

SUBMISSION - One year of Auckland Council's Local Alcohol Policy (LAP)

Submitted by: Heart of the City (Auckland City Centre's Business Association)

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To Whom it May Concern,

Heart of the City (HOTC) represents the interests of businesses and property owners in Auckland's city centre. We advocate for a vibrant, accessible, safe, and welcoming city centre that is a great place to do business. Our members are diverse and include hundreds of hospitality venues, and a number of off-license operators.

In this submission, we are responding to Auckland Council's request for feedback on the first year of Auckland's Local Alcohol Policy (LAP), effective since December 2024. We structure our response to largely follow the question structure of the [Survey](#) where possible and also layering in other relevant information including on-license and off-license perspectives. We focus our feedback on the city centre changes and impacts.

The intent of the [Auckland Council Local Alcohol Policy](#) (LAP), adopted in 2024, is to reduce alcohol-related harm and enhance community safety by controlling the density, location, and operating hours of alcohol retailers.

Key changes put in place with the LAP were:

Off-licences (bottle stores & supermarkets)

- Sales must stop at 9pm across Auckland from 9 December 2024. (was 11pm)
- Two-year freeze on new off-licence applications in the central city + 23 suburbs from 16 September 2024. Applications in these frozen areas are likely to be declined unless they meet a very high threshold

On-licences (bars, restaurants, nightclubs)

From 9 December 2024, maximum trading hours are:

- Up to 4am in the central city (reaffirmed status quo)
- Sports clubs and RSAs: may sell alcohol until 1am (if permitted)

Other

- Special licences (festivals, events) are unchanged — assessed case-by-case.

Responses to Questions:

Q3. Have any aspects of the LAP worked well for your business/organisation?

Key themes in the feedback we received were:

On-License

- The LAP has been a good ‘reset’ that actively promotes responsible service of alcohol at licensed premises.
- Some on-license operators reported a net benefit from the restriction in off-licenses meaning that they are attracting more patronage due to the unavailability of off-licence purchasing after 9pm. This is a positive as it is a safer, more controlled environment so helps achieve the intent of the LAP.

Off-license

- Existing off-license operators are benefitting from reduced competition as the freeze on new off-license applications means they are able to gain higher market share.
- A standardised closing time across Auckland means there is a level playing field in the sense that operators can no longer compete on trading hours, with benefits to operating certainty.

Q4. Have you experienced or noticed any challenges with the LAP? If yes, what are they?

On-License

Key themes in the feedback we received were:

- There have been no improvements or changes in patron behaviour, levels of disorder, or public safety. The intent of the LAP is not being achieved through the rules – it would be much better to focus on transport, policing and street management which are crucial to late-night harm reduction.
- The restrictions on trading hours takes away turnover opportunities and increases costs. Not being able to trade between 4am and 8am has a negative financial impact as venues are not able to open for sports events televised from the northern hemisphere (which often start during this window).
- There is concern that the LAP’s broad restrictions disproportionately impact responsible operators, effectively penalising well-managed venues for issues caused by a small number of poor performers. Stakeholders note that most licensees and patrons behave responsibly, and therefore a more targeted, evidence-based enforcement approach focused on non-compliant operators and demonstrable risk would be more appropriate than uniform constraints that burden compliant businesses.
- Harm in surrounding streets is not driven by on-licence behaviour. Without corresponding increases in late-night policing, public transport options, or city-centre safety initiatives, the LAP places disproportionate responsibility on venues without addressing root causes.
- Some operators reported that some inspection and enforcement activity feels overly targeted, adversarial and creating a perception that the process is designed to catch venues out and close them down - rather than support compliance, leading to an environment where responsible businesses fear punitive action rather than collaborative problem-solving. Inconsistency of enforcement was noted, with some operators being targeted despite being very responsible hosts with a strong track record.

Off-license

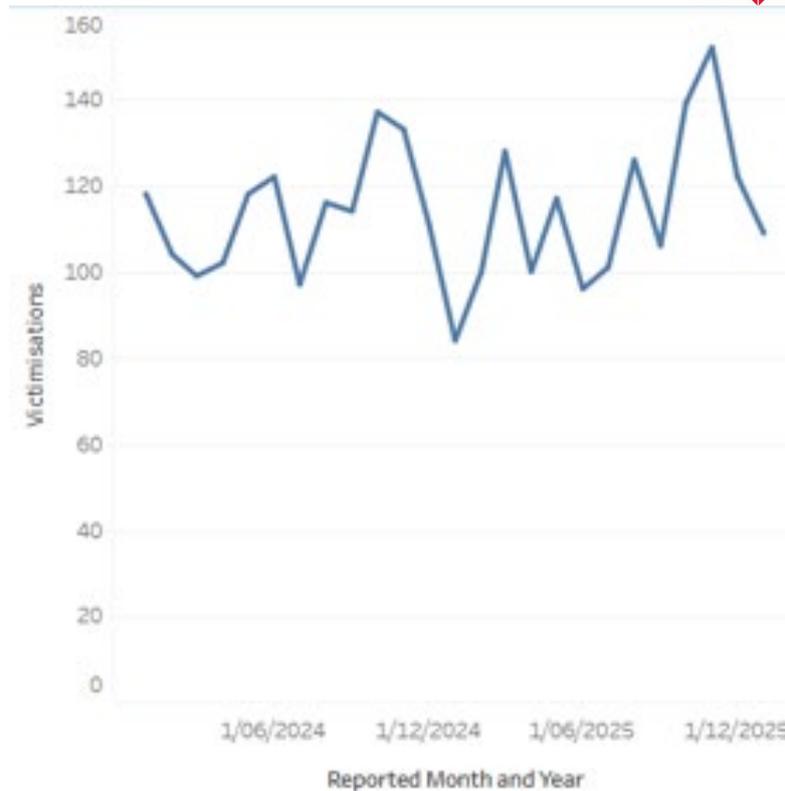
- Operators report occasional disappointment from visitors, particularly tourists, who are unable to purchase alcohol after 9pm. It means trade opportunity is missed, and diminishes the ability to offer a high-quality visitor experience in a city that positions itself as a global destination.
- Businesses in lower-risk areas (for example Wynyard Quarter), feel they are subject to blanket restrictions despite not experiencing the harm patterns present elsewhere. This contributes to a sense that responsible businesses in 'safe' precincts are being constrained by a policy designed for higher-risk areas.
- Off-licence operators acknowledge that liquor stores can attract challenging customer behaviour, contributing to safety and amenity concerns in the surrounding public realm. Responsible operators feel this association negatively affects perceptions of their business, even when they operate to a high standard.
- The 9pm closing times means a reduced ability to respond to peak-period customer behaviour - particularly during events and holidays - hindering their ability to adapt to fluid city demand patterns.
- Businesses that sell alcohol as part of a broader product offering aside from alcohol, face additional complexities shutting off alcohol sales at 9pm while keeping the rest of the store open. This creates operational inefficiency, staff training requirements, and customer confusion.
- Some operators who invest heavily in responsible practises such as staff training, security, store layout, lighting feel that the LAP does not differentiate between them and historically problematic stores. This creates a sense of inequity and undermines incentives for best-practice behaviour.

Q7. Do you have anything you would like to add that this survey has missed?

Police Victimisation Data

Reducing violence is a core component of the LAP's alcohol-harm reduction goals. The policy is designed to limit alcohol availability to reduce a spectrum of harms, including physical violence, domestic violence, and street disorder.

However, during the year since implementation, police victimisation data (city centre) shows no improvement in the frequency of Assaults – with some months showing increases year-on-year. This data suggests that the LAP is not achieving its intent in this area.



Victimisation Data (Police) – Assaults – City Centre

Night Time Economy

The Night Time Economy (spending in the city centre between 6pm and 6am) saw a fall of 8.2% in 2025 compared to 2024 – a higher fall than the daytime economy (-5.5%).

The Hospitality Sector in the city centre saw an overall decline of 8%, a larger fall than average across all categories (-6.4%).

Whilst causation is unable to be established, the hospitality industry and the city centre economy is facing a number of headwinds and any trading restrictions could be further hampering operators ability to trade effectively.

Unintended Consequences

- Some operators expressed concern that the restricted trading hours may unintentionally displace alcohol consumption into less safe, unsupervised environments, or push some individuals toward alternative substances — potentially shifting, rather than reducing, the overall harm the LAP aims to address.
- Some on-license operators reported that a closing time of 4am is impractical and potentially more dangerous for customers and staff – due to the unavailability of transport links.

License Costs

- On-license operators have reported that the high cost of licence renewals and special-event licences presents a significant barrier to trade, particularly in the current environment where operators are already under pressure from reduced consumer spending and the broader cost-of-living crisis.

CONCLUSION:

Heart of the City supports a balanced approach to alcohol regulation that reduces harm while protecting the economic vitality, safety, and cultural vibrancy of Auckland's city centre.

The city centre has a unique role as Auckland's largest entertainment, hospitality, and events precinct, and policy settings must reflect its distinct late-night economy and safety needs.

Heart of the City appreciates the intent behind Auckland's Local Alcohol Policy (LAP) - to reduce alcohol-related harm, including violence, antisocial behaviour, and unsafe public environments.

However, after its first year of implementation, feedback indicates that the LAP, in its current form, is not achieving these objectives in the Auckland city centre and is generating a range of unintended and disproportionate impacts on responsible operators.

Businesses report that the LAP's blanket approach does not adequately account for the unique operating context of the city centre. While some positive effects have been observed - such as a reset and reminder on responsible service practices and reduced competition for established off-licences - these are outweighed by operational challenges, reduced flexibility, and increased compliance complexity. Importantly, available police victimisation data demonstrates no improvement in the rate of assaults in the city centre, with some months showing year-on-year increases, suggesting the LAP is not achieving its harm-reduction aims in this regard – or at least that other factors are at play.

For on-licence operators, the LAP has added administrative pressure, heightened enforcement scrutiny, and reduced trading opportunities, particularly through the inability to open during early-morning international sports events. Operators consistently note that harm in the public realm is driven more by gaps in policing, transport provision, and late-night city-centre management than by on-licence activity itself. The broad, uniform nature of enforcement - including inconsistent inspection approaches and an adversarial tone in some interactions - risks penalising responsible hosts rather than targeting poor performers.

For off-licence operators, the 9pm sales cut-off has reduced customer choice and flexibility, impacted the visitor experience, and constrained low-risk businesses in low-risk areas. Mixed-use retailers face operational inefficiencies in shutting off alcohol sales while remaining open, and responsible operators feel unfairly grouped with historically problematic outlets. Some operators also note that restrictions may be displacing alcohol consumption into unsafe, unsupervised environments or towards alternative substances, shifting rather than reducing harm.

From an economic perspective, the city centre's Night-Time Economy declined by 8.2% in 2025, outpacing the downturn in the daytime economy. Hospitality spend fell by 8%, indicating the sector is facing significant headwinds. While causation cannot be directly established, additional trading restrictions at a time of reduced consumer spend and rising costs - including high licence renewal and special-event licence fees - further constrain operators' ability to trade effectively.

Taken together, this evidence suggests the LAP requires refinement to better align with the realities of the city centre. A more targeted, risk-based, and evidence-driven approach is needed - one that differentiates between high- and low-risk areas, rewards responsible operators, and focuses regulatory and enforcement



effort where it will meaningfully reduce alcohol-related harm. Complementary investment in policing, transport, and public-realm safety will also be essential if the LAP's objectives are to be fully realised.

Heart of the City remains committed to working with Auckland Council to refine the policy settings so that they effectively reduce harm while supporting a vibrant, safe, and economically resilient city centre.

Heart of the City recognises the Council's objectives around harm minimisation, but stresses the need for balanced regulation that supports both community wellbeing and the economic strength of the city centre, particularly during a period of recovery and significant urban transformation.

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