

NUJ submission to the UK government's open call for evidence on Reforming the licensing system

November 2025

About the NUJ

The National Union of Journalists (NUJ) is the voice for journalism and journalists in the UK and Ireland. It was founded in 1907 and has more than 22,000 members working in newspapers, news agencies, digital media, magazines, book publishing, public relations, photography, videography and broadcasting.

The NUJ represents numerous journalists across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland who work for regional or local newspapers. The union has a Newspapers and Agencies Council that meets regularly, engaging with issues such as cuts to local journalism and democratic accountability.

The NUJ is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and is not affiliated to any political party.

Do you foresee any risks or benefits from removing the requirement to advertise alcohol licence notices in print local newspapers?

Alcohol licence notices are a key source of income for local papers and a key source of information for local communities.

For many people, particularly those who lack digital access, local papers remain their main source of news. Alcohol licence notices inform them of plans that can have a significant impact on their daily lives and quality of life, such as proposals to open a new pub or nightclub, or changes to an existing venue's operating hours.

It is concerning that the proposal to remove the requirement to advertise alcohol licence notices coincides with a similar proposal in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill to remove the requirement to publish notices on local authority governance changes in local papers. The removal of these requirements would severely affect democratic engagement and restrict many people's ability to access information that is of public interest.

This constitutes an obstruction of the public's right to be informed, and would likely create confusion, anger, and increased social isolation. The government states that these reforms "aim to create a modern, proportionate, and enabling system that supports economic growth, revitalises high streets and fosters vibrant communities." However, the removal of alcohol licensing notices would undermine both community cohesion and economic growth as local businesses would lose publicity and local papers would be deprived of reliable revenue, potentially putting treasured titles at risk of collapse.

Journalism is already severely underfunded in the UK and the government must recognise the role of local papers in providing trusted news and enabling social unity. The NUJ's News Recovery Plan offers practical measures the government could adopt to reinvigorate local journalism, such as extending business rates relief for local titles and introducing a windfall tax on tech giants to sustain the industry. Like community pubs, local papers should be designated assets of community value. The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill offers an opportunity for government to change legislation so that "asset of community value" status can be conferred on local papers and the NUJ looks forward to engaging with the government further on this matter.

The NUJ urges the UK government to retain the requirement for alcohol licensing notices to be printed in local newspapers.

In place of publication in print local newspapers, what alternative methods of publicising this information do you consider would be most effective in ensuring effective scrutiny, transparency and public awareness of licensing activities?

We reject the premise of this question. According to research from OnePoll, more people continue to access public notices through local titles than through local authority websites, printed mailouts, and social media. Print papers are the most effective methods of publicising these notices.