

LICENSING PARTNERSHIP UPDATE REPORT 2020/21

Licensing Committee - 8 September 2021

Report of: Chief Officer Planning and Regulatory Services

Status: For Information

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: This report is an annual update on the performance and activity of the Licensing Partnership

This report supports the Key Aim of: Sustainable Economy

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Margot 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 Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Sevenoaks District Council 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 11 years of working together, with London Borough of Bexley becoming a partner as of 31 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.

2020 - 2021 Performance report

- 5 The performance of the Licensing Partnership has been generally good despite the challenges of the past year of moving the processing of work to be done by staff mostly working from home during the on-going pandemic. (this should set out options for the committee to consider along with reasons for the recommendation)
- 6 The indicators for each of the four authorities and the combined Licensing Partnership results are attached as **Appendix A**
- 7 This has been a challenging year due to the Pandemic. It affected the type of work done as well as how officers could work. We saw a drop in applications of some types (in particular, Temporary Event Notices) but new areas of work were created either from legislation or the need to work differently. For example, the introduction of Pavement licensing created work for three of the four partners. The ever changing regulations due to Covid required constant evaluation of new legislation and dissemination to trade, which lead to enquiries. For those who had to suddenly and permanently work from home (and who did not usually do so), this would have created some IT issues for them in the initial stages of getting set up and having the right equipment. Additional work also included a deferred payment scheme for renewals.
- 8 The general processing and consultation on applications within timeframe has been maintained but there will have been times when performance may not have hit targets. This would have been to various factors, such as the usual annual leave, unanticipated other leave (we had one staff member off with Covid for a number of weeks, another who needed bereavement leave). In addition, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, the wholesale move to work from home for majority of the year would have brought its own challenges in April and May in particular as staff would have needed to adjust to different working practices and IT issues (not at SDC but for example, their own broadband needing upgrade, having additional monitors at home etc.).
- 9 In respect of pro-active compliance/enforcement work, with the exception of Bexley, this has proved difficult at times due to the various lockdowns and advice to work from home. This is reflected in performance figures for the other partners but is not seen as a failing by those partners due to the circumstances. All reports of Covid regulation breaches have been investigated/followed up by officers throughout the partnership and they have worked with colleagues in other service areas (Police and Env. Health) to provide information and help resolve issues.
- 10 The Partnership handled a large amount of work in 2020/21, but as mentioned earlier, applications volumes were down on the previous year due to the pandemic (for example, very few temporary event notices were submitted compared to a normal year). However, other new areas of work were required which kept the teams busy. 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 9000 applications, notices, permits and other pieces of work were received / carried out across the partnership.
- From this total, over 2250 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, Bexley's share of processing work accounted for approx. 19% of the processing work of the entire partnership in 2020/21
- A deferred payment scheme for renewal applications was agreed in April 2020 to help businesses across three of the four partners. This was very much appreciated by the various trades. For Sevenoaks, this allowed the taxi trade to be able to submit their renewals on time without needing to pay the fee (which we recognised would be difficult during lockdowns when they could not trade).
- Over **20,000** emails were received in the main Licensing inbox and actioned for all four partners
- Just under **10,000** calls were received to main licensing hotline and dealt with by the Hub team for all four partners.

Performance against Service Plan objectives 2020/21

11 Objective 1: *To oversee and lead 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 and regular face to face meeting with staff are carried out routinely
- c) the Licensing Partnership Board meets 4 times a year.

Performance against the targets is included in Appendix A

12 Objective 2: *Be open and proactive about 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.

13 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: achieved

- A move towards paper free workplace for Hub team

Result: achieved (resulting in time savings and reduction in costs)

14 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: testing on-going, not in use yet - it has not been possible to achieve this in year due to the demands on officers not having spare capacity to do testing in the time frame initially planned)

- Complete testing and go live with electronic record management system, Enterprise (from Idox)

Result: achieved - system has gone live though further development desired.

- 15 Objective 5: *Undertake a programme of training for Members and officers. Ensure all new Members on each Licensing Committee receive appropriate training.*

Result: training has been given as and when required

- 16 Objective 6: *Revision of Policies & Procedures*

- Complete the review Licensing Act 2003 Policies across the Partnership in readiness for January 2021 when they must come into force

Result: achieved

- Review Street trading policy at Maidstone regarding designation of street trading pitches

Result: carried over to 2021/22 service plan at request of Maidstone (due to go to next licensing committee)

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

Result: Achieved but included in new 2021/22 service plan as there are always requests from 17m partners to review certain practices or procedures

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

Result: achieved

- Adapt procedures and requirements in the face of the Coronavirus pandemic to support the trade whilst adhering to regulations

Result: achieved and on-going

- 17 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

- Ensure any H&S workplace requirements related to the 2020 pandemic are adhered to and workable solutions are in place.

Result: achieved and on-going

The new service plan for 2021/22 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. There are no legal implications as it is for information only.

Equality Assessment

The information contained within this report has a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Appendices

Appendix A - Performance data

Appendix B - Service plan for 2021/22 to follow.

Background Papers

None

Richard Morris

Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer - Planning & Regulatory Services