

LICENSING PARTNERSHIP UPDATE REPORT 2019/20

Licensing Committee - 18 June 2020

Report of	Chief Officer Planning and Regulatory Services
Status	For information
Key Decision	No

This report supports the Key Aim of sustainable economy.

Portfolio Holder	Cllr. McArthur
Contact Officer	Sharon Bamborough, Ext. 7325

Recommendation to Licensing Committee:

To note the performance of the Licensing 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, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and 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 10 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, fees, compliance strategies and decision making at Sub and Full Licensing Committees. The 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 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. The chairmanship of the board rotates around the partnership.
- 9 In 2017, following the unexpected passing of the Licensing Partnership Manager the post was re-evaluated and made a Head of service role. The current Head of Licensing, Sharon Bamborough, has nearly 30 years' experience in licensing and comes from a London local authority background.
- 10 The Head of the Licensing Partnership also represents the south east region (72 authorities) on the LGA Licensing Forum as well co-chairing the London Licensing Managers Forum.

2019 - 2020 Performance report

- 11 The performance of the Licensing Partnership has been generally high performing despite the challenges of the past year, which included:
 - A restructure of the central processing (Hub) team at Sevenoaks
 - Re-design and implementation of many processes which created a considerable amount of work, and
 - staff turnover / shortages within the Hub team
 - addition of new areas of work (special treatments licensing for Bexley moving to Hub team)

- some special projects to identify and resolve outstanding documentation on taxi licensing

The indicators for each of the four authorities and the combined Licensing Partnership results are attached as Appendix A.

- 12 **Restructure** - The Hub team at Sevenoaks was restructured to deliver better performance and give development opportunities to existing staff. Following consultation and interviews the new structure went live on 1st November 2019. This was largely well received by staff and morale was boosted. The hard work was started on redesigning many of the processes to make them more efficient and but there is still much to review. The Hub team has a new manager (Michael Moss) who will also be a deputy for the Head of Licensing on occasion.

Key Activities in the last twelve months

- 13 The general processing and consultation on applications within timeframe has been maintained and any times when performance has have slipped would be due to staff shortages and lack of fully trained team (annual leave etc.)
- 14 In respect of enforcement work, this year hasn't not been as on target as it would normally be by the Sevenoaks Licensing team due to being short staffed for a large portion of the year. The senior licensing officer was on maternity leave from June 2019 (returned late April 2020), and temp contractors did not work out, and recruitment did not deliver suitable candidates in year. This meant that the existing officer had to carry the work of two and just try to keep the most urgent work under control and that was often at the expense of on-site compliance work (though other compliance work such as taking action on complaints regarding taxis or premises were always progressed). The portfolio Holder and Licensing Committee have been kept abreast of this situation throughout the year.
- 15 In respect of the applications outstanding more than a month after consultation - this generally occurs when the application needs to be referred to a hearing and performance on this has been high this year.
- 16 The Partnership handled a very large amount of work in 2019/20. 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, approx. **10,100** applications, notices, permits and pieces of work were received and carried out.
 - From this total, **3600** 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 of processing work accounted for approx. 25% of the processing work of the entire partnership in 2019/20

- Over **20,500** emails were received in the main Licensing inbox and actioned by the Hub team for all four partners
 - Just under 10,600 calls were received to main licensing hotline and dealt with by the Hub team for all four partners.
- 17 During 2019 - 20 the cost of the Licensing Partnership was £498,000 of which Sevenoaks' share was approx.£130K
- 18 Reviews of The Taxi Licensing Policy, Taxi Fares and the Licensing Act 2003 policy took place in 2019 which were undertaken by the Sevenoaks Licensing Team.
- 19 The restructure of the Hub team has dominated the year but enabled better concentration on previously neglected areas of work in addition to setting up better reporting systems to more accurately capture the entire work of the team.
- 20 A deep dive on timings and costings on all processing was undertaken by the Head of Licensing in the summer of 2019 to ensure they were still accurate or needed adjustment. This was a major piece of work which had not been done for many years, and with technology developments and reviews of procedures, it was the right time to do this to ensure the partners could be confident that the costings were fair and based upon recent analysis.

Performance against Service Plan Objectives for 2019/20

- 21 *Objective 1 - To oversee 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. Please see Appendix A for a report on Key Performance Indicator targets.
 - b) 1:1 meetings with staff are carried out monthly and
 - c) The Licensing Partnership Board meets 4 times a year.
- 22 *Objective 2 - Investigate further undertaking of licensing functions for other local authorities.*
- Result:** we have not received any requests or expressions of interest during this year and have not actively pursued any due to wanting to focus on the Hub team restructure and the improvements which were needed.
- 23 *Objective 3 - Seek further efficiency savings in processes and use of online facilities.*

- Review (ongoing) processes and procedures of Hub team officers and streamline / change to save time on unnecessary record keeping -
Result: work in progress (still more to do)
 - Consider current practices re face to face meetings (taxis) and pick up of plates - move over to sending by post where appropriate
Result: achieved (resulting in time savings and reduction in costs)
 - Explore feasibility of online solutions for document checks for taxi applications to reduce face to face visits the face to face visits
Result: explored, but not feasible currently (no systems available)
- 24 Objective 4 - *Ensure all online forms are implemented and in use by customers and explore other software solutions*
- The library of on line forms should implemented across the four partners - to include new forms for Bexley (Special Treatments) and any updates needed for existing ones
Result: most forms now online and the remainder are currently in development (e.g. special treatments)
 - Arrange for purchase and installation of electronic record management system, Enterprise (from Idox)
Result: still in testing and hopefully to be rolled out throughout partnership in July/August 2020
 - Arrange for purchase and installation of electronic enforcement software for use out and about, called Mobile App (from Idox)
Result: this has been put on hold until further information is obtained about the effectiveness of the technology (some anecdotal evidence from other authorities suggests it may not be as interactive as we thought)
- 25 Objective 5 - *Undertake a programme of training for Members and officers. Ensure all new Members on each Licensing Committee receive appropriate training.*
- Deliver a programme of training to the Members and officers
Result: achieved, training has been given as and when required
 - Hold morning/afternoon sessions where new Members can visit the Licensing Partnership's Administration Team.
Result: achieved, both the Chairman of the Licensing Committee and the portfolio holder have visited the office, met staff and had discussions with officers
- 26 Objective 6 - Revision of Policies & Procedures
- Start the review LA03 Policies across the Partnership in readiness for January 2021 when they must come into force
Result: achieved - work has started and continues in the current year. Sevenoaks was reviewed in 2019/20 as it needed to be in place for January 2020.
 - Review Street trading policy at Maidstone regarding designation of street trading pitches

Result: carried over to 2020/21 service plan at request of Maidstone (due to go to licensing committee 18th June 2020)

- Re-visit (with Legal Services) the approach to street trading in Sevenoaks with a view to assessing what would need to be done to implement such a policy, and report back to Chief Officer (this comes from a discussion at Health Board as to whether anything can be done to stop fast food vans etc. parking up near schools, which contributes to childhood obesity)

Result: Achieved - initial discussion with Legal services and Chief Officer showed no demand for this, therefore, at this time, no need to adopt legislation or implement policy

- Investigate feasibility and implement if approved, the charging for pre-application advice to licence applicants

Result: implemented

- Review outcome of Street trading farmers market consultation at Tunbridge Wells regarding designation of a farmers market, and take to committee with appropriate recommendations

Result - achieved and due to go to committee in June 2020

- A review of the Hub Team Admin procedures and update where necessary

Result: A lot of progress has been made in streamlining and updating procedures but due to high number of procedures and practices and Hub Team restructure this could not be completed in year - carried over to 2020/21 service plan for completion

- To review taxi policies in Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks as needed.

Result: Achieved

- To deliver the implementation of the ULEV taxi charging points in conjunction with Kent CC following successful bid for funding

Result: partly achieved (work in progress)

27 Objective 7 - Health, Safety and Well Being of Staff

- Ensure risk assessments are carried out and reviewed as appropriate and at least once a year.

Result: achieved

- Ensure 1:1 meetings are carried out on a regular basis.

Result: achieved

The new service plan for 2020/21 is attached as **Appendix B**

Key Implications

Financial

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

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement.

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

Equality Assessment

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 2019-20

Appendix B - Licensing Partnership Service Plan
2020/21

Background Papers:

None

Mr. Richard Morris
Chief Officer Planning and Regulatory Services