

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the LICENSING AND PROTECTION COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC SUITE (LANCASTER / STIRLING ROOMS), PATHFINDER HOUSE, ST MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 7 December 2022

PRESENT: Councillor B S Banks – Chair.

Councillors M L Beuttell, A E Costello, S J Criswell,
S W Ferguson, S A Howell, A R Jennings, P A Jordan,
D Terry and C H Tevlin.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J Clarke and P Kadewere.

19 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7th December were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

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 Interim Community Services Manager, 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 July to 30th September 2022.

With regards to the programmed activity within the Food Safety Plan, the Committee were advised that the inspection programme had been continuing in line with the Food Standard Agency's Recovery Plan. During this quarter, inspections had moved on to 'Category C' businesses, of which there had been six outstanding at the end of the quarter. These had now been completed. In total there had been 191 inspections completed during Quarter 2, which contributed to a total of 315 inspections throughout the year to date.

The Committee were informed that the Authority were still receiving a high number of new business registrations. In Quarter 2, there were 78 new business registrations of which 71 remained open. Members queried how the Council were engaging with businesses as they were registering to support them in the current climate and noted that this was largely done through the inspection programme. The Committee were informed that as at 1st April 2022, 1721 food businesses were registered within the District.

Officers were continuing to find that standards had declined where businesses have gone a number of years without inspection due to the pandemic which was having an impact on inspection times. Members were advised that times for inspections were recorded and could range from half an hour for a simple inspection to two and a half hours for a larger premises where there were significant issues which warranted longer discussion. In response to a question regarding resourcing levels within the Environmental Health Team – the Committee were advised that the team were currently fully staffed at 4.8FTE on food hygiene and safety.

In addition, it was reported that the cost-of-living crisis was also having an impact on inspections with examples being found where boilers had been turned down to save money which conflicted with necessary legislation. As a result, work was ongoing with the Authority's Economic Development Team to offer necessary support.

In terms of formal actions, it was reported that there had been one voluntary closure during the quarter agreed with a food business operator. Further details of this process was provided to Committee Members.

With regards to those activities within the Plan which were still showing as 'Red', the Committee were informed that the Alternative Enforcement Strategy was not an immediate concern given they were the Authority's lowest risk premises. Consideration was being given within the next quarter to improving these statistics. In response to a question regarding 'Other Proactive Visits', Members were informed that progress was in fact nearing amber and related to additional work which did not form part of the normal inspection programme.

Turning to the unplanned / reactive activities which had been undertaken during quarter 2, the Committee were advised that 105 service requests had been received which was slightly less than anticipated based upon previous years. Officers were also continuing to take part in the UK Health Security Agency's sampling study which has been takeaway sandwiches and salad bars.

The Committee were advised that health and safety activity has been concentrated around health and safety advice given to event organisers through the Safety Advisory Group. There had been 6 accidents investigated, in addition to a number of other service requests covering a range of issues.

In commenting on the report more generally, comment was made by the Executive Councillor with regard to the extent by which the work of the team is governed by the Food Standard Agency's Recovery Plan and it was suggested that it might be useful to incorporate a summary flow chart of this into future reports. Members were reminded that the Recovery Plan had been put in place to help the inspection programme resume following the Covid 19 pandemic and would run until March 2023. It was also suggested and agreed that future reports should also include a definition of the different categories of businesses that received inspections.

22 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 during the period 9th September to 25th November 2022.

In reviewing the information within the report, Members were advised that 11 vehicles and 3 drivers had had licences suspended or revoked during the period. Attention was drawn to the revocation on 27th October 2022 which had been undertaken with immediate effect in consultation with the Chair and the Vice Chair. Members were advised that it was possible to revoke a license with immediate effect if there was considered to be a danger to the public.

Members were also provided with an update on the inspection on vehicles, the Committee noted that defects could be picked up as part of the annual inspection and reminded that there was a compliance standard which was higher than that for a standard MOT to protect members of the public.

Whilst there were currently no outstanding decisions awaiting a court date, Members were advised that the Licensing Team had been alerted to the possibility of a future Appeal. The Licensing Manager undertook to keep Members updated as necessary.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

23 LICENSING AND PROTECTION SUB COMMITTEES

With the assistance of a report by the Elections and Democratic Services Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Committee received and noted the details of one meeting of the Licensing and Protection Sub-Committee which had taken place since their last meeting.

Chair