

Thank you to the committee for hosting us here.

As a background on Give Us The Night - we're an independent volunteer group whose primary purpose has been to achieve fair conditions for night-time venues. Night-time is about bringing together communities, enjoying unique experiences and in many cases being inspired to create challenging art and music. Night-time is a magical time, that so many of us live for. We want to live like the rest of Europe, but instead we're living in a no man's land, where in order to open, venues must apply for nightly Special Exemption Orders rather than being granted their own specific annual licence. We are still operating under this bizarre pub legislation from the last century, that does not meet modern requirements.

The infrastructure supporting venues in Ireland is wholly inadequate, the system is set-up to penalise any venue that wants to operate beyond standard pub hours, and the costs are extortionate. It is €410 per night (plus legal fees) for any venue (regardless of size) to open. This price was fixed back in 2008 by Fianna Fail and has been continued by Fine Gael.

Venues have now been priced out of the market. Special Exemption Order applications are down 55% since 2008, and dance licences are down 46%. So Ireland, famed for its dancing culture, is for the most part prevented from dancing after dark. This is an issue that has been neglected by the justice department and needs to be rectified.

This isn't just about dancing though; this is about opening our main urban centres later, that will move us in line with other European countries. Why don't theatres or galleries open

later, or coffee shops, restaurants or even markets? Why is there not a business model for them to open, considering gyms open 24 hours and bus routes are now beginning to operate 24 hours. Despite having record levels of tourism, we're ejecting people out of our towns and cities at artificially early times, also putting excessive pressure on transport services and Gardaí. No other European country does it like this.

Licensing is unavoidable in the conversation around music and night-time culture. The knock-on effect to performers and staff is catastrophic when a venue has to shut down. So many talented people around Ireland - young and old - literally don't have anywhere suitable to perform or work anymore. The vast majority of qualified sound engineers for instance don't have regular work, and would currently be lucky to find any work in this country.

We once had working showbands becoming stars around Ireland, when there was a nationwide venue circuit worth talking about. We can have that again, more people can earn a living here, will pay more taxes here; but instead the primary focus of government, councils and tourist boards is event tourism, in the shape of large scale concerts and festivals. This results in a gig economy that is sporadic and unpredictable. By also supporting local venues and ongoing community-led events, this will lead to a more vibrant night-time economy.

Once upon a time we built dancehalls, we had cinemas next to our local shops, we had various places for young people to come together and create real-life communities.

Multi-purpose spaces are now common place around Europe - spaces that are not just a pub or a club, but that operate as different types of facilities from day through to night, for the local community as well as for visitors. These are spaces that

can operate as an art gallery or coffee shop by day, and transform into a performance space or dance club by night.

The licensing system for venues is mean-spirited, is anti-business, anti-music and anti-culture. It's a form of censorship, and this isn't surprising, seeing as the legislation relating to venues was more or less written by the Catholic church back in the 1930's.

We propose the reintroduction of the theatre licence for late night cultural and music events, or a variation of this licence to be called a culture licence or a night-venue licence. We also suggest the introduction of a multi-use licence, for all types of cultural, artistic and business activities under the same roof. We can't underestimate the value of the night-time economy - the UK value their nightlife at £66 billion per year, while Berlin value their club industry alone at €1.5 billion per year. Similarly we should value the creative minds and entrepreneurship that emerge from the dancefloor. Electric Picnic was spawned from an internationally renowned Dublin nightclub and became an essential Irish cultural event like no other.

Local development plans need to follow through on what they say. The Dublin City Council development plan states that "there is a need to facilitate the concept of the 24-hour city, particularly in the city centre and key district centres". It also says it seeks "to promote and support a vibrant night culture that attracts a diverse range of cultural activity and is attractive for a wide range of age groups". Given the vast amount of key venue closures in recent times, do Dublin City Council believe that the city has a vibrant night culture?

Minister Josepha Madigan and her department are in the early stages of developing a policy on night-time culture. She has cited different areas where changes could be made, like licensing and planning, and also discussed the creation of a night mayor to manage night-time activities. Given the growing lack of access to cultural and music-based activities at night, we would like this committee to do all in its power to get behind this initiative.

We also propose that the Government commission a report on the night-time economy as soon as possible, that can forecast the potential impact on local economies around the country, should we reform the structure around nightlife.

We are at a critical point. An important cultural change must take place here, that recognises modern culture and communities, and what they expect going into the year 2020.

Thank you,

Sunil Sharpe - Give Us The Night