Village, the West End, Haymarket, Southside, Canongate and Dumbiedykes will also be classed as already providing enough opportunities to purchase alcohol.



The West End could be affected by new licensing areas

The new policy throws into doubt the viability of new licensed premises in swathes of the city – with the Virgin Hotel, Gleneagles Hotel and new gin and whisky visitor centres due to arrive in the Capital. Traders have labelled the stance “fundamentally flawed”.

In licensing terms, over-provision means the board will now “create a rebuttable presumption against the grant of new premises licences, provisional premises licences and major variations to increase capacity of premises” in those areas.



Councillor Norman Work is the Licensing Board Convener

Licensing Board Convener, Cllr Norman Work, said: “Our assessment of

overprovision takes into account a range of evidence and feedback provided during our in-depth consultation with a variety of organisations, health professionals, trade representatives and other interested parties, and I welcome the outcome.

“By extending the areas of overprovision we have demonstrated

our commitment to addressing alcohol-related crime and health problems, as part of our responsibility as Edinburgh's licensing authority.

"This, alongside the new statement of licensing policy, which has been updated to reflect issues arising since the last review in 2013, will help us to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the public, while also maintaining Edinburgh's rich and varied entertainment scene."

Brigid Simmonds, chief executive of the Scottish Beer & Pub Association, criticised the overprovision label.

She said: "The SBPA believes that the policy of overprovision is fundamentally flawed, with no evidence to show that it achieves a reduction in alcohol-related harm, while simultaneously sending a message that the area is closed for business.

"It also severely impedes investment and best practice in any area designated as such. The Edinburgh board should be congratulated, however, for resisting the pressure to designate more areas of the city as overprovided for, as called for by some."



Cllr Steve Burgess

At the licensing board meeting, Green councillor Steve Burgess

tabled a motion calling for The Shore, Constitution Street, Great Junction Street, South Leith and Pilrig to be included – areas where at least 34 premises and 14 off-licences are within a 10 minute walk or 800 metres of the local centre.

Labour Cllr Lezley Marion Cameron called for “bold civic leadership” from the licensing board while her Labour colleague, Cllr Cammy Day, also urged the board to listen to the concerns of the NHS and Police Scotland.

He said: “We have talked for years about the impact in parts of Edinburgh. I think it’s about time we did take some action.

“The board has to take a responsible decision and be bold. This isn’t going to stop bars and restaurants coming to the city but I think it’s quite a bold thing to say ‘let’s try these additional areas as over-provision’.”



Cllr Cammy Day

Police have welcomed the measures by the board in attempting to tackle alcohol-related crime.

Chief Superintendent Gareth Blair, divisional commander for Edinburgh, said: “Within the city, a large number of the crimes we investigate, particularly public space offences, have alcohol as a contributing factor.

“We work closely with colleagues at the licensing board to ensure the responsible sale of alcohol from licensed premises and advise on any concerns we have in relation to areas

identified as having an over-provision of such premises.

“The decision by the Edinburgh Licensing Board is a very positive step in helping keep the public safe and reduce the number of offences where alcohol is involved.”

Cllr Work, who arrived 15 minutes late to the meeting, became frustrated over attempts to change the draft proposals. He later told Cllr Burgess who tabled a motion to restrict the hours that premises can sell alcohol, that Cllr Burgess could not speak about the issue.

Conservative Cllr Joanna Mowat backed calls for the original plans to be agreed.

She said: “We have determined five areas of over provision. To use two different methodologies is completely intellectually incompetent.

“It seems to me I cannot support that because we will be pulled to pieces in any challenges.”

The board agreed to ignore the calls for parts of Leith to be designated as over-provision of alcohol.

Cllr Burgess said: “I’m gravely concerned with the decision to go against the strong advice of NHS Lothian, the police and the alcohol and drug partnership.

“Despite the clear evidence provided that 15 areas of the city have above average numbers of pubs and off-licences coupled with high levels of alcohol-related harm to health and crime, the majority of the board were only willing to act in four areas around the city centre leaving out other residential areas with high alcohol harm.

“The city’s people, health services and police are buckling under pressure from alcohol related impacts, yet we could fit almost our entire population within licensed premises and there’s enough alcohol display shelving to stretch from here to Glasgow. This was a huge missed opportunity to really start to stem the tide.”