

## **NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

### **LICENSING COMMITTEE**

At a virtual meeting of the **Licensing Committee** held on Thursday, 11 February 2021 at 2.00 pm.

#### **PRESENT**

Jl Hutchinson  
(Chair) (in the Chair)

#### **MEMBERS**

K Parry  
T Cessford  
R Gibson  
W Pattison  
C Seymour  
K Stow

L Bowman  
B Crosby  
J Lang  
G Roughead  
A Sharp

#### **OFFICERS**

T Hardy  
N Masson

P Soderquest  
N Turnbull  
D Wilson

Licensing Manager  
Legal Services Manager (Deputy Monitoring  
Officer)  
Head of Housing & Public Protection  
Democratic Services Officer  
Business Compliance and Public Safety  
Manager

#### **9 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Campbell, Purvis and Wilson.

#### **10 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Licensing Committee held on Wednesday 26 February 2020, as circulated be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

#### **REPORTS OF THE HEAD OF HOUSING AND PUBLIC PROTECTION**

#### **11 STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY**

The purpose of the report was to advise the Committee of delays in the

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consultation process associated with the review of the Council's Statement of Licensing Policy. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed minutes).

Philip Soderquest, Head of Housing and Public protection, explained that the Licensing Act 2003 required licensing authorities to prepare and publish a statement of its licensing policy every 5 years. The process included consultation with the hospitality industry, however, the closure of licensed premises and furloughing of staff, due to the Covid 19 pandemic, had meant that it had been impossible to adequately consult with interested parties.

The Local Government association had received advice from the Home Office that the process could be delayed, provided work was progressed once normality returned.

The Head of Housing and Public Protection made reference to the comments made at the earlier meeting of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee about holding workshops as part of the consultation process. He also enquired whether sections of the Licensing Policy be brought to future meetings as part of the review process. This was welcomed by the Chair who suggested that this commence after the local elections scheduled to be held on 6 May 2021.

The Chair proposed that the current Statement of Licensing Policy remain in effect, until such time that it was possible to prepare and consult on a revised policy. This was seconded by Councillor Sharp and unanimously agreed.

**RESOLVED** that:

- a) The contents of the report be noted.
- b) The Council be recommended to agreed that the Statement of Licensing Policy 2015-20, remain in effect until such time that it was possible to prepare and consult on a revised policy.

## 12 **COVID 19 ON LICENSED PREMISES**

The purpose of the report was to provide Members with information regarding legislation put in place to protect the population from risk of infection arising from Covid 19, and the impact on, on-licensed premises. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed minutes).

Darin Wilson, Business Compliance and Public Safety Manager, set out the activity that the Public Protection Service, as the lead service for responding to regulatory issues and compliance associated with Covid 19 legislation in respect of businesses. He was pleased to report that compliance by businesses in Northumberland had been very high and businesses were to be applauded. He reported that:

- License fee income in relation to the hospitality industry had reduced by 75%.
- The number of drivers and vehicles licensed had reduced by 33%.
- 5 Direction Notices had been issued to close premises, due to the severity of breaches and risk to public health.
- 6 fixed penalty notices had been issued for less severe breaches of the

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regulations, such as individuals being served at the bar when it should have been table service only.

The Head of Housing and Public Protection described the complexity of the legislation and the short period of notice they were given of changes between announcements and implementation. Enquiries and complaints had increased in complexity. Their main priority had been the protection of public health, given the severity of disease. The next announcement regarding easing of restrictions of the third national lockdown was awaited on 22 February 2021. He was very proud of how the service had responded to the challenges of the pandemic and the willingness of staff to work evenings and weekends.

The Chair and Members expressed their appreciation to staff and also businesses, some of whom had responded in innovative ways to ensure their businesses could remain open and Covid compliant. They acknowledged the severest risk to public health was death, and therefore they thanked officers for their efforts to save lives, which they and their communities appreciated.

In answer to questions, it was confirmed that:

- Approximately 50% of the complaints investigated had been justified. This was mostly due to a lack of understanding on what businesses could and could not do.
- The number of complaints received had been lower during national lockdowns.
- The highest number of complaints had been received in the period immediately after premises had reopened on 4 July 2020.
- Fines of £1,000 had been issued as fixed penalty notices to 6 premises. None of these, or the 5 premises which had been closed, had so far appealed against the action. They had a period of 6 months to appeal to the Magistrates Court.
- The service had been provided by the redirection of resources from other areas, recruitment of additional members of staff funded by LA7 resources identified for education and enforcement, and also the claiming of costs via Government grant.
- They used the “4 Es: Engage, Explain, Encourage, Enforce”. Enforcement and the issuing of fixed penalty notices and direction notices to close, had been issued when premises had not been managed, face coverings had not been worn, no social distancing, no record taking etc.
- Meetings were held every Monday with Northumbria Police to discuss where the highest rates of infection were located, and officers were sent to those areas.
- Reference was made to the work that had been undertaken in recent weeks to prevent an illegal rave in rural Northumberland where over 1,000 tickets had been sold. A small minority of residents had little or no regard of the risk to health that the virus posed, and were prepared to meet in large numbers, contributing to the extension of restrictions.

**RESOLVED** that the information be noted.

### 13 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

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The next meeting was scheduled to be held on Thursday 29 April 2021 at 2.00 p.m.

**CHAIR**.....

**DATE**.....

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