

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the LICENSING AND PROTECTION COMMITTEE held in the REMOTE MEETING VIA ZOOM on Wednesday, 10 March 2021

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors B S Banks, J R Clarke, Ms A Diaz,
Mrs A Dickinson, Mrs S A Giles, Mrs P A Jordan,
L W McGuire, K I Prentice, Mrs P E Shrapnel and R J West.

APOLOGY: An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor D J Mead.

19 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9th December 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

20 MEMBERS INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

21 MONITORING REPORT ON THE DELIVERY OF THE FOOD LAW ENFORCEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY SERVICE PLANS

With the assistance of a report by the Acting Operational Manager (Business) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee received an update on progress made against the delivery of work on the Council's Food Law Enforcement and Health and Safety Plans during the period 1st October to 31st December 2020.

The Committee were advised that once again the period had been significantly dominated by the impact of the current Covid Pandemic.

In terms of the delivery of the Food Law Enforcement Plan, Members noted that the key activities of compliance visits, approved premises inspections and other proactive visits were all classified as 'Red'. This was a direct result of the second suspension of physical inspections in November 2020 by the Food Standards Agency (FSA). This and the suspension earlier in the year had significantly impacted the number of planned food hygiene inspections for 2020/21, such that only 64 had been conducted at the end of Quarter 3, out of a predicted target of 550 by the end of the year. Whilst a programme of remote 'virtual' inspections had been undertaken, these did not classify as inspections for the purpose of FSA reporting. Members were advised that a plan of action was now in place to address the backlog once inspections were permitted to restart. However, it was unlikely that the reporting position would change by the end of the reporting year.

Members noted that work to target new business registrations had been successful during the reporting period and remained on target for completion by the end of the year.

Clarification was then sought and obtained as to how 'high risk' premises which required an immediate an urgent visit during the pandemic were identified, particularly in view of the fact that food delivery businesses and takeaways were continuing to operate. In response to a question, Members were also reminded that there were processes in place for the NHS to notify the local authority of any cases of food poisoning or infectious diseases that were presented to them. This would then result in a thorough and robust investigation by the District Council.

In relation to the Health and Safety Service Plan, the Committee were informed that health and safety activity had increased significantly and was forecast to remain high for the foreseeable future due to the ongoing pandemic.

Having recognised the difficult circumstances during the course of the year and the forecast for a significant increase in health and safety activity going forward, Members discussed the ability of the Council to address this extra influx of activity. Whilst the Acting Operational Manager was confident that the work would be managed, this had been made more difficult following the recent resignation of a member of the team and efforts would need to be made to ensure that it was resourced accordingly.

Having welcomed the introduction of a plan of action to address the backlog of food safety inspections, it was

RESOLVED

that progress on the delivery of the two Services Plans for the period 1st October to 31st December 2020 be noted.

(At 14.14pm, at the conclusion of this item, Councillor J Clarke joined the meeting).

22 SERVICE PLAN FOR FOOD LAW ENFORCEMENT 2021-22

Consideration was given to a report by the Acting Operational Manager (Business) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached a proposed Service Plan for Food Law Enforcement in 2021/22. The Plan, a requirement of the Food Standards Agency sets out how the Council will fulfil its duty to deliver food controls within the District in the forthcoming year.

In presenting the report, the Acting Operational Manager (Business) explained that the main focus for the forthcoming year would be to address the backlog in the number of food safety inspections, although attention was drawn to the other key priorities ,as set out at paragraph 3.3 of the report. These included the impact of the Covid recovery programme on food related businesses. Members were advised the resourcing requirements specified within the Plan remained similar to those in the previous year.

In reviewing the details of the Service Plan, Members of the Committee sought clarification as to the impact of the UK's departure from the European Union on the activities of the Service. In response, it was reported that whilst to some extent this was largely unknown, it was anticipated that requirements for inspections of food export and import companies which are not currently required could have a significant impact on Local Authorities. Consideration would also need to be given to the Council's position on the issue of Environmental Health Certificates once further details had been made available. The Committee went on to discuss the likely resourcing impacts of these potential changes, which in some instances Members recognised could be significant.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Service Plan for Food Safety Enforcement 2021-22 be approved in accordance with the Council's Constitution.
- (b) that the Operational Manager (Business) be authorised to update the 2020/21 performance data within the Service Plan prior to publication.
- (c) that quarterly reporting figures on progress against the annual Service Plan be requested.

23 SERVICE PLAN FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY REGULATION 2021-22

Consideration was given to a report by the Acting Operation Manager (Business) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached the proposed Service Plan for Health and Safety Regulation 2021-22. The Plan, which is a requirement of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) sets out how the Council will make adequate arrangements for the enforcement of the relevant statutory provisions within its area, together with the Council's key priorities for the forthcoming year.

In presenting the draft, the Acting Operational Manager (Business) reiterated that the Covid pandemic has had and continued to have a significant impact on health and safety matters, which were highlighted within the Plan. By way of example Members noted that whilst figures for health and safety in 2019-20 showed a total of 119 inventions, at the end of January 2021 this stood at 521 for the current year. It was also reported that the Covid related legislation had passed on a number of enforcement matters to local authorities.

Having noted that it was hoped that much of the additional workload could be offset through the continued use of the Council's temporary Covid Officer, should the Government funding for this post be removed this would have a significant impact on the health and safety service. The Acting Operational Manager (Business) undertook to report back to the Committee on a quarterly basis should any operational issues emerge.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Service Plan for Health and Safety Regulation 2021-22 be approved in accordance with the Council's Constitution.
- (b) that the Operational Manager (Business) be authorised to update the 2020/21 performance data within the Service Plan prior to publication.
- (c) that quarterly reporting figures on progress against the annual Service Plan be requested.

24 SUSPENSION AND REVOCATION OF HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENCES

With the aid of a report by the Licensing Team (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Committee noted the details of actions which had been taken since their last meeting under delegated authority.

In doing so, clarification was sought regarding the outcome of the Revocation of a Private Hire Operators Licence in December 2020.

An update on the outstanding appeals against the decisions of the Authority was also provided and the Committee were pleased to note that the Council had not lost an appeal during the past 12 months.

At the request of Councillor J Clarke, the Acting Operational Manager for Business agreed that he would, if possible make appeal dates known to those Members who may be interested in attending the Appeal Hearing.

Chairman