

07 January 2021

Paula Bradley MLA
Chair
Committee for Communities
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
Belfast
BT4 3XX

Dear Paula

Committee for Communities - Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill

Belfast Chamber welcomes the opportunity to present its views on the Licensing and Registration of Clubs (Amendment) Bill to the Committee.

Belfast Chamber represents over 600 businesses of all sizes, in all sectors and in all parts of the city. Our growing membership employs tens of thousands of people and contribute hundreds of millions of pounds to the local economy annually.

A significant proportion of Belfast Chamber's membership is drawn from the city's hospitality, leisure and tourism sector including many licensed premises including hotels, bars, pubs, restaurants and conference venues. They have all demonstrated great confidence in our city over recent years and have helped build a tourism industry that boasts more than 1.3 million annual hotel room sales, has grown out of state tourist spend by 55% since 2011 and was acknowledged by Lonely Planet as the number one region to visit in 2018.

Obviously, as the Committee will fully appreciate, the past 9 months have been an incredibly challenging period for Belfast's licensed premises with many of our members only able to open for a few weeks since March of last year. Ensuring that the sector can recover from the catastrophe caused by COVID-19 is crucial to not just hospitality, leisure and tourism but the entire city's economy. At Belfast Chamber, we often talk about the symbiotic relationship between the sectors of the economy in Belfast. Pubs and restaurants rely on the trade they get from staff in tech firms or banks at lunchtime or after work on a Friday whilst those office-based businesses benefit from the 'buzz' our night time economy creates and how it helps attract and retain talent.

Part of aiding that recovery will require the reform of Northern Ireland's antiquated licensing laws which Belfast Chamber considers to be an impediment to growing tourism and the local hospitality sector.

We are, therefore, broadly supportive of the Department's Bill and would emphasise the following points:

- **Clause 1: Removal of additional restrictions at Easter** – the proposed removal of all restrictions on Good Friday and Easter Sunday as well as the Thursday and Saturday of Easter week is warmly welcomed by Belfast Chamber. This will bring Northern Ireland into line with other neighboring jurisdictions and, at what is ordinarily an important holiday period, provide a boost to Belfast's attractiveness to tourists.
- **Clause 2 Public houses and hotels: further additional hours** – Belfast Chamber also welcomes the proposed increase in 'permitted hours' which will allow the hospitality industry to cater for changing consumer behaviour. The Department's proposed changes will also support the growth in tourism, with international visitors also looking for later entertainment.
- **Clause 5: Extension of "drinking-up time"** – Belfast Chamber supports an increase in the 'Drinking up' time by 30 minutes to 1 hour to allow for a more controlled consumption of last drinks and the better management of people leaving the premises.
- **Clause 6: Major events** – Belfast Chamber supports Clause 6 and the introduction of powers to vary licence conditions to support 'Major Events' of economic or cultural significance taking place in Northern Ireland. Belfast Chamber also believes that this Clause should also include the power for the Department to vary licence conditions for significant events taking place outside Northern Ireland.
- **Clause 8: Licence for off-sales** – Belfast Chamber supports the creation of the new 'category of licence' proposed in this clause that will allow craft breweries, distilleries and cideries to sell alcoholic products manufactured on their premises as part of a visitor centre experience. There are a growing number of such establishments in the city and across the region and this amendment to the law will greatly help them and assist in further establishing them not just as viable businesses but also as tourist attractions.
- **Clause 10 Removal of requirement for children's certificate, etc** – Belfast Chamber welcomes this Clause as the need for a separate Children's Certificate causes in additional paperwork, cost and confusion across the sector
- **Clause 11 Underage functions and Clause 12 Private functions** – we welcome the changes proposed in both of these Clauses.

We look forward to discussing our views on the Bill and the need for the reforms it contains with the Committee on the 14th.

Yours Sincerely



Simon Hamilton
Chief Executive