

LICENSING COMMITTEE

THURSDAY, 22 APRIL 2021

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR – GROWTH AND REGENERATION

REVIEW OF COVID-19 IMPACT ON LICENSING SERVICE IN 2020-21

EXEMPT INFORMATION

None.

PURPOSE

THIS REPORT IS TO UPDATE THE LICENSING COMMITTEE ON THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON OUR THE LICENSING SERVICE IN 2020/21 AND PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- the Committee note the content of this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since March 2020 the Environmental Health Service have seen an exponential increase in workload as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. As well as enforcing the various lockdowns/Tier restrictions for different business sectors the Service has also been commissioned by Staffordshire County Council to investigate outbreaks of Covid-19 in local workplaces and ensure compliance.

Throughout this period the Service has continued to provide critical regulatory services including the processing of applications for new and renewal licenses across the full range of licensing functions including the Licensing Act, Gambling Act, Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle/Drivers/Operators, Scrap Metal dealers, Animal boarding/breeding licenses, Tattoo/skin piercing licence applications and dealing with illegal encampments.

Although the pandemic and various lockdowns have placed restrictions on many of these licensed premises at different times, the majority of these licenses have still had to be assessed and processed alongside our emergency response workload. Many of these businesses have continued to trade as they have been classed as 'essential infrastructure' supplying food/beverages or essential services to key workers e.g. hackney/private hire vehicles or animal boarding. Other 'higher risk' businesses such as 'close contact' industries have only been allowed to trade for a limited time when national restrictions were briefly lifted.

This report aims to summarise the Licensing workload through 2020/21 alongside the additional business support that has provided to many local businesses including the hospitality industry and licensed trade. The report outlines proposals for how we will continue to support these industries through 2021/22 and beyond as we move to the 'Reset and Recovery' stage.

Regulatory Licensing Workload

From 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021 the Environmental Health (Licensing) service processed the following licence applications/requests for service:

SUBJECT AREA	DESCRIPTION	TOTAL 2020/21
ANIMAL LICENSING	Animal Boarding, Breeding, Dog Control etc.	44
FOOD	Food Registration Received	100
GAMBLING ACT	Gambling Act applications, permits, lotteries etc.	45
LICENSING ACT	Premises Licence Applications, renewals, amendments, variations etc.	285
	Premises Licence Consultation	11
	Temp Event Consultation	10
	Club Premises Certificate - Annual Fee (renewals)	15
	Licence Application Consultee	10
	Temporary Event Notice (TENS) Standard	7
	Temporary Event Notice (TENS) Late	3
	Request for Service	28
	Annual Fee Enquiries	8
	Personal licence	48
	Sub-Committee Hearings for New Application, Licence Transfer and Change of DPS	3
LICENSING OTHER	Street Café, House to House, Scrap Metal, Hairdressers, Street Collections etc.	50
MISCELLANEOUS LICENSING ENQUIRIES	General Enquiry	98
SKIN PIERCING	Skin Piercing	40
TAXI LICENSING	Licensed Vehicle Driver - new/renewal applications	18
	Licensed Hackney Carriage - new/renewal applications	141
	Licensed Vehicle Operator	3
	Licensed Private Hire Vehicle - new/renewal applications	94

Covid-19 Emergency Response – Enforcement of Business Restrictions through various 'lockdowns'

Since the start of the first 'lockdown' in March 2020, the Environmental Health team have been responsible for enforcing the 'business restrictions' regulations that have placed restrictions on local businesses and industries throughout the year including

the move to 'Tiers' and the resumption of further 'lockdowns' that have heavily affected various business sectors. In 2020/21 we received the following requests for service in relation to Covid-19 business restrictions and alleged non-compliance that required investigating in licensed and non-licensed premises:

COVID-19	COVID-19 Advice request	223
	COVID-19 Non-Compliance	200

A number of these incidents required investigation on site to collect evidence and establish the facts of the case. Overall compliance levels have been good, and the majority of complaints received about non-compliance appeared to be unfounded or due to misinterpretations by the public. Where issues have been identified we have been able to secure immediate compliance without the need for further enforcement action, although there have been some recent incidents that may need to be brought before the committee in the near future. We meet with the local Police force and Licensing Unit on a weekly basis to share intelligence, review recent incidents and prepare for forthcoming changes in restrictions.

Covid-19 Test and Trace Investigations at Workplaces

Since the start of the pandemic, the Environmental Health team have worked alongside our Public Health colleagues at Staffordshire County Council and led investigations into Covid-19 outbreaks and incidents at local workplaces and other high-risk premises. In 2020/21 we have investigated the following number of Covid-19 Incidents:

COVID-19 TEST & TRACE	COVID-19 Outbreaks/Clusters/Incidents	170
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23 (13.5%) of these incidents were in premises licensed by Tamworth Borough Council with the remainder occurring within a wide range of other employment settings. Each of these incidents has had to be fully investigated and risk assessed to ensure appropriate Covid Secure measures were in place, follow up any 'close contacts'/further cases and on occasions arrange mass swab testing. Many of these incidents have required physical site inspections to provide assurance that suitable control measures were adequate. The Environmental Health team attend the Staffordshire Health Protection Board 3 times per week to report back on local incidents.

Business Support provided to Hospitality/Licensed Businesses in 2020/21 and going forward

At the beginning of the first lockdown in March 2020 our team made contact with 274 local food business to offer and advice/support on the new restrictions and provide guidance on making their take-away/click and collect service Covid Secure and to signpost them to the grants on offer. We have also received 118 requests for advice on specific Food Hygiene issues.

Later in the year we appointed 2 Environmental Health Covid-19 Officers (EH C-19 Officers) who have been visiting local businesses and offering advice and support on how to safely trade and re-open businesses in a Covid Secure manner.

Between December 2020 and March 2021 our EH C-19 Officers have provided the following support:

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH COVID-19 OFFICER SUPPORT FOR LOCAL BUSINESSES	958 visits to local business/premises to advise on COVID-19 Measures
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Support available to local hospitality and other licensed industries in 2021/22

We will continue to process applications for new and renewal licenses across all parts of our Licensing service as this is a statutory requirement.

Our EH Covid-19 Officers will also continue to visit local businesses across the Borough to monitor compliance and offer advice/support whilst other member of the Environmental Health team will investigate any serious allegations of Covid Secure/Licensing breaches.

At each stage of the road map we will offer advice/support to local businesses in sectors that are allowed to re-open and will sign post them to the most relevant guidance for their sector. This will be very important when indoor hospitality and events are allowed to take place later on in the national 'road map'.

We will also continue to investigate any outbreaks/clusters/incidents of Covid-19 at local businesses to help control the spread of the disease.

During the next 12 months we will also be starting the review of our Gambling Policy, Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Policy as well as reviewing our 'Statement of Licensing Policy' and the associated Cumulative Impact Assessment.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The above Licensing activities are funded within the Council's normal budgetary process, and the additional Covid-19 emergency response workload will be resourced by the Covid-19 grant funding provided by Staffordshire County Council and the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

LEGAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS BACKGROUND

None.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATION

None.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

None.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

None.

REPORT AUTHOR

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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

APPENDICES

None.

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