

LICENSING PARTNERSHIP UPDATE REPORT 2018

Licensing Committee - 9 July 2018

Report of Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services

Status: For Information

Key Decision: No

This report supports the Key Aim of sustainable economy.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Anna Firth (Legal and Democratic Services)

Contact Officers Richard Wilson Ext. 7067

Sharon Bamborough Ext. 7325 / 07970 731616

Recommendation to Licensing Committee: To note the performance of the Partnership as contained within the report and to ask the Head of the Licensing Partnership to continue to provide an annual update on the Licensing Partnership activity to the Licensing Committee each municipal year.

Reason for recommendation: To ensure the Licensing Committee are updated on the performance of the Licensing Partnership.

Introduction and Background

- 1 The Council is a member of the Licensing Partnership with Maidstone Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and (more recently) London Borough of Bexley, 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, notices, permits and representations.
- 2 The Licensing Partnership has completed 8 years of working together, with London Borough of Bexley becoming a partner as of 31st October 2016.
- 3 This arrangement provides each council with sovereignty over its policies and decision making processes whilst operating within a partnership that gives resilience and capacity to deal with the fluctuating demands on the service through the year.
- 4 This report is an annual update on the performance and activity of the Licensing Partnership.

- 5 In 2009 it was agreed that both the line management and administration of the Council's licensing processes would be undertaken in partnership with Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC). It was agreed that the administrative team processing licensing application would be based at the offices of Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) with Licensing Officers continuing to be based at each council.
- 6 Each Council retained responsibility for setting its licensing policies, compliance strategies and decision making at Sub and Full Licensing Committees. The then Licensing Partnership Manager, had line management responsibility for the operation of the administration team and the Licensing Officers of the three councils.
- 7 In January 2010 the new Licensing Partnership took effect and the back office functions started to be transferred to the administration team based at SDC. The Licensing Partnership 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 basis and allows for the variances that still exist in the policies and procedures of the three authorities.
- 8 The Licensing Partnership is governed by a legal agreement made between the four councils and the Chief Officer/Heads of Service/ Assistant Director responsible for licensing at their respective authorities meet four times a year as a Licensing Partnership Board to oversee performance and the direction of the Partnership. John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Community Services at Maidstone Borough Council is currently the Chair of the Licensing Partnership Board and this is rotated between the four Partners.
- 9 In May 2017, Claire Perry, the Licensing Partnership Manager tragically and suddenly passed away, causing an unanticipated but understandable huge impact on the management and performance of the partnership. The Admin Hub Team at Sevenoaks concentrated on trying to ensure they continued on with the day to day work, and the new Head of the Licensing partnership has been in post since 30 October 2017. The intervening period had, naturally, upset the usual performance and scrutiny, but performance is back on track.
- 10 The new Head of the Licensing Partnership, Sharon Bamborough, comes from a London local authority background.

2017 - 2018 Performance report

- 11 The performance of the Licensing Partnership has been generally good despite the huge challenges of the past year, which is a testament to all officers in the partnership as to their drive and determination not to see the service fail. The indicators for each of the four authorities and the combined Licensing Partnership results are attached as Appendix A.

- 12 In addition to the sudden loss of the partnership manager, there had also been some long term sickness and performance issues and staff vacancies at Sevenoaks which also had a knock on effect to their ability to meet targets.
- 13 The general processing and consultation on applications within timeframe has been maintained. However given such challenges it was inevitable that some areas of work may need to be de-prioritised in favour of application processing. The areas where performance fell were compliance checks and the length of time applications have remained outstanding.
- 14 In respect of the number of proactive premises compliance visits, the senior licensing officer needed to step up and undertake some duties of the manager, including Performance monitoring, Partnership ordering/invoicing and giving advice to Hub team whilst being a part time officer and only assisted by a part time licensing officer. This naturally had a knock on effect to their ability to carry out pro-active compliance checks on top of the multitude of reactive visits and investigations (often carried out as a result of complaints from public about taxis or premises). A lot of enforcement work still continued to be done, but not of the type reflected in this particular performance measure.
- 15 In respect of the applications outstanding more than a month - this has generally been down to awaiting responses from third parties and not as a result of lack of action by officers. The period in which we were without the manager who may have ordinarily stepped in to advise/assist or re-prioritise work would have had an effect in this regard. However, this has been resolved now and is currently achieving target and has been for some months.
- 16 The Hub team and licensing team at Sevenoaks have recently come back to full strength and it is anticipated that target achievement will be back on track across the board for the 2018/19.

Key Activities in the last six months and progress regarding service plan objectives

- 17 The Partnership handled a huge amount of work in 2017/18. The performance measures should be read in conjunction with the entire volumes of work delivered. The headlines of the performance are as follows:
 - In this time period, over **7908** applications, notices, permits and pieces of work were received and carried out.
 - From this total, **1961** pieces of work were for Sevenoaks.
 - Taking into account the different amounts of time needed for different types of applications, and the differing nature of the work carried out for some of the partners, Sevenoaks' share accounted for approx 26% of the work of the entire partnership in 2017/18.

18 The following forms are now online:

- TENS
- Personal licence - new
- Personal licence - change of details - this one is a pdf and doesn't drop info into Uniform
- Personal licence - renewal (now obsolete)
- Scrap Metal dealers - site & collector
- Premises licence - change of details - this one is a pdf and doesn't drop info into Uniform
- Variation of DPS - this one is a pdf and doesn't drop info into Uniform
- Taxi driver (HC & PH)
- Taxi vehicle (HC & PH)
- Taxi operator (PH)
- Transfer of premises licence form
- New lottery form
- Lottery returns form (new lottery form has already been used)
- Premises licence (new)
- Animal establishment forms - boarding,
- Animal establishment forms - breeding,
- Animal establishment forms - riding establishments,
- Animal establishment forms - pet shops,
- Animal establishment forms - dangerous wild animals
- Notification of gaming permit
- Licensed Premises Gaming Machine permit
- Premises variation form
- Minor variation premises form

19 Electronic notification of taxi renewal reminder letters have again been sent either by email in the first instance and if an email address is not available a text message. This encourages taxi licensees to make their renewal applications online and removes the need for the Licensing Partnership to send out large quantities of paper. Applications can either be made online or the applicant can download the forms from the three websites.

20 The Taxi and Private Hire policy for Sevenoaks District Council has been revised to allow scanned and photographic images of documentation with renewal applications.

21 In July 2017, a new online taxi knowledge test was implemented across the partnership, introducing a new form of standardised test for the three partners dealing with taxi licensing and a raising of standards. For the first time for some, private hire drivers were required to pass the test, bringing them up to a standard with hackney carriage drivers. The application process has also been changed to require successful completion of the test before an application may be submitted, thereby reducing the number of applications which could not be progressed due to failed tests.

- 22 Having reviewed the test results since implementation, it has become clear that pass rates are not as hoped for (though this does keep up a high standard) and the test is being revised at present to make it clearer and easier to pass without dropping the standards, and it is hoped that this can be implemented in August or September 2018.

23 Previous initiatives run by new partner Bexley, such as the proactive approach in working with licensees prior to large events such as World Cups, and seasonal events, have worked very well. The new Head has adopted the proactive approach of Bexley initiatives and shared them across the partnership - recently a letter was sent to **all** alcohol licensed premises throughout the partnership advising on the importance of updating / reviewing risk assessments in lieu of the Royal Wedding celebrations (additional hours for sale of alcohol were granted nationally by Government) and the World Cup football tournament.

The Head is looking to also carry out special enforcement operations where all officers could contribute and take part.

- 24 In the coming year, we are keen to work with the Metropolitan Police and Kent Police on the new Met Police initial WAVE, which seeks to educate and re-train all involved in the licensing industry about being more proactive in spotting vulnerable people who should be assisted when in licensed premises

Service Objectives for 2017/18 and planned service improvements

- 25 Objective 1 - To manage the Licensing Partnership to deliver efficiency savings and achieve performance targets.
- a) This is ongoing and performance is monitored on a weekly and monthly basis.
 - b) 1:1 meetings with staff are carried out monthly and
 - c) the Licensing Partnership Board meets 4 times a year.
- 26 Objective 2 - Investigate further undertaking of licensing functions for other local authorities.
- a) There are current talks going on with a potential fifth partner who are exploring joining the partnership.
- 27 Objective 3 - Seek further efficiency savings in processes and use of online facilities.
- Increase the feedback received from customers regarding the service they receive and improvements that can be achieved - **result:** An increase in responses to our customer survey was achieved and improvements were made to the service.

- Implement an improved renewal/reminder notification system utilising email and text for taxi licensees - **result:** achieved reduction in costs
 - Reduce the face to face interaction for Licensing Partnership staff by implementing scripts to enable customer service staff to assist licensees in their requirements - **result:** appointment only system set up in Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells;
- 28 Objective 4 - Ensure all online forms are implemented and in use by customers - most forms now online and more are to be developed (e.g. special treatments)
- 29 Objective 5 - Undertake a programme of training for Members and officers. Ensure all new Members on each Licensing Committee receive appropriate training. - this has been carried out as and when required.
- 30 Objective 6 - Officers and Licensing Committees to consider opportunities for greater harmonisation of policies - **Result:** the last review of Taxi Licensing Policies brought greater harmonisation between Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks policies. Example: the same computerised knowledge test (with local route testing in each authority) was introduced for all potential drivers for Private Hire and Hackney Carriage vehicles with effect from July 2017, raising the standards across the board.

The new service plan for 2018/19 is attached as Appendix B

Key Implications

Financial

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

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

- 19 This is a report to update on the progress of the Licensing Partnership.

Equality Assessment

- 20 This is a report to update on the progress of the Licensing Partnership. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Appendices

Appendix A - Performance Indicator update report 2016

Appendix B - Licensing Partnership Service Plan

Background Papers:

None

Mr Richard Wilson

Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services