

LICENSING COMMITTEE

Pandemic Update – Licensing Service 7 January 2021

Report of Licensing Manager

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update the Committee in respect of the work undertaken by the Licensing and Public Protection services during the Covid-19 Pandemic.

The report is public

RECOMMENDATIONS

- (1) That the Committee note the report

Report

The Chairman and vice-chair requested that the Committee be updated with the work undertaken by Licensing and Public Protection teams during the covid-19 pandemic.

Working with businesses and compliance checks

- During the first lockdown and the introduction of trading restrictions for businesses, the Food and licensing teams have worked closely with businesses to help them understand the restrictions as well as how to operate safely and legally. Guidance notes, advice papers, and website updates have been used to help businesses understand the regulations and how to protect customers, themselves and their staff.
- The advice and support offered has been significant and at times very time consuming, going beyond the conventional relationship between businesses and the public protection services. However, it was clear from the beginning these were unprecedented challenges being faced by businesses and the public which required a response that went beyond the conventional.

Business advice and support

There has been a range of advice and support offered to businesses, including:-

- Routine calls and e-mails from businesses seeking general Covid safety advice and information
- Frequently Asked Questions updates published on the Council website
- Trade specific summary documents and guidance based on Covid regulations published and issued to businesses via e-mail
- Virtual Business forum
- Design and production of various advice leaflets and posters

- Video “pod cast” on how to conduct a risk assessment
- Guidance on safe and effective cleaning
- Guidance on effective cleaning products (specifically focussed on sanitisers suitable for killing the Coronavirus)
- Attending Pub Watch meetings to advise on safe opening of the pubs
- Regular summary updates to licensed businesses outlining and explaining trading restrictions under the Tier system
- Advice and signposting of businesses to grants and financial assistance available

Private Hire and Taxi Licensing

- We have also changed the way we operate to keep staff and the public safe by reducing one to one contact with businesses and licence holders, whilst at the same time changing or relaxing standards to allow businesses and services to continue to operate. For example, utilising existing documents held on file for taxi applications, ensuring MOT extensions were applied to vehicle licences and allowing fast track applications.
- The introduction of the legal requirement for passengers to wear a face mask in licensed vehicles has led to a handful of complaints from members of the public, unaware that it is only an advisory measure for drivers. Lancaster City Councils communications have assisted in ensuring such updates are in the public domain and routinely updated.
- Vehicle testing has been reintroduced and the Councils vehicle maintenance unit are operating a full testing regime.
- New driver training programmes have been recommenced at Lancaster and Morecambe College. The Committee approved an amendment to policy to allow for private medicals to be accepted, this position will be reviewed in one year.
- The Council is now able to process new driver applications and driver renewal applications are being processed and licences/ ID badges issued via the postal system.

Feedback from businesses

- Our approach across the Licensing service and the food team has generally received support and thanks by businesses. Whilst there have been some complaints and dissatisfied comments, our response and support to businesses has been broadly welcomed and recognised as being fair, supportive and consistent.

Covid Compliance visits

- The licensing and food teams have not only been proactive in business support, but has also conducted many advice visits, compliance checks, and taken enforcement action using powers available under the Coronavirus regulations and health and Safety at Work Act.
- The approach to enforcement has followed the Council’s standard intervention protocols, escalating from advice, warning, and formal enforcement action where required, including the informal and formal closure of 4 licensed premises where

Covid safety controls were inadequate and the business had failed to positively respond to earlier interventions.

- From July the 4th when the pubs and restaurants reopened, the team have conducted approximately 1,500 compliance visits to premises. The visits were mainly conducted in the evenings and at weekends. The visits were made by Council Public Protection staff, but with the support of Lancashire Police.

Covid Safe award scheme

- The scheme was developed by Lancaster City Council to help provide public assurance that it was safe to return to our high street shops. Although there are a few similar schemes operating across the Council, the Lancaster scheme was the first to be launched by a Local Authority and has received national recognition by Government as an example of good practice.
- Full details of the scheme are on the Council's website [Lancaster.gov.uk/covid-safe](https://lancaster.gov.uk/covid-safe)
- At the time of writing, there are just over 100 businesses that have been awarded the Covid Safe award and we expect the number to grow over the next few weeks.

Conclusion

During these unprecedented times, the licensing and public protection teams have worked exceptionally hard to advise and support businesses and licence holders at each stage of the pandemic, assisting to reduce the infection rate locally. Examples of pro-active measures have been implemented and used as best practice nationally.

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

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Legal services have been consulted and make no comments

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

No financial implications arise from the content of the report
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OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources, Information Services, Property, Open Spaces
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Not applicable

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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