

Call for greater flexibility over licensing hours

Strict licensing rules are stifling investment in Edinburgh's hospitality industry, councillors warned.

Edinburgh's pubs and restaurants have called for greater flexibility over opening and closing times, as the council reviews its alcohol licensing policy.

Trade representatives were speaking at a meeting of the Edinburgh Licensing Board to gauge views on possible policy changes, at the City Chambers on Friday.

Currently on-sales premises can open between 9am and 1am, with later hours for casinos and venues offering entertainment.

Attendees at the session said giving business more freedom over terminal hours would be welcomed as they continue to recover from the pandemic and investors look to the Capital for opportunities.

Niall Hassard, licensing solicitor for TLT, said: "What a lot of clients require, and certainly what we're being told, is flexibility.

"Terminal hours without any duty to trade mean people can choose when to stay open to within the permitted hours and we're seeing increasingly, not just from the back end of Covid but also the cost of living and cost of energy, a real sea change in the hours that people are actually choosing to trade.

“Lots of premises aren’t trading right through to the maximum terminal hours on a regular basis – they need the flexibility to be able to do that, but frankly some of them can’t afford the staff, heat, provide energy throughout that period.”

Caroline Loudon, also from TLT, added: “When we explain the constraints of the Edinburgh policy and the Edinburgh hours that is a turn off for investment and certainly I’ve had many requests from restaurateurs predominantly to go until much later in the night to be able to service people who are still out beyond one o’clock in the morning.”

She said: “We’ve got investment coming to Scotland from down south and these people that are coming up have a very different idea as to what they should be able to operate to.”

Paul Togneri from the [Scottish Beer and Pub Association](#) said: “Businesses in Scotland just now are really struggling for that investment, it’s a bit of a hangover from the pandemic and the restriction that we had here which lasted longer than elsewhere in the UK.”

Director of [Caledonian Heritable](#) Graeme Arnott added: “The costs of staffing and of utilities, I think since Covid there’s been a sea change in people’s habits.

“Certainly going out later seems to be not the norm and outlets need the flexibility that when the trade is there they can basically accommodate it.”

The council’s [public consultation on alcohol licensing rules](#), which are reviewed every five years, was completed in December. The new policy must be agreed and published by November.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter

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