
REPORT TO:	ENVIRONMENTAL AND DEVELOPMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM: 8
DATE OF MEETING:	11th NOVEMBER 2021	CATEGORY: RECOMMENDED
REPORT FROM:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE	OPEN/
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SUBJECT:	LICENSING – SERVICE UPDATE	REF:
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	ALL	TERMS OF REFERENCE:

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That Members note the content of the report.

2. Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To provide Members with an update on the Council's Licensing Service in the absence of a quarterly report monitoring the services KPI's.

3. Detail

- 3.1 Service standards of the Licensing Department are usually reported to this Committee on a quarterly basis. Inevitably, small deadlines have been missed due to revised working practices however, the team have worked effectively to ensure service requirements have been met. Prior to March 2020, the Licensing Department accepted applications via an online system or in a paper format with Officers needing to view the original documents to verify their authenticity. Officers carried out DBS criminal record check appointments face to face to verify documents and to test spoken English. Knowledge tests were carried out monthly with up to 8 applicants carrying out the test at the same time. Officers carry out inspections on receipt of applications, following complaints and unannounced inspections as required. The Depot carried out checks of private hire vehicles on receipt of an application, every 6 months, after an accident and on renewal of the licence.
- 3.2 In March 2020, due to the national lockdown with all staff working from home, changes had to be made to how the Licensing Department worked. The changes had to be made quickly to support the Officers and to ensure that applicants were still being processed in a timely manner.

3.3 The initial changes made were:

- All applications accepted via email with copies of documents. Measures were put in place to ensure the documents provided were still authentic.
- The Depot was closed therefore no vehicle inspections could be carried out; all depot tests were delayed for an initial period of 6 weeks. Applicants required their vehicles for work as key workers, therefore the decision was made to renew the licence on the proviso the vehicle would be tested once the Depot was back open. All 6 months checks were delayed by 6 weeks and licence holders were still permitted to use their vehicles during this period for private hire purposes. All licence holders were advised of their duty to ensure the vehicle was roadworthy and fit for purpose as private hire vehicle.
- No new applications for private hire vehicles were accepted as a Depot test could not be carried out so Officers were unable to determine if the vehicle was fit for purpose. No new applications were received for new vehicles during the initial lockdown period.
- MOT certificates due during the initial lockdown were postponed whilst garages were closed.
- Eye tests and medical certificates were postponed by an initial 6 weeks and the licence holder was still permitted to work during this period. They were reminded of their duty to report any medical conditions to the Licensing Authority in line with their conditions.
- No applications for new private hire drivers were accepted as Officers were not able to safely carry out a knowledge test. The demand for new applications was low at the time so this decision did not adversely impact on any potential new driver.
- The Licensing Department sourced a new provider for the DBS checks so licence holders could use the new online system or the existing paper format to be completed at home. The new online system provided by a third party returned the DBS certificates quicker than the old system and most licence holders used the online facility to obtain their DBS certificates.
- All inspections were put on hold as it was not safe for Officers to be attending any premises.
- Debt recovery for outstanding annual fees for Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Act 2005 premises was put on hold until restrictions were lifted.
- No applications for street collections were accepted as it was decided it was not appropriate to permit collectors to be collecting money in the streets.
- Officers still investigated and inspected complaints of non-compliance with Covid Regulations.

3.4 Officers were working from home; a rota system was introduced so licences could be printed and the post dealt with. Licences were sent out in the post rather than collected by the private hire trade.

3.5 Once the national restrictions started to lift, the Licensing Department again had to adapt how they worked. The following changes were made:

- In July 2020, as applications for new private hire vehicles were being received and the backlog of due inspections were rising, the Depot reopened with additional measures in place to protect the depot staff and the drivers during the test. The additional measures included the driver not being allowed on the premises, the hiring of a cleaner to clean the vehicle before and after the test and the test sheet sent electronically rather than a paper

copy given to the driver. To clear the back log of tests, an extra test was added in each day however the tests reverted to the normal 3 tests a day in September when the back log was cleared.

- With a large number of inspections and complaints pending for Officers, the decision was taken in September 2020 to permit Officers to resume inspections and complaint visits.
- The knowledge tests commenced in September 2020 on a one-to-one basis using the secure Covid kiosk in reception.
- Once garages were back open, Officers required all licence holders to submit a valid MOT certificate when it was required. Even though the Government had provided MOT extensions of 6 months during the lockdown, the Licensing Authority still required a MOT to be carried out in line with the original expiry date as the vehicles are carrying members of the public and the MOT is an additional check to ensure that the vehicles are safe to do so.
- Once the doctors and opticians reopened, licence holders were required to obtain their eye test and medical certificates as required. Officers still provided some flexibility with regards to obtaining their certificates if their doctor or optician was unable to assist.
- In October 2021, a system of collecting plates and badges for private hire licence holders was introduced rather than posting the plates which was causing delays to licence holders receiving their licences and being able to work.

3.8 Officers supported the hospitality trade during the pandemic. Advice and guidance were provided on a daily basis to licensed premises in conjunction with the Environmental Health Team. In addition to advice and guidance, compliance work was carried out to ensure that the temporary structures were Covid compliant as well as the rest of the premises. Most premises complied with the guidance and advice given however, Officers did issue fines to two premises for non-compliance with the Covid Regulations. Despite not being able to carry out inspections for a large majority of the year, the Licensing Department carried out 156 inspections in 2020-2021 which was an increase on the year before.

3.7 In November 2020, again inspections and knowledge tests were suspended until April 2021 however the Depot remained operational during this period.

3.8 Now full restrictions have been lifted nationally, the Licensing Department has reviewed its working practices and continues to streamline and make improvements for the benefit of the customer. In addition, Covid funding has allowed the Licensing Department to obtain further resource and cover to assist businesses in Covid re-opening and to ensure any inspection backlog is cleared.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 There are no financial implications.

5. Corporate Implications

Employment Implications

5.1 None

Legal Implications

5.2 None

Corporate Plan Implications

5.3 None

Risk Impact

5.4 None

6. Community Impact

Consultation

6.1 None

Equality and Diversity Impact

6.2 None

Social Value Impact

6.3 None

Environmental Sustainability

6.4 None

7. Background Papers

None