

Licenses unaware of law for children

By Peter Johnson

Pubs all over Shropshire are unwittingly breaking the law by employing school-age youngsters to serve alcohol, a licensee's meeting heard. Children aged 16 and under are not allowed to pull pints behind the bar or serve glasses of wine to diners in restaurants - despite the recent relaxation in licensing laws, child employment officer Joanne Walker-Shelton said. But licensees said they were unaware of the legislation.

The revelation was described as a "bombshell" by Telford's highly experienced police licensing officer Paul Homersley who said he had been totally unaware of the rule.

Mrs Walker-Shelton, who covers both Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire, is responsible for registering all school-age children for jobs - from paperboys and girls to models and West End performers.

She attended a meeting of Telford Licensed Victuallers' Association in Wellington yesterday to outline the law because of the growing number of children employed in family or theme pubs with restaurants.

Glasses

Mrs Walker-Shelton said child employment legislation covered children of compulsory school age - from 13 to 16 on the official school leaving date of June 29.

Even if youngsters collected empty glasses for no payment - such as the children of licensees - they were still legally employed as they were involved in the profit-making of the business, she said.

And the law clearly stated they could not sell or serve alcohol except in sealed containers.

Mr Homersley said: "This is a big issue. A lot of people are unwittingly breaking the law at the moment and I must admit this is news to me."

Since the new Licensing Act came into force two years ago, many licensees thought they were allowed to employ school-age youngsters under supervision behind bars and as waitresses in restaurants, he said.

But Mrs Walker-Shelton said child employment legislation took precedence and these pubs were breaking the law and could ultimately face prosecution.

"I think it's great for children to have part-time jobs. But I have to ensure they are working lawfully," she said.

All school-age children must be registered if they want to work. For details, call Mrs Walker-Shelton on (01952) 385223.

Dancing night

People are invited to mill