

Sunday Trading Rules Set for Review by Social Development Minister

December 2010



The rules are set to change. Social Development Minister Alex Attwood has said that, following representations and his own consideration, he plans to take a fresh look at the law surrounding Sunday trading.

Opening hours in Northern Ireland are currently regulated by the Shops (Sunday Trading &c.) (NI) Order 1997. Large shops (those with a floor area exceeding 280 square metres) are restricted to opening for a maximum of five hours between 13:00 and 18:00 on a Sunday. Plans to lengthen shopping hours on Sundays would bring Northern Ireland more into line with the UK mainland where the rules are more flexible. In England and Wales large shops are permitted to open for a total of six hours between 10:00 and 18:00. In Scotland there are no overall government limits on Sunday opening. Increasing opening hours would also bring Northern Ireland closer to the status quo in mainland Europe where very few restrictions on opening times exist.

Mr Attwood is keen to continue to maintain the tradition of Sunday as a family day but believes “a review would be a timely and balanced way to go forward”. “Going forward” in this context would appear to apply mainly to economic implications and the expectations of consumers. In the current economic climate to many it seems only sensible for large shops to be open for longer on a day of the week when much of the population is off work. Employees would be provided with more working hours, increasing spending power and producing economic knock-on benefits.

Mr Attwood also referred to benefits for the tourist industry as well as the regeneration of town and city centres. Benefits to family life can also be envisaged as many see shopping as an occasion for a family to spend some time together, especially when the family includes young children. Many larger stores currently open at 12:00 in order to allow potential customers to browse but do not open tills until 13:00. This can cause frustration and longer waiting times.

The current restrictions have been in place for 10 years. Is it now time for a move towards more flexibility? Should there be any opening restrictions on Sundays at all? We would encourage you to make your views known on this issue via one of the following methods:

- E-mail: social.policy@dsdni.gov.uk
- Phone: 028 90829521
- Post: Social Policy Unit, Department for Social Development (NI), 4th Floor, Lighthouse Building 1 Cromac Place Gasworks Business Park, Belfast, BT7 2JB.

Please note: The content of this article is for information purposes only and further advice should be sought from a professional advisor before any action is taken.