

LICENSING COMMITTEE

Update on licensing work plan 2020 2 July 2020

Report of Licensing Manager

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update the Committee in respect of progress regarding the Licensing 2020 work plan approved by the Committee at its meeting 28 November 2019

The report is public

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) That the Committee note the report

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting in November 2019 the Committee approved a licensing workplan. The workplan provided an overview of planned project work for the year 2020. The work plan did not deal with the day to day routine activities of the team which takes priority over planned reviews and developments.
- 1.2 The Committee were advised that the permanent Licensing Manager is currently on Maternity leave and the temporary licensing manager is working a reduced week, 3 days per week.
- 1.3 This report now provides an update on progress with the workplan, together with an overview of other work undertaken as a result of covid 19 pandemic.

2.0 Details

- 2.1 Attached at **Appendix 1** is a copy of the approved workplan with an additional column added on the right hand side of the document showing the updated position as at July 2020.
- 2.2 There has been some progress made with the workplan, but this has been hampered by the pandemic and reduced staff resources during January/February 2020.
- 2.3 The pandemic has seen a huge reduction in the public demand for taxis including private hire. The night time economy to all intents and purposes has been closed down and vulnerable people who often used taxis for journeys to medical appointments, hairdressers and shopping have been told to stay at home. The impact on the taxi trade has been extremely severe, a large sector of the trade have not worked during the pandemic, one private operator estimated that trade had reduced by 80-90% In

view of the very unique circumstances of the pandemic it may be appropriate to defer some of the planned projects in particular the review of taxi licensing conditions.

- 2.4 Since March the licensing service has adapted to operate in a way which is compliant with covid 19 restrictions. New procedures have been put in place regarding driver medicals, vehicle testing and application processes. Officers work remotely and in Morecambe Town Hall. There has been a minimum of 2 licensing officers at Morecambe Town Hall at any one time, phone calls, emails and complaints have all been dealt with in a timely manner. The Council website has been utilised to provide relevant update regarding covid 19 issues
- 2.5 At the start of the pandemic the service was busy dealing with enquiries from businesses looking to operate legitimately, but differently to “business as usual”. Off sales and delivery sales of alcohol from pubs was an option explored by many businesses, licensing requirements for sales of alcohol via a third party app was also something that we hadn’t previous experience of.
- 2.6 In terms of taxis there was some initial debate as to whether taxis services could continue to operate. However, advice from the Department for Transport made it clear that they could operate but were under no obligation to do so. A number of enquiries were received regarding the use of screens/ partitions in taxis, this was a national issue and the only Govt advice was that this was a matter for local authorities to determine. The Council reviewed all available information and developed a position statement on the use of such screens, this was dealt with by means of an urgent decision and reported to the Licensing Committee on 6 June.
- 2.7 Prior to the pandemic an application for a review of a premises licence was received from Lancashire Police. The application related to a late-night takeaway in Lancaster City Centre found operating in breach of the premises licence conditions. The Licensing team made a representation supporting the police led review, and this was based on the lack of management control at the premises. The review hearing was originally scheduled for the beginning of April but was adjourned due to covid restrictions, a revised date was then arranged for the end of May, with all the arrangements in place for a remote sub committee hearing. The licence holder surrendered the premises licence the day before the review hearing, so no hearing took place. The preparation for the hearing however took a considerable amount of police and local authority time.
- 2.8 In terms of moving forward it is difficult to estimate the amount of officer resources available to undertake planned project work. The re-opening of the hospitality sector is expected to present a number of challenges. At the time of drafting this report the Prime Minister has stated an intention to try and relax the rules around hospitality but there has not been any detail as to whether this relates to any or all of the following planning, licensing or pavement café requirements. It may be that a verbal update can be provided at the meeting.
- 2.9 In recent weeks there has been a steady increase in the number of taxi related applications and enquiries, vehicle testing has been reintroduced and complaints are being investigated. New driver training programmes have not been recommenced, this is dependent upon Lancaster and Morecambe College providing the training programmes, as such the Council is not processing any new driver applications (unless the applicant has completed all stages of the application process. Driver renewal applications are being processed and licences/ ID badges issued via the postal system

3.0 Conclusion

- 3.1 The report provides an overview of progress on the 2020 Licensing workplan. The progress of the workplan has been hampered by the impact and changes brought about by the covid19 pandemic. The report also provides members with an overview of the key licensing issues arising from the pandemic

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing):

The work plan identifies a number of policy reviews which will be subject to impact assessments as appropriate

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Each policy review will be conducted within the appropriate legal framework and compliance with best practice guidance where appropriate

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Any financial implications arising from individual elements of the work plan will be detailed in the specific reports

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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