



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Communities

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Licensing and Registration of Clubs
(Amendment) Bill:
Police Service of Northern Ireland

20 October 2016

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Ms Michelle Gildernew (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Steven Agnew
Mrs Naomi Long
Ms Nichola Mallon
Mr Fra McCann
Ms Carál Ní Chuilín
Mr Christopher Stalford

Witnesses:

Chief Superintendent Stephen Cargin	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Mr John Conner	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Ms Alison Douglas	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Constable Paul Larkin	Police Service of Northern Ireland

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): I welcome Chief Superintendent Stephen Cargin; Constable Paul Larkin, district licensing officer; Ms Alison Douglas, legal adviser; and Mr John Conner, deputy principal. I invite you to brief the Committee and, as far as possible, refer to specific clauses.

Chief Superintendent Stephen Cargin (Police Service of Northern Ireland): Thank you for introducing all of us. Members will have received our written submission on the Bill and be aware that, in general, we support the majority of its provisions. However, we raised some concerns, and, as a result, we would like to add some further brief comments and points for the Committee to consider.

I will start with clause 2, which deals with additional hours. It refers to an additional occasional licence that will permit later opening for one additional hour up to a maximum of 12 days a year. However, this will result in an increased demand for policing as patrons will be able to remain on licensed premises for a longer period, resulting in streets in towns and cities not being cleared until later.

Needless to say, this will have a financial impact for the police. In order to show this, I will give you a case study from H district, which covers Derry and Strabane. You are probably aware of the night-time economy operations that police officers generally run from about 11.00 pm to 3.00 am. In Derry, for example, 57 officers are on duty for that. That averages out at 285 hours and costs around £4,500 each night. Each extra hour will cost about £912, and, after 3.00 am, the officers are entitled to claim overtime, so there will be an additional cost. If you extend that right across Northern Ireland, it will have an impact across policing areas in all 12 districts.

One of the challenges of having an extra hour is that more people will be on the streets, and it will take longer to disperse them. The potential impact of that will be increased antisocial behaviour, more assaults and people on the streets being more vulnerable. From a financial perspective, this is concerning for us. You will appreciate that, if we put policing resources into this area, it will have an impact on other areas across the policing spectrum. It is important that we are able to highlight that to the Committee.

Clause 5 deals with the extension of drinking-up time. This poses a similar issue for us. We support the principle of what the Bill intends to do, but, again, I have to point out the financial impact on policing. That, potentially, will mean an extra half an hour of policing every night that there is a night-time economy operation. Every Friday, Saturday and Sunday night across Northern Ireland, for example, potentially, there will be an extra half an hour when police will be held on duty. That, in itself, will have a significant impact on the policing budget.

Clause 6 deals with the alignment of liquor, entertainment and refreshment provision etc. The Committee will be aware that we welcome this proposal. At present, it is possible for entertainment to continue on licensed premises after the bar has closed. The previous Minister highlighted his concern that the current discrepancy in opening hours has led to illegal sales of alcohol, and he also acknowledged the difficulties in enforcing the alcohol licensing laws. Belfast city centre entertainment has run up to two to three hours past the liquor licensing hours, which has led to the illegal sale of alcohol by a number of premises. As a result, it has required a number of extensive and unusual policing operations to tackle this challenge. An alignment between the two separate licensing regimes would make the law substantially clearer for customers and easier for the police and courts to enforce.

Clause 8 is on underage functions, and the Committee will be aware that we support this proposal. However, it is important to highlight that, a number of years ago, we obtained legal advice from our legal adviser and senior counsel. They advised that under-18 events, such as juvenile discos on licensed premises during the permitted hours, were a breach of The Licensing (Northern Ireland) Order 1996. At that time, both confirmed that it was irrelevant whether it was a school formal or any other underage event not linked to a school.

Essentially, all such functions are underage events on licensed premises. This has always been a problematic area for police, and last year's Court of Appeal judgement on the Sense Nightclub in Cookstown only exacerbated the problem for us. At the time, it was widely acknowledged, including by the relevant trade associations that we met, that this ruling was going to have serious implications for various events at which under-18s would be in attendance: for example, school formals, teenage discos, weddings and birthday parties.

As highlighted in our written submissions following the ruling, we realised the problems that this would create for policing, and we wrote to the then Minister for Social Development to highlight the difficulties and the fact that they needed to be addressed urgently in the licensing legislation because it related to children on licensed premises. We added that the Police Service was concerned that, without adequate legislation, officers would continue to find themselves in challenging positions that would undoubtedly have consequences for confidence in policing.

In January this year, we attended the Social Development Committee. We gave evidence on the Licensing Bill introduced to authorise the sale of intoxicating liquor at outdoor stadiums. We had a number of concerns with that Bill, especially in relation to the protection of young people under the age of 18. In order to address our concerns, we requested an amendment to include under-18s in this provision. At that time, we felt that this would greatly assist in addressing our issues with that Bill and the difficulties that we knew we would face following the Sense Nightclub judgement. Our view was that the two issues were closely related; hence we asked for the amendment. Unfortunately, our request for the amendment was not granted, because the Committee felt that it was outside the remit of the Bill.

Finally, the clause refers only to underage events on licensed premises. There is no reference to family-type functions, such as weddings and birthday parties et cetera, and, as a result, young people under the age of 18 will have to leave these types of events by 9.30 pm at the latest, as they do under the current legislation. Our view is that the clause should include a reference to these types of function.

Clause 9 is on the delivery of intoxicating liquor to young persons. The Committee will be aware that we support the proposal. It will also be aware that, under the current legislation, deliveries of drink must be logged in a day book kept on the premises from which the liquor was dispatched and in a

delivery book or invoice carried by the person delivering the liquor. Licensing officers in the Belfast district and the Derry and Strabane district confirmed to us that there have been no reports of breaches of the delivery of alcohol over the past year or so. However, it is important to highlight that this form of policing is difficult for us to enforce, and the reality is that, unless somebody reports it, it is difficult for us to do anything about it.

Before I move on to the request for an amendment, does the Committee have any questions or want clarification at this point?

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): No, go ahead, and we will ask questions at the end.

Chief Superintendent Cargin: Our request for an amendment involves asking the Committee to consider the introduction of an event licence or something similar for outdoor concerts, award ceremonies et cetera. At present, there are a number of these, which are all held under the occasional licence. However, functions that qualify for the grant of an occasional licence are those organised by a body:

"established for social, charitable or benevolent purposes or for furthering the common interests of persons associated with any trade, profession, educational or cultural activity, game or sport."

In particular, we highlight a number of events that recently caused considerable problems for the police. The events, which some members of the Committee will be aware of, include Belsonic, Tennent's Vital and, more recently, the Londonderry MTV concert.

The alcohol licence for Belsonic was approved with a children's certificate to allow a wide range of persons to attend and enjoy the opportunities that it presented. The PSNI supported the application on the basis of a clear agreement that the area would be managed effectively, ensuring that appropriate measures were in place to keep everyone attending safe from harm. However, during two concerts in particular — Tiësto and David Guetta — there was clear abuse of alcohol by persons under the age of 18, and there was no clearly defined plan to separate children from others who were legally consuming alcohol within the event arena. Police could see no clearly delineated area where the certificate was being applied and managed in order to ensure that there was no inappropriate mix of those consuming alcohol and those who were underage. At the Tiësto concert, it was reported that 17 children between the ages of 14 and 17 were intoxicated and required treatment from the SOS bus. At the David Guetta concert, 66 children between the ages of 13 and 17 were intoxicated and required treatment from the SOS bus.

Unfortunately, last month's Derry MTV concert made headlines for all the wrong reasons. At the event, a total of 65 were treated by first-aid staff, with the vast majority under the age of 18. More importantly, however, a further 10 young people were in such a serious situation that they had to be transferred to Altnagelvin Hospital; their needs were beyond the capabilities of first-aid personnel. During the debrief, the hospital manager stated that those 10 urgently required hospital treatment. She expressed the seriousness of the situation, in that all 10 patients were transferred to A&E not for basic medical attention but because their high level of intoxication and drug intake placed them in a critical condition due to their age. It is accepted, however, that some of those young people probably arrived intoxicated prior to the event. Between 50 and 100 young people were also turned away at the gate because they had been drinking to excess, and the choice was to let them in, leave them to wander the streets or bring them into a safe environment.

With that in mind, it is important to refer to the Marshall report of an independent inquiry into child exploitation in Northern Ireland. The report states:

"Bars and clubs were referred to as places of vulnerability even for children under 18."

It goes on:

"it is very easy for underage young people in Northern Ireland to get access to licensed premises."

The report also states that a group of parents expressed concern about:

"the lax interpretation of licensing laws by licensed premises and off-licences ... Underage young people gaining admission to ... night clubs was a particular concern, as was the specific vulnerability of these young people to predatory adults."

As a result, a recommendation was made by us that action be taken to strengthen the enforcement of licensing laws, especially those concerning the supply of alcohol to young people.

In conclusion, it is against that background that we ask for this amendment so that, when such events are planned in the future, the police, if needs be, can place conditions on the applications that the event organisers must comply with. Thank you, Chair.

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): Thank you, Stephen. I would like to bring you back to an issue that, as the Committee knows, I have raised a number of times. My child is 14 now, and he managed to get to Sense once, having spent all of his twelfth year looking forward to it. I had checked it out with other parents. I had heard how well supervised it was and how it was very strict: you had to be 13, you had to have photographic ID, you had to be breathalysed by a handheld breathalyser on the way in, and, if you were found to have alcohol on you, you would be taken to a safe place and your parents would be contacted. The staff to young people ratio was 1:50.

Since Sense closed, I have been inundated with concerned parents and very angry residents, particularly around the park in Dungannon, where youngsters go now because they do not have a controlled, safe environment in which to socialise and learn to enjoy going out for a night without taking alcohol. I have raised this with the PSNI in Dungannon. We have had a huge increase in underage drinking by very vulnerable children who are drinking in parks and public places. Adults are taking alcohol to them, and drugs are also being supplied. This summer, in Dungannon, as an 11-year-old girl was being lifted into an ambulance, a bottle of vodka fell out of her handbag.

I cannot remember who said that the law is an ass, but they must have been thinking about the PSNI's intervention on Sense nightclub and the subsequent ruling. That intervention was extremely unhelpful. We now have a situation in which 12-, 13- and 14-year-olds do not know what it is like to go to a properly monitored and supervised teenage disco, and they go out drinking to serious excess. I am angry that a safe and controlled environment was closed down. The fridges in Sense were even papered over so that young people could not see the alcohol. No alcohol was served. I am at a loss to understand why that happened.

We have a chance to amend this legislation and to update and modernise the licensing and registration of clubs, but we need some pragmatism and common sense. You say that you are opposed to the extension of drinking-up time, and you mentioned the cost to towns and villages. Are the police not on duty anyway? Presumably, they do not all just go home when the pubs have closed and everybody is tucked up in their bed. Police are on duty during the night anyway. The extension of the drinking-up time would, I feel, give pubs and clubs a chance to stagger the times at which people leave, making it be easier to get away or get a taxi home. There would be less chance of rows in licensed premises because bar staff would not have to take drink off people who might not be ready to go. I am not sure that I understand your opposition to the extra hour's drinking-up time.

We have to discuss your proposed amendment. Have you talked to the Department about it? It would be much easier for the Minister to take it forward than it would be for us. Have you had discussions with the Department about that?

Chief Superintendent Cargin: There are quite a few questions there, and I will come back on a number of them. My colleague John will talk a wee bit about the contact that we have had with the Department. The ruling on Sense nightclub and this legislation have created a real difficulty for the Police Service. It is not a space that we really want to be in. We recognise the difficulties that it presents for parents, families and licensees, but the law is the law, and we cannot turn a blind eye.

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): The law was the law for a long time, and you did turn a blind eye to it. Your intervention resulted in this.

Mr John Conner (Police Service of Northern Ireland): I will give some additional background information. As Stephen said, we attended the Social Development Committee in January to discuss outdoor stadiums, and the Sense nightclub judgement came up then. We advised the Committee that, besides the nightclub function itself, which, generally, was well run, there were a significant number of other issues, such as antisocial behaviour, disorderly behaviour and complaints from neighbours and residents, including questions about how many young people were allowed in an unlicensed premises. At that meeting, one of the members said, "Well, that is a different perception of it".

The premises had caused local police concerns over a period; it was not a one-off event. Children and young people were being bussed into Cookstown from all parts of the Province and left in the area. The buses were leaving them off and then leaving. On occasions, a significant number of young people were being turned away from Sense nightclub because they were totally intoxicated. That is understandable. At that time, however, concerns were raised by elected representatives, the policing and community safety partnership (PCSP), community groups, local churches and members of the public. All asked, "What are the police doing about this?".

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): The problem was on the buses, not on the premises.

Mr Conner: No, the problem was with people not getting into Sense and being intoxicated.

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): They did not get in because they had drink on them. Sense was ensuring that children in that nightclub were not intoxicated on the premises.

Mr Conner: They were left to wander the streets of Cookstown. It was not a one-off event.

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): Sense did not get them intoxicated; they arrived with drink on them. The problem was the parents and the bus companies.

Mr Conner: The comment made to local police was about why they were not focusing on what the problem was at the actual event. That was seen to be the problem in attracting all these people from across the Province and for the majority of them being intoxicated getting there. Once people did not get in, they were left to wander the streets. There were allegations, even from some of the young people, about alleged rapes, disorderly behaviour and drug taking. This was all because they did not get into Sense and were left to wander about the town.

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): That is all happening now, all over the place, because they have nowhere to go; that is happening anyway.

John, I meant to say to you that it was the Speaker who ruled that the stadium issue that Stephen mentioned was outside the scope of the Bill. All of the things that you are talking about are happening now, and youngsters do not have a safe and controlled environment in which to socialise.

Mr Conner: I think that it goes back to what Stephen said: the law is the law. We have an opportunity here to change it and allow this to happen; we totally support it and that is why we asked for it as an amendment to the outdoor Licensing Bill. We knew the issues that were going to be caused for us after the Sense nightclub judgement, which have happened. Obviously, at the minute, school formals are very much to the fore again, but we need to be consistent. We cannot say to some people, "We will grant that, it is OK for you to have it", while, maybe, another section of the business cannot have it. We need to be consistent in what we do.

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): We are not asking for inconsistency; we are asking for a bit of common sense. We will try and inject that into the Committee's work on this Bill, but the fact remains that, at the minute, it is very difficult for young people, aged from 13 to 17 or 18 to access a safe and controlled environment in which to socialise without drink or drugs being present. It is happening now in every park, car park and housing estate all over the North because teenagers have nowhere to go.

The Mid Ulster council has been very supportive of this. I raised the issue with the council about trying to identify nights out for young people. They are all afraid to do it now given litigation, the insurance issue and all of that, and the role that the police play locally. A lot of parents are very concerned — responsible parents who were taking their children to and from the disco and were ensuring that there was no alcohol taken by their children — that their children now have nowhere to go. Buses are a separate issue, which is something that we might want to look at. It is in the NILGA response that we will be considering today. I have met the PSNI in Dungannon — I do not want to labour the point — but, presumably, you are aware of the extent of underage drinking in public areas now in the Dungannon and Cookstown areas as a result of there being no safe and controlled environment.

Chief Superintendent Cargin: I will make another point about underage drinking. Legislation is not going to stop underage drinking. If we have reformed legislation that allows for underage events, that

is not going to stop the social issue of underage drinking, which is a much bigger issue and a bigger concern.

You talked about responsible parents. Regarding parents who allow their kids to arrive at the like of Sense nightclub, as an example, already intoxicated; that is not responsible parenting. There is a much bigger issue here that police are faced with around underage drinking. No matter what legislation we give to provide for these well-run events, there will still be issues with underage drinking.

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): Absolutely. That is the point that I am making. There will be children now who do not want to go to somewhere like Sense because it is too tame for them. The fact is that we have a generation of young people in the area that I represent who can now access drink and drugs quite easily, and a teenage disco would have no appeal for them anymore. But, we still need to see safe places for young people to socialise without taking a drink. They are doing it now, on a wholesale basis, and there is nothing and nowhere for them.

There is another venue in Cookstown that has actually given up its licence to be able to have a teenage disco. That is how bad the situation is; that a licensed premises would give up a licence to provide a safe environment for young people. It should not have had to do that. The fact remains that there will be children — 13-year olds and 14-year-olds — who, if we change the law, will still not want to go to a teenage disco because they have realised that it is better craic sitting in a park in Dungannon where you can get drink and drugs and do not have to go to somewhere where you are searched on the way in. I do not want to monopolise things. We will hear from Steven and then Nichola.

Mr Agnew: Thank you for the information so far. I share some of Michelle's frustrations at the lack of things for young people to do; it is something that I have been vexed about for a long time. Hopefully, we have the opportunity to change that. What is the problem, at present, with the issue regarding alignment with the entertainment licence? I am aware of a small number of nightclubs in Belfast that stay open, I suppose, to the liquor licensing time. What is the problem, as you see it, and what is the scale of it?

Mr Conner: Basically, they are not aligned, so you have a lot of places finishing at 1.00 am. Young people then filter out at that time and go to other places that stay open until 3.00 am. Stephen mentioned, as part of his opening speech, how we had to use some unusual tactics to address this. It meant four or five police officers and the local superintendent standing at 1.00 am outside a place that had later licensing asking, "What is the attraction of coming here?". The young people answered, "The other place has closed, and we are moving here because it stays open to 3.00 am". He replied, "But you will not be able to get a drink in here". They said, "Yes, we can. We can get drink". This is only one example, but it leads to illegal sales of alcohol. Obviously, it is very resource intensive, financially and physically. The police cannot do it, week in, week out. This is just for one premises. It is happening on a regular basis because the licensing is not aligned.

Mr Agnew: How many premises, that you are aware of, are staying open to 3.00 am?

Mr Conner: I do not know. I imagine that there are about half a dozen.

Mr Agnew: Is it all in Belfast?

Mr Conner: No. I would say that the majority finish at 1.00 am, but people head round to other ones that can stay open later. They are there to 3.00 am, 4.00 am or 5.00 am.

Mr Agnew: I admit that I see both sides to this. Whilst alcohol is a controlled substance, and we have laws in place to protect people from harm, dancing is not. *[Laughter.]* The last I heard, dancing —

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): You want to see the way Fra dances. *[Laughter.]*

Mr Stalford: That might need an amendment to the Bill, I think.

Mr Agnew: As I understand it, there are DJs in all the clubs that I am aware of, and people go to dance and whatever else. If illegal alcohol is being sold, that is a breach of the law. However, my concern is that we are, effectively, changing the law on dancing and not on alcohol sales. There are restrictions on alcohol sales already. Also, John, you mentioned that places stay open to 3.00 am. The new laws will obviously allow other places to stay open until then.

Mr Conner: Yes, very much so.

Mr Agnew: I wonder whether we are trying to solve a problem that will not be there, if we allow that extension.

Mr Conner: As Stephen mentioned, we support the proposal because it means that once one place finishes the other will also finish and we will not be faced with what happens at the minute whereby people, if they have to be out of one place by 1.00 am, will move to another place. We hope that this goes through and will resolve that problem.

Mr Agnew: On the cost of the additional hour; we are back to 3.00 am. Stephen, you said that after 3.00 am, police would get overtime. I wonder whether that is contracted regarding any work after 3.00 am for all officers. As Michelle said, presumably, the whole police force does not shut down at 3.00 am.

Chief Superintendent Cargin: No, it does not. I will explain. It works in this way. You have local police teams that work 24/7. They are on a shift rota; they basically work a night shift, a late shift and an early. They are available for 24 hours a day. On top of that, there are night-time economy operations. Where you have a number of licensed premises that are bringing thousands of extra people into towns and cities, we then have to put additional resources on, and we traditionally call these night-time economy operations. They traditionally run between 11.00 pm to 3.00 am. This puts us in a position to respond to an increased demand. Part of it is about being on the ground from 11.00 pm to provide high-visibility reassurance for people that the police are there in numbers and are available to deal with whatever happens.

When people come out of clubs, we are faced with all sorts of issues, from drunken young people and older people, antisocial behaviour, fights, urinating on the streets and all that sort of stuff. We have to have the resources to respond to that. Traditionally, that shift period will stop at 3.00 am. If there is a requirement for officers to stay on beyond that, they are entitled to overtime. If we are going to change the licensing legislation, then extra police resources will be required for police to be working longer and at different times. There will be a cost for us.

Mr Agnew: Do workers for whom working through the night is almost their normal shift get overtime past 3.00 am?

Chief Superintendent Cargin: There is no—

Mr Agnew: Is it a matter of changing shift patterns? Can it be done without paying overtime? I am not trying to do anybody out of money from their due pay. I wonder how much of this can be done with a reorganisation of shift patterns.

Chief Superintendent Cargin: There is a huge issue with this because, as an organisation, we have gone through constant change in how we do policing through neighbourhood policing teams, local policing teams and in having resources available. Without having full-time resources dedicated to this, it is cheaper to bring people in on overtime than have resources employed solely for it. It is better value for money. Therefore, there will be an impact on policing from extended hours.

Mr Agnew: The Chair referred to you opposing the extension. Is that right? You have raised concerns about cost. Are you opposing the extension to have additional opening hours?

Chief Superintendent Cargin: I understand that some of the rationale around the extension is to have a phased approach, whereby people leave at different times. How do you enforce that? It comes down to goodwill by the licensees. We know that it provides a longer opportunity for people to drink more. In reality, if people drink more, there will be consequences for us.

Mr Agnew: It is a case of looking at the evidence. I do not think that it is about enforcing it but, almost, making an assumption. The Department can answer as to whether it has evidence for this but, if places are staying open until 3.00 am, a lot of people will choose to go home at 1.00 am or 2.00 am. Certainly, I cannot stay out until 3.00 am any more. That is an assumption, and, as I said, I do not know whether the evidence backs it up.

Mr Conner: It is also important to highlight to the Committee that we are regularly asked to say what we can stop doing in order to meet budget cuts and the likelihood of more budget cuts. It is important that we reflect the potential increased costs of the additional hours. It would be very remiss of us not to mention that. We are looking at what we are trying to cut at the minute, and, obviously, this would bring additional hours. As Stephen said, the money comes from somewhere else, which does not get it. There is a financial aspect, which is important.

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): So, we will cancel Christmas shopping and 'Disney on Ice'. People still have to enjoy themselves.

Ms Mallon: Steven has touched on issues that I wanted to extrapolate. We very much appreciate you coming here, and it is important that you highlight the cost implications. You will also appreciate that we have had briefings from across the tourism and hospitality sector arguing that the current system and even that which is in the draft Bill at present have a huge financial negative cost in that it has a negative impact on visitor experience. They make a counter financial argument, so we have to weigh all of that up.

At present, there are 12 additional hours that can be selected by an applicant, so there is lack of continuity, if you like, there. There are some proposals that we should look at regular extensions. If that were adopted, would it provide you with the preparation time that you need to better manage budgets? I am mindful that you have set out the case about overtime and all of that. Also, is there scope to look at creative partnerships? I appreciate that community safety wardens do not work through to these times, but is there scope to look at a partnership approach to try to manage this situation?

The other question that I have is in respect of clause 9 and is about the delivery of alcohol. It is something that I feel very strongly about as, in north Belfast, it is a huge problem. In your briefing, you question whether the current proposals would aid the police in enforcing the law. From a policing perspective, what do you think needs to happen to better enable you to enforce any legislation that is tackling this problem?

Chief Superintendent Cargin: We work in some really good partnerships. The majority of licensees are very responsible. I am sure that Paul could give you some examples and touch on some of the issues.

Constable Paul Larkin (Police Service of Northern Ireland): I have to apologise: I am profoundly deaf, and the loop system does not appear to be working, so please bear with me.

We have come across some good practice, especially in the Derry city and Strabane area. The majority of deliveries of alcohol to households is normally conducted by large supermarkets. However, there is one small bar and off licence in our area that offers delivery. Its owners were very good in practice and contacted the police at an early stage to explain what they were planning on doing and address any concerns we had. They had also sought their own legal advice. I met them this week, and they have a record of every delivery. They were aware that, at present, it was not illegal to deliver to underage persons but they took good steps to ensure that their drivers do not do that. They highlighted an incident where they went to a house and an 11-year-old answered the door, saying that his mother was unavailable because she was in the bath. The driver, correctly, would not hand over the delivery even though he knew that the child was not going to consume the amount of alcohol that was being delivered. So, we have come across a lot of good practice and, as Mr Cargin said, the majority of licensees that I deal with are certainly very responsible when it comes to issues such as this.

Ms Mallon: What about those who operate illegally? We hear anecdotally about the dial-a-drink phenomenon and I know it is very difficult to police that. Are there things that could be happening to better assist you in cracking down on that?

Constable Larkin: If we receive reports about anything like that, we are duty bound to investigate them. We are the custodians of the law and we have to look into anything like that. As I say, it can be very difficult sometimes, especially when it comes to taxis. If you stop a taxi that has a tray of beer on the back seat, as a police officer, your hands are tied. It could be for personal use, and that is a very easy excuse for someone to come up with.

Ms Mallon: Would a more regularised extension to opening hours assist you in trying to manage your budget?

Chief Superintendent Cargin: There is no doubt that the longer notice we have, the better it is for us to plan in advance. I understand the point from the trade that it is trying to generate income and that it is good for the Province and for tourism. We understand that, and we will do everything we can to support it. However, it would be remiss of me as a senior manager not to point out that we foresee an impact on our budget if this is what you choose to do.

Mr F McCann: Thanks for the presentation. I was a member of the licensing committee on Belfast City Council and, if I close my eyes, this, with the exception of a couple of changes, is like listening to submissions made 20 years and more ago on the same issues. The vast majority of parents who deliver their kids to discos and dances do so making sure that they are safe. It is a small minority who do otherwise, and we have to clear that up.

I socialise in and around Belfast city centre because I live fairly close to it. The vast majority of premises in Belfast are run in a good way. I have been in premises where the staff have refused to sell drink to people who were intoxicated and who they thought might be harmed by consuming more alcohol. Sometimes, we are faced with difficult decisions. I know that you are the guardians of the law but we also have to look at how we find a happy medium. One of the biggest planks in the economy today is tourism, and we have to work within that. All of us have faced difficult questions from the industry, which tells us that the licensing laws are causing them problems.

The vast majority of people who go to the premises you talked about, whether in Derry or Belfast, do so just to enjoy it. As Michelle said, many people go to dance rather than to drink. I understand that you are coming at this from a policing point of view, but, in comparison with 20 years ago, the whole culture of alcohol consumption has changed. The vast majority of people sit in the house and drink until midnight before they even go out to a club. In that three hours in between, the vast majority of people will go out to dance. As you say, after 1.00 am, it is illegal to take a drink, but most people will take only one drink when they go out because their whole thing is about trying to get entertainment. They go home safely.

I remember a couple of places in Belfast — Christopher probably remembers — that sold alcohol after hours. Rather than putting five or six people outside a place, putting one person undercover inside the place to determine whether the law is being broken is probably the best way to do it. There are a lot of difficulties, but we are looking at how to regularise the law. We had presentations last week about formals. Most of them are being driven across the border. That is having an impact on the economies of hotels and other premises that provide for formals. It is about trying to get a happy medium.

I was surprised that, in the written presentation, you said that any change in the law around large supermarkets would help. That is one of the problems that I have. It is a very minor change that extends the advertising to only 200 metres. That does not mean anything to people. The huge problem is the sale and delivery of alcohol from supermarkets, including the cut-price sales that they have. They encourage people, through the media, the paper press and advertisements that are put through doors. So, the 200-metre ban on advertising will do nothing.

We also have a duty to ensure that what is on offer to young people — people in general — allows them to enjoy themselves socially within the confines of wherever it may be.

Constable Larkin: You mentioned putting one police officer inside licensed premises. I do that regularly.

Mr F McCann: Without drink in them. *[Laughter.]*

Constable Larkin: I do that regularly in the Derry city and Strabane area; I dress casually and go into a lot of the nightclubs just to observe. It has reached the stage where they know that I am there sometimes, especially on big nights. In Derry city, Halloween is a big night, so, every year, I am inside licensed premises. They now know that I am there most nights and that, if I am not there, I am outside or five minutes' walk away from a lot of the big places. I am there quite regularly. We have had to remind them a few times that I am there, but, by and large, they act responsibly.

Mr F McCann: Given all the places that sell drink after hours and all the problems with people coming out of places, how many people have been arrested? How many premises have been charged with

selling alcohol after hours? Do regular meetings take place between the industry and the police to ensure that the practice stops? A lot of your argument is around financial problems and resources rather than trying to deal with some of the difficulties.

Chief Superintendent Cargin: A lot of proactive stuff goes on. Part of the night-time economy operation is around enforcement and checking that people are keeping within the legislation. Where they step outside that, they are dealt with. I am sure that Paul wants to chat about some of that from a practical point of view.

Constable Larkin: Once there is a problem with a licensee or a licensed premises, you can be sure that other licensees will become aware of that very quickly. They will be in contact with me very quickly. In the first instance, we speak to the licensee to explain the situation and the complaints that we have received.

We also usually get a lot of communication from local community workers, especially in rural areas. In Dungiven, we have a good working relationship with a lot of the community representatives. They contact us as well in relation to certain premises that may be causing a few issues, for example, by serving after hours. You also asked exactly how many premises there are and how many convictions there have been in cases we have taken. I cannot give an exact number but there have been quite a few. To be fair, most of them are in rural areas. We do not have a big problem with city-centre areas because the police are usually there, or thereabouts, on a Saturday night, especially in Derry city centre, where all the main places are quite close to one another. We do not tend to have a big problem there; it is mostly in rural areas. We have immediate meetings with licensees to explain that there are rumours, or that we believe that breach of legislation or permitted hours has taken place. We then remind them that we will probably make an inspection over the next few weeks. That gives them a chance to tighten up their ship, for want of a better term. We do a lot of proactive work in relation to that. Also, up in Derry — I keep referring to my own area —

Mr F McCann: There must be a lot of drink taken in Derry. *[Laughter.]*

Constable Larkin: We have the joint licensing group meeting, which includes the local council, various bodies on it and the City Centre Initiative. Once a month, all issues relating to licensing are discussed at these meetings. We share information on how best to tackle certain problems as best we can with one another, and they give us assistance as well. Along with the PCSP as well, of course. We do a lot of groundwork. You probably do not see a lot of the work that is going on behind the scenes. We meet regularly with licensees. I am out for most of my day, meeting licensees and discussing various things. A lot of proactive work goes on behind the scenes.

Chief Superintendent Cargin: Going back to your earlier point, Fra, I agree that the vast majority of licensees are responsible and work in partnership with us. That is a fact. Again, it is the same with parents. As a parent, I know what it is like to leave them off and pick them up again. However, the fact is that, from a policing perspective, antisocial behaviour and assault hot spots generally are the areas where people are leaving licensed premises at certain hours. That is where we know the majority of assaults and antisocial behaviour in towns and cities will take place. The reality is that when hundreds and thousands of people are drinking and get out onto the streets, we have the problem of dealing with the assaults and all the aftermath that comes with it. That is the reality of the social issues that we have.

Mr F McCann: Can I just mention one thing? I do not for one minute say that there is not a certain degree of difficulty in policing licensed premises. However, to my knowledge and in my understanding, a big lot of the problems that spill onto the street are caused by house drinking in different communities, rather than by drinking in licensed premises. That is where fights happen, drugs are taken and so on. There is a particular problem in that. Again, a lot of it stems from buying alcohol from the larger supermarkets.

Chief Superintendent Cargin: You are right, and that is another changing dynamic for policing. We have more social drinking in houses and that has an impact. Resourcing for that, as well, is a challenge for us. That is a fact; those are the changing social dynamics that we have in our society.

Mr F McCann: Things have changed, but I know that many people prefer to go out and drink socially. People should be encouraged, as Michelle said, to drink in premises where there are tight and serious controls. That is better than what we have at present.

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): Steven, you indicated that you wanted to ask a question. Is it supplementary to Fra's line of questioning?

Mr Agnew: It is in relation to the entertainment licenses.

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): OK. I can come back to you after Christopher and Naomi have had their turns, if that is OK.

Mr Stalford: Do you have a figure for the additional expenditure that you envisage the changes outlined in the Bill will cost the police? Have you a monetary figure?

Mr Conner: The only cost that we have is the one Stephen outlined. It was really just down to the one night, and we have never looked at it further than that. Obviously, we could go away and —

Chief Superintendent Cargin: We could do some work on it. Actually, it will take a bit of work, because it is quite complicated. You have 12 additional nights per club across Northern Ireland, and those will be different nights. We need to work out how that will potentially work. We will try to give you some indication of how we see it going. On the other issue of the extra half hour of drinking-up time, we know that that will give us an extra half hour on the night-time economy operations, potentially right across the Province. Again, I could probably work out something more precise and come back to you with some figures.

Mr Agnew: If you factor in Nichola's point on that, it might be better if you knew that it would be Friday and Saturday nights across the board.

Mr Stalford: There is a lot of anecdotal evidence, and a lot of people have an opinion on the reasons for antisocial behaviour. As the Bill progresses, we will have a lot of point-counterpoint. On a practical level, it would be useful if you were able to give us an estimate of what the cost might be, given the changes that are outlined, taking into account what Steven said. I represent South Belfast, and the district command unit (DCU) that covers that area runs from City Hall to Lisburn. It is a huge area, and it includes all of the so-called golden mile with many of the clubs and pubs and what have you in Belfast. Policing resources are already stretched in that part of Belfast, because you have responsibility for the city centre as well as south Belfast. Are you telling the Committee that, if the changes were to come through, your job of policing residential neighbourhoods would be more difficult?

Chief Superintendent Cargin: It is about getting the balance of resources right. We will always do our best to respond to everything, and we will. But when you put extra pressure on policing, it has an extra pressure on resources.

Mr Stalford: So, if the changes were to go through as outlined, is it your assessment that policing areas such as Malone, Belvoir, Taughmonagh and Finaghy would become more difficult because more of your time would be devoted to the city centre?

Chief Superintendent Cargin: Generally, night-time economy operations are dedicated to particular operations, so I envisage that there would be an extension of the time that they are held on duty. There will be other resources available to deal with the other issues. If it becomes more problematic, with the night-time economy, we have to bring resources from wherever we can, so there can be a knock-on effect.

Mr Stalford: I do not know the situation in Dungannon, and I would not contradict you, Chair, or you will come down on me like a ton of bricks, I am sure. I am looking for more information — some facts and figures — on where teenage discos have been stopped. Are there examples of where that has happened and there has been a corresponding increase in the incidence of antisocial behaviour; arrests for drug use, drinking in parks and things like that? Can you point me to any examples of that?

Chief Superintendent Cargin: Not unless my colleagues have any specific examples. I am sure that I can go away and ask colleagues for specifics.

Mr Stalford: A correlation has been made between the closure of a teenage disco and a subsequent increase, and I do not doubt that that is your experience, Chair. The strength with which you conveyed your message leaves me in no doubt.

Mr Agnew: Do you want me to sweep up those eggshells so that you don't have to walk on them?

Mr Stalford: Yes, please.

It would be useful if we had examples where we could point to the data and say, "Because this teenage disco stopped, there was a corresponding increase in antisocial behaviour". We are all public representatives here; we know what people say to us, and we have experience. I was in council for 11 years, and I would go to a PCSP meeting and say, for argument's sake, in Sandy Row, "There has been a discernible increase in x", and then the police come back to me and say, "We have the figures here, and there hasn't". If we are going to make an argument, I think that it is useful to have it confirmed by the data that you collect; so, if we could have some information there, it would help.

Mrs Long: There are a few things that have already been raised, and I do not want to go over them too much. I understand the point that you have made about overtime, but I am still slightly confused about why shift patterns cannot change to adapt to the change in getting-out time.

Chief Superintendent Cargin: I am not saying that they cannot be. They can be, but it takes time. There is a bit of science behind shift patterns, and it takes negotiations with unions and all that type of stuff. They can be, but we know that there is a cost with overtime after a certain time. There is a very good reason for the science of, for example, having your night-time economy operation starting at 11.00 pm and finishing at 3.00 am. If you extend that, you still have the requirement to have them there at 11.00 pm, and there is a cost to it.

Mrs Long: The point that I am making is that, if, as seems to be your argument, people will not leave early, surely you are talking about 12.00 midnight to 3.00 am. Essentially, you are moving the time that people leave the premises back an hour as well as extending it on an hour.

Chief Superintendent Cargin: The change will not be when they go into the premises.

Mrs Long: No, it will not.

Chief Superintendent Cargin: They will go in at the same time, so we need to be on the ground as well to reassure people and make sure that people are safe. That is why the police are there. The problem is that, in reality, people will be longer on the premises and are likely to be more intoxicated when they get out. It takes a period of time to clear hundreds and thousands of people off the street. It takes a period of time for them to get taxis and buses.

Mrs Long: Let us take the point about extra drinking-up time. Surely the point of that is that all those people do not end up on the street looking for taxis at the same moment. The purpose of that is to allow people to gradually come out of the premises and they can then get taxis. It is to smooth that end-of-night operation, which, we have been told repeatedly by the police, is a major pressure. When everyone lands out on the street at the same time, there are not enough taxis, and there are not enough police to police the situation. Everybody has been drinking very quickly to get their drinks finished and get out the door. They come out quite intoxicated, the air hits them, and everything starts to go wrong. Trying to expand that time might lengthen the hours of work, but would it not take off some of the pressure during that period?

Chief Superintendent Cargin: The reality is that, in practical terms, people tend to stay until they are told to get out. A lot of this will come down to goodwill by licensees to try to encourage different licensed premises to say, "We will let them out at 1.30 am, you let them out at 1.40 am". There would be a graduated response across.

Mrs Long: As somebody who has been in a bar when last orders are called, I know that most people start to drift from before that point. There is already a drift, and the problem is that you have only half an hour for that drift to happen. That is quite a concentrated period of time. They will not be able to buy any more drink, so it is not that they will be able to become more intoxicated than would have been the case. It is simply that the time that they have to drink the last drink that they have in front of them is extended. If I had the choice between saying that somebody could sip their glass of wine or

their pint over the period of an hour or neck it in 15 minutes and go straight out onto the street, I would choose the former as it would be more easily managed from the point of view of trying to police the situation outside.

You mentioned shift patterns. For balance, what is the cost of having backup if there is trouble in the streets, including additional support from Land Rovers and so on if there are arrests? How do you balance out those costs? There must be a differential between where people are behaving more responsibly and the policing of a responsible group of people and where people are more intoxicated and are waiting for taxis with nowhere to go. To stretch that, people who come out of a bar or a club now at 1.00 am or 2.00 am will often still be standing on the street at 3.00 am or 3.30 am if there is not a taxi available. Therefore, does it really make any difference to your shift patterns? They are still going to be there. The difference is that some will have left earlier, got taxis and those taxis will have come back. You are still out in those hours anyway. I am just a wee bit confused, to be honest.

Chief Superintendent Cargin: I understand, and maybe I have not been clear enough. The reality is that, for us, we want to be visible, and we deal with whatever is there. If people are acting in a disorderly or unruly fashion, we have to deal with it. I used that cost of the 57 officers, for example, in the Derry and Strabane area, who are on that night-time economy operation, at a cost of £4,560, to be precise. That is just the hours; it does not take into account the use of vehicles and that sort of stuff. In reality, if some of those officers get involved in arresting people and so forth, they will be held on doing interviews, processing prisoners, going to hospitals and all the other stuff that flows from that. So, in reality, there is an additional cost beyond what I have given you. It is not that we just go off the streets at 3.00 am. There are other resources there and sometimes we do not go off the streets at 3.00 am.

Mrs Long: Which is why I was slightly confused because I have seen that myself.

Chief Superintendent Cargin: You make an assessment at the time; are the streets cleared, do we believe that we do a graduated response, do we gradually reduce the resources? At the end of the day, our job is to keep people safe.

Mrs Long: Nichola mentioned the issue of partnership working. How closely do you work with the door staff of premises about their responsibilities in ensuring people are kept safe? Let me give you an example. We have heard before about where a fight breaks out in the street outside a bar but, because they are not allowed to have anyone on the premises beyond a certain time, they cannot take what would be sensible action in allowing bystanders to take shelter away from that, and allow the police to deal with the main issue. How closely can you work with door staff to ensure that they are able to make a responsible contribution to making sure that people filter out when taxis are available and are able to go home? Most of the tension tends to arise when people are left on the street with no means of getting home. That is when things tend to get slightly more dangerous, and where people are slightly more vulnerable, because they are intoxicated, to other crime and assault. Is there some way that you can work directly with them to try to manage that better? There have been huge improvements in recent years around how that works, but I think that there is still quite a way to go.

Constable Larkin: We have had some initiatives, up in Derry city, over the last number of years. We had a one-day training session with all the door staff from the various estate services or security services, who were asked to attend. We also invited some taxi drivers, and there were some bar staff. We brought in outdoor trainers on how to deal with self-defence. From my point of view, on licensing, I felt that there seemed to be a gap between the door staff and policing. We have managed to close that gap, due to close working relationships with them.

In fact, this week, I am due to meet the staff from one nightclub in relation to fake ID. We have had an incident in a bar where an underage person was assaulted. The door staff have stated that they were not aware of how good the fake ID was. So, we are out this week meeting them and showing them examples of fake ID and what they should be looking for. We have also produced posters for licensed premises to assist door staff on how to look for fake ID. We have given them four examples of acceptable ID and four examples of what to look for in fake ID. We meet them, especially coming up to big concerts, and they explain to us what they will be doing on the day, what is expected of them and who our point of contact will be.

Up in the Foyle area, I probably speak to the security services at least once a week — certainly once every two weeks. It may be a minor thing that can be dealt with over the phone.

We have had incidents when door staff have overstepped the mark. We know that it is a testing environment for them. They are quite sober, of course, and are dealing with someone who is maybe highly intoxicated. Every time, we have waited a couple of days and then dealt with it. It has not been a serious incident; it is when something has got a bit more boisterous than it should have done. For some of them, actually, more personal issues have been brought into their job. So, we meet with the door staff a couple of days later, and they accept that they have been in the wrong. We will note that it is dealt with and in the past. Normally, their employers are very good with that as well. We have very good working relationships with licensees, who check their CCTV after advice from the police. They will look at certain incidents and decide that a certain member of the door staff will not work there again. The police in Cookstown, for example, are doing a lot of work in relation to one or two nightclubs with door staff. The licensees involved are very professional and very impressive in how they work with the police and their door staff. A lot of contact goes on there.

Mrs Long: There is another issue, which flows on from what the Deputy Chairperson was asking earlier. If people are refused by door staff because they have fake ID, what action is taken in that respect? People are often pre-loading at home, so they are turning up at premises with alcohol already taken. They are refused by the door staff because they are underage, potentially, because of the fake ID. They are on the street then, intoxicated. Is there a system whereby door staff refer those cases to the police so that the police can approach the parents? Is any follow-up done? The point that Michelle was making earlier was that if you have young people turning up and not getting into the premises, they are just left on the street. Those are vulnerable young people, and how that is policed in a coordinated way between the door staff and yourselves is really important in preventing crime as well as dealing with it when it occurs.

Constable Larkin: That is an issue that I have taken up. For example, I had a complaint from parents that their 15-year-old daughter was not allowed into a nightclub because that was a place of safety rather than having her walk the streets. That is especially the case when they are getting buses from certain parts of the country to others. Parents complain when they do not get in; they say that they should have been allowed in rather than left to walk the streets.

We know that some nightspots will try to get mobile phones off young ones as well as adults. They will try to phone someone to ask them to come down and pick up their son or their brother or whoever. We get a lot of calls on that. In the case of the MTV concert, the police had to take quite a lot of people home as well as phone parents. It surprised me that some parents refused to come and pick up their children from quite a long distance away. They felt that because the police were with them, they were in a place of safety or that the police had a duty of care to take them home. In some cases, they were looking for the police to drop them home 80 miles or 90 miles away.

Mrs Long: In cases like that, frankly, the parents are to blame. There is a genuine issue there that is not about policing but about getting social services involved. It is outrageous.

We have talked a bit about responsible licensees. Obviously, there is a vested interest there for them to be able to retain their licences. Do you think that the penalties for breaching a licence are sufficiently robust? If people sell alcohol after hours or breach their conditions, do you think that the penalties are sufficiently robust to dissuade them from taking that risk again?

Ms Alison Douglas (Police Service of Northern Ireland): According to the legislation, you need 10 penalty points before your licence is suspended. You could get as many as five points for one incident, depending on what the offence is. From our point of view, it is difficult to comment on the penalties that accrue because our role is to investigate incidents. It is up to the court what penalty is placed on the person.

When a licence is suspended, the suspensions are not usually very long. A suspension is usually for seven days, but it can be a bit longer than that. I have anecdotal knowledge of a few cases that have gone through the court, and suspensions are not that long, even when the licensee reaches the penalty points limit. The other factor is that the penalties would have an impact on a licensee when they come to renew their licence or if they want to get another licence. Our role in that would be to look into the background of the licensee to see whether they are a fit and proper person. If you have a suspension on your licence, when you come to renew or do anything with it, that may be something that the police will look at and say, "Well, these incidents happened here. You were convicted of x, y and z under the Licensing Order". When they come looking for an occasional licence, the transfer of their licence or its renewal, we might object in that instance, but, again, it is not our role to decide on that; we just present the court with evidence on the background of the person. We leave it in the

hands of the judge to decide what happens. In reality, it is not really a matter for the police to say whether we think that the penalties are strong enough, but, anecdotally, I do not know of many suspensions. Obviously, we could see what statistics we have on that and come back.

Mrs Long: It would be really helpful to know. I understand that you cannot comment on individual cases of penalties and how they are used, but, in general terms, it also has resource implications: if you have responsible licence owners and if the risk of the removal of a licence becomes a genuine threat to other licensees that choose to break the law, there is a massive incentive for them to stop doing so and abide by the law. Part of what the Committee wants to do is to reform and simplify licensing so that patrons and licensees understand exactly what the rules are. That will mean that, when people go out for the night, they will know when they are going to be leaving so that it is not confusing and there is no grey area.

It is also quite important to look at those who continue to breach the law. If we are going to make it easier and simpler for people to do their business, it is important that they do their business entirely within the law. I would be interested in getting a bit of feedback as to how that works in practice. There is potential to be quite robust with those who breach the conditions of their licence in terms of ensuring that they do not continue to be able to run a licensed establishment. It would give much more freedom in terms of policing to police good premises well. It would also remove a lot of the burden of having to chase the same people up for breaching their conditions over and over again as opposed to focusing on dealing with some of the other perhaps more important issues, such as the public safety elements and so on as people are coming out of events. It would be quite good if we could get some of the figures around that. I have a sense that, at the moment, there is not a sufficient disincentive for people to continue selling alcohol after the licence time. Bigger operators will not do it because the risk to their reputation is too great; it is maybe more of an issue with smaller operators. It would be interesting to know how that operates in practice.

Mr Stalford: Taking on the point that Naomi raised regarding the extension to 3.00 am, one of the problems is that you can outline a scenario that sounds eminently plausible and reasonable in terms of how events will play out if we extend. You could then outline a theory of a vastly different set of consequences flowing from it, and both sound equally valid. It comes back to the need for factual information with regard to experience elsewhere. In terms of lengthened hours, are there examples that you can show to back up your assertion that, if you give people more time to drink, they will drink to the maximum time and the problem that exists presently will continue to exist but just at a later time in the evening? It would be useful for the Committee's consideration to have that information. Have studies been carried out elsewhere, or are there examples that you can point to that show that, where the change has been brought in, the theory of people drifting home rather than necking something in five minutes and rushing out the door has played out? If you have policing examples from the mainland or elsewhere that back up your assertion as to how the time would be used, it would be useful for the Committee to have them.

Chief Superintendent Cargin: We could certainly look at that.

Mr F McCann: On the back of what Christopher just said, again it depends on where you get your information. If you go to some of the big nightspots that people are attracted to, yes it may distort the information that is required for here. That is a difficulty. Everybody was horrified a couple of years ago when they saw pictures of young people lying in the middle of the street in Belfast city centre. However, we need to put it into context. Only a small number of premises were selling alcohol to excess; it does not reflect the generality of premises.

I am not saying that it is easy for you. Obviously, you have to look at how you provide operations and deal with that. As a matter of fact, we all live in communities that have to do the same. You talk about the Bog Meadows and the hundreds who drink there illegally or the Falls Park, the Springfield Dam or wherever else and what that has done, with the community actively working with the police.

You quoted figures on excess drinking. You spoke about Belsonic and Tennent's Vital. You also spoke about Hallowe'en, which is one of the biggest nights in Derry. Maybe in excess of 10,000 people will turn out, but only a very small minority will drink to excess. The vast majority will be there to enjoy themselves.

I saw people heading to Boucher Road and most of them were drinking on the way down rather than depending on drink at the venue. It was obvious that they had bought their alcohol elsewhere. You

spoke about the figures. My understanding — not that I was at the event; I am a bit too old for that now —

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): You are a big David Guetta fan, Fra. I know rightly. *[Laughter.]*

Mr F McCann: Somebody said that there might have been in excess of 25,000 people at that concert, and the same at some of the others. What we need to do is to put all this into context and how it is dealt with.

Mrs Long: Were you throwing shapes in the church of dance, Fra? *[Laughter.]*

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): Clause 8 is about underage functions. I want to separate out for a moment the teenage disco element, which is a function for children where drink is not available. By the way, just in response to a point that one of you made, I think that a maximum of three buses went to the teenage Sense. The issues that you described might have been more around the Saturday or Sunday over-18 discos, not that that is something that you want, but I think that there were fewer problems with intoxicated youngsters at the teenage disco, or with not getting in.

Let us separate them out: teenage discos for underage people; children at events; and weddings, christenings, parties etc where drink is available. Can you talk us through what would need to be taken into consideration from a policing point of view to ensure that an amendment to that is enforceable?

Mr Conner: I think that it has more to do with the fact that the current proposal does not take account of weddings and birthday parties, and then they still fall foul of the current law. It was to put a form of words into the clause to capture weddings, birthday parties and family events so that they would be in the legislation. As it sits, they are sitting outside and will remain so unless an amendment is made. That is important. It is not a grey area any more.

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): Yes, because hotels have indicated that they are not willing to take the formals, for example, because there will be 17-year-olds there and they do not want the risk. The law as it sits puts them in a difficult position. Is there a form of words that you would suggest?

We want to be pragmatic and sensible. We have had a good discussion about young people at weddings. Naomi made a number of contributions on the Floor about how children being at an event can moderate adult drinking. So, if you have a wedding and there are children there, there is alcohol being served at the bar, and we want to see a situation whereby there is not a fear and that hotels do not refuse to take on such events because children will be there and there might be a chance of prosecution. Is there a form of words that you have for that? I know that you support removing the children's certificate, so is there something that you would like to see in there that would make it easier for you and for businesses to have events without being liable for prosecution?

Mr Conner: It is a matter of taking that away, talking to Alison from the legal side, coming up with a form of words, and coming back to you. It is not something that we could come up with now, but we would be willing to do that.

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): OK, I am going to close the session, unless anyone has something burning that they want to get off their chest. Thank you all for coming along.

Mr Conner: May I just add one thing, Chair? You asked a question about our amendment that was not answered. I had a telephone conversation with the Department, but I am more than happy to follow it up with it in writing.

The Deputy Chairperson (Ms Gildernew): OK. Thank you.