

# **24-hour drink law disaster: Police chiefs brand round-the-clock pubs a terrible mistake as they call for 'drunk tanks' to cope with late-night mayhem**

- **Round-the-clock licenses have proved 'a disaster' say police chiefs**
- **Police chiefs call for 'drunk tanks' to care for the overintoxicated**
- **£400 cost would be for private security and health teams to care for them**
- **Survey of 2,000 police finds 95% say they waste time dealing with drunks**

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**Drinking disaster: Chief Constable Adrian Lee of Northamptonshire has slammed 24-hour drinking**

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The 24-hour drinking laws have proved a disaster, police chiefs declared yesterday.

Calling for the creation of 'drunk tanks', they said the continental-style licensing regime had led to chaos in the early hours.

'The cafe culture was an entirely legitimate experiment but I don't think it has worked,' said Northamptonshire Chief Constable Adrian Lee.

'The impact on the streets of our towns now at three and six o'clock in the morning is very significant and I don't think that is correct and we need to change that.'

The Association of Chief Police Officers wants to be able to put drunks in holding cells where they will be charged up to £400 a night.

It claims the Coalition has not kept its promise to reverse the worst effects of Labour's switch to round-the-clock opening hours.

Mr Lee said he was disappointed at the lack of progress on a late night levy scheme under which councils can charge bars up to £4,440 a year to help pay for clean-up costs and extra police.

He also criticised ministers for failing to bring in minimum pricing for alcohol.

Since 24-hour drinking was brought in by Tony Blair's government in 2005, police officers have dished out an estimated 400,000 fines for drunk and disorderly behaviour.

The Mail – backed by senior police, ambulance staff and judges – opposed the licensing change, which was justified as a move toward peaceful, European drinking.

Coalition ministers say they have tried to limit the fall-out from the policy but have stopped short of returning to the traditional closing times of 11pm or midnight.

An Acpo spokesman said only revellers who were a danger to themselves risked being put in drunk tanks.

Those who had committed a crime would be taken to a police cell and anyone ill would be sent to hospital.

The idea has split the police service. Chief constables say their cells, which cost £300 a night, are often filled with drunks who need constant monitoring.



**Big fat fail: Police chiefs say the 'cafe culture' which was the long-term goal of the 24-hour licensing scheme has only led to early morning chaos**

Mr Lee said: 'Why don't we take them to a drunk cell owned by a commercial company and get the commercial company to look after them during the night until they are sober?'

'When that is over, we will issue them with a fixed penalty and the company will be able to charge them for their care, which would be at quite significant cost and that might be a significant deterrent.'

But rank-and-file officers are unhappy. Steve White of the Police Federation said: 'This proposal throws up far more questions than answers, particularly with regards to accountability.'

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Yes, there may be some merit in setting up privately-run 'drunk tanks', where the incapably inebriated would be charged a fee while they sober up.

The plan might also be extended to hospital A & E departments.

But may the Mail, the paper that campaigned for years against New Labour's mad round-the-clock drinking laws, offer another solution?

As chief constables now declare the policy is a 'failed experiment', why doesn't the Government just drop it?

Privately-operated drunk tanks are neither a viable nor long-term solution to binge drinking.'

Dr Peter Brambleby, who is health chief at Westminster City Council, said: 'This is an interesting idea, but simply treats one symptom of a much wider problem.'

'We need to promote a healthier attitude to alcohol and stop people before they get into the state where they cause harm to themselves or others.'

'We are just as concerned about the quiet drinkers who drink at home and aren't causing problems on the streets.'

Government officials said police forces were working on introducing the late-night levy. Councils can also impose a blanket ban on late drinking.

Jeremy Browne, the Coalition's crime prevention minister, said alcohol-fuelled crime cost around £11 billion a year in England and Wales.

He added: 'Frontline police officers are all too aware of the drunken behaviour and alcohol-fuelled disorder that can effectively turn towns and cities into no-go areas for law-abiding people, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights.'



**What people face: This is the inside of an Australian drunk tank, with its metal bed and loo, which could be used in Britain**



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**Problem with alcohol: A man is left in a German drunk tank, which could be used in Britain and users could be charged £400 per night**

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Diana Johnson, Labour's crime spokesman, said there should be caution about the role of the private sector.

She added: 'Drunk tanks could and should only be one small aspect of any proper alcohol strategy, which would need to start with education in schools right through to licensing enforcement powers.'



'The Government's alcohol policy is out of touch and in disarray – dropping their minimum alcohol pricing policy, rejecting drugs and alcohol education in schools, and going ahead with an ineffective late night levy.'

Acpo estimates that half of all violent crime is alcohol-related, while offenders are thought to be under the influence of drink in nearly half of domestic abuse cases.

Mr Lee is not the first to moot the idea of privately-run drunk tanks.

It was floated last year by David Cameron and more recently taken up by the Conservative police and crime commissioner for Humberside, Matthew Grove, who said it would conserve finite resources.

'One day we're probably going to have someone dying of a heart attack on the side of the road because we're dealing with a drunk,' he said.

'Public services are a finite resource and we need to appreciate that.'

When championing the policy of round-the-clock drinking in the 2001 election, Labour used a campaign gimmick to court young voters by sending them a text message reading: 'Don't give a XXXX for last orders – vote Labour for extra time.'