

LICENSING PARTNERSHIP UPDATE REPORT

Licensing Committee – 30 September 2014

Report of Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services

Status: For Information

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary:

The Council is a member of a licensing partnership with Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils which provides line management responsibilities to their respective licensing enforcement teams and an administration team at Sevenoaks to carry out the processing of licence applications and representations.

This arrangement provides each council with sovereignty over its policies and decision making processes whilst operating within a partnership that gives service resilience and capacity to deal with the fluctuating demands on the service through the year.

This report is a follow up to the report that was presented to the Licensing Committee on 4 April 2013.

This report supports the Key Aim of safe communities and effective management of Council Resources.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Ms Lowe

Contact Officer(s) Mrs. Claire Perry Ext. 7325 / 07970 731616

Recommendation to Licensing Committee: That the report be noted.

Introduction and Background

- 1 In 2009 it was agreed that both the line management and administration of the Council's licensing processes would be undertaken in partnership with Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) and Maidstone Borough Council (MBC). It was agreed that the administrative team processing licensing applications would be based at the offices of SDC with Licensing Officers continuing to be based at each council.
- 2 Each council retained responsibility for setting its licensing policies, enforcement strategies and decision making at Sub and Full Licensing committees. Claire Perry, the shared Licensing Partnership Manager, has line management responsibility for the operation of the administration team and the licensing officers of the three councils.

- 3 In January 2010 the new Licensing Partnership took effect and the back office functions started to be transferred to the administration hub based at SDC. The administration hub uses a single database to maintain the licensing records for the three authorities. The database structure enables reporting to be carried out on an individual authority basis and allows for the variances that still exist in the policies and procedures of the three authorities.
- 4 The Partnership is governed by an agreement made between the three councils and the Chief Officer/Heads of Service responsible for licensing at their respective authorities meet regularly as a Licensing Partnership Board to oversee performance and the direction of the Partnership. Gary Stevenson, Head of Environment and Street Scene at Tunbridge Wells is currently the chair of the Licensing Partnership Board.

2013 - 2014 Performance Outturn

- 5 All the performance indicators bar one were achieved last year. The Licensing Partnership's performance indicators for 2013 – 2014 are as follows:-

- a. Number of licensed premises enforcement visits in the year – (risk assessed) undertaken each month – **289**

Target for the year was 288.

Licensing Officers have carried out a risk assessment of the premises following a visit. This sets a frequency for the next visit being due based on the type of premises, activities carried out at the premises, an assessment of the management of the premises and whether the premises has been the subject of recent complaints.

- b. Number of taxi checks undertaken each month – **90 for the year**

Target for the year was 84.

Licensing Officers have carried out vehicle checks around the District to ensure compliance with the Council's Policy.

- c. Percentage of valid personal licence applications to be processed within two weeks – **98.59% (70 out of 71 applications)**

Target for the year was 95%.

- d. Percentage of temporary event notices processed within 72 hours – **99.30% (423 out of 426 notices)**

Target for the year was 90%.

- e. The number of Hackney Carriage Vehicle licences issued within 5 working days – **98.71% (229 out of 232 applications)**

Target for the year was 75%.

- f. The number of Private Hire Vehicle licences issued within 5 working days – **98.95% (94 out of 95 applications)**

Target for the year was 75%.

- g. The number of Hackney Carriage Driver licences issued within 30 working days – **100% (120 out of 120 applications)**

Target for the year was 75%

- h. The number of Private Hire Driver licences issued within 30 working days – **95% (38 out of 40 applications)**

Target for the year was 75%

- i. The number of Private Hire Operator licences issued within 30 working days – **100% (20 out of 20 applications)**

Target for the year was 75%

- j. Length of time to process an application from date of validation to issue date for new and variation of premises (not DPS) applications for Licensing Act 2003 – **88% (22 out of 25 applications)**

Target for the year was 95%

Those where the target was missed was as a result of hearings.

- k. Percentage of applications outstanding for more than one month – **4.92%**

Target for the year <10%

- 6 As a result of the excellent performance of the team last year and to improve our customer service, we have tightened the targets for next year. All those that were 75% have been increased to 90% for 2014 / 2015.
- 7 In addition to this we have also reduced the processing target time for drivers and operator licences from 30 working days to 10 working days to speed up delivery of the service to the customer.

Key activities in the last six months and innovation for the future

- 8 In addition to the day to day work processing 3,850 applications under the various licensing regimes, carrying out enforcement actions and presenting cases to Licensing and Licensing Sub Committees, officers across the Partnership have also:
 - 8.1 Implemented the ability for customers to use our own bespoke online forms for submitting Temporary Event Notices.
 - In April 2014 106 TENs were received - 59 of these were online - 55.7%
 - In August 2014 85 TENs were received - 57 of these were online - 67.1%

We have set up survey forms which continually provide us with feedback from customers regarding their experience of our online forms. We use this information to drive improvements to the service.

- 8.2 Continuing with the actions identified in the Customer Insight toolkit action plan (developed with the assistance of the Business Delivery Unit from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council) we now have taxi driver, vehicle and operator online forms are now available on the website. We also have the personal licence application available on the website. We are in the process of testing further forms which will be implemented within the next few weeks. This will enable our customers to be able to make applications to the Licensing Authority 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- 8.3 The forms have been designed so that the information input by the applicant will be inserted into our back office database system which we use to process applications. Under the current online form system, operated by Central Government, the Licensing Authority is sent a pdf form via email and the Administrative Officers still have to input this information onto the database system.
- 8.4 We anticipate that over the next 6 months at least a further 20 application forms will be introduced to enable customers to make an online application. Each one of these forms will require a considerable amount of testing and then we will then need to amend the web page for each of the applications.
- 8.5 By continuing to review our processes and procedures we have reduced the cost of the Licensing Partnership Administration team and the cost of shared management to the three authorities by £30,000 for the 2014/15 budget. This means that in 2013/14 SDC paid £137,104 to the Licensing Partnership which has reduced to £114,753 for 2014/15.
- 8.6 Every year we issue 1,476 invoices for payments due to the Licensing Partnership. We have carried out a large project in recovery of outstanding annual fees and issued suspension notices for those payments that have not been paid.
- 8.7 We have adopted a Document Retention Policy for the Licensing Partnership to assist us in moving towards a 'paper-less' office environment.
- 8.8 Sevenoaks responded to the Government's consultation on Personal Licences and Locally Set Fees for the Licensing Act 2003.
- 8.9 The Administration Team working on behalf of the three authority partners processed 6,035 tasks which included the processing and issuing of licences.
- 8.10 We continue to provide 4 weeks of valuable work experience at the Hub for nine people through the Job Centre placement scheme and considering the introduction of a licensing administration apprenticeship.
- 8.11 The Licensing Officers and Administration Team have provided invaluable cover for absences at the other authorities.
- 8.12 The performance indicators for 2014/2015 are on track to meet the targets.

Key Implications

Financial

Financial implications have been dealt with in the body of the report.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

The report is for information only.

Equality Impacts

Consideration of impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty:		
Question	Answer	Explanation / Evidence
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to disadvantage or discriminate against different groups in the community?	No	This is a report for information only to update on the progress of the Licensing Partnership.
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have the potential to promote equality of opportunity?	No	Not applicable
c. What steps can be taken to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		Not applicable

Conclusions

There are always many challenges for partnership and for the staff working within the Licensing Partnership. However, the operation of the partnership is progressing, developing and improving embracing innovative techniques to seek efficiency savings.

Appendices

None

Background Papers:

Licensing Partnership Revenue tracker
<http://pa.sevenoaks.gov.uk/online-licensing>

Richard Wilson

Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services