

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the LICENSING AND PROTECTION COMMITTEE held as a REMOTE MEETING via Zoom on Wednesday, 30 September 2020.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

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

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs P A Jordan and D J Mead.

10 MINUTES

Subject to the inclusion of Councillor L W McGuire in the list of those present, the Minutes of the meeting held on 24th June 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

11 MEMBERS INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

12 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 April to 30th June 2020.

In turning to the specific information within the appendices, Members were advised that performance in a significant number of areas had been affected by the current Covid:19 outbreak which had resulted in the closure of the hospitality sector and the decision by the Food Standards Agency to suspend all planned food safety inspections on the 20th March 2020. Those inspections which had taken place had been undertaken as part of a programme of remote 'virtual' inspections – 4 of which had targeted high risk premises and 81 new food businesses. Following the re-opening of the hospitality sector in late June / early July, physical inspections to high-risk premises had now recommenced although the Food Standards Agency were now reviewing the inspection process in the light of the rising number of Covid:19 cases being reported nationally.

In response to a question as to whether the Authority conducts checks on business compliance with Covid-19 safety requirements, the Committee were informed that as part of a review of the inspection regime, officers will now be checking whether premises are broadly Covid compliant.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that progress on the delivery of the two Service Plans for the period 1st April to 30th June 2020 be noted.

13 PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER - DOG CONTROL

The Committee considered a report by the Operational Manager (People) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) detailing the outcome of the public consultation exercise on proposals to renew a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) for the control of dogs for Huntingdonshire.

The Committee were reminded that the previous Dog Control Orders in force within the District had been converted into a single Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) for Huntingdonshire in 2017. This was due to expire in October 2020 and authorisation was now being sought to extend the Order for a further three years.

Members were advised that the current PSPO had been a valuable enforcement and prevention tool and that the number of complaints relating to dog control had fallen significantly since it came into force. The Committee were informed that it had not proven necessary to adjust any of the provisions of the current order during its lifetime and it was not intended to change any of the conditions or areas where the Order was to be in force.

In order to implement a PSPO, the Committee were informed that the Council was required to carry out a consultation exercise with both statutory consultees and members of the public. This has been undertaken during the summer period and extended to enable a further opportunity for individuals to make comments. The consultation exercise had indicated strong support for retaining the controls retained within the existing order.

The Committee's attention was then drawn to Appendix 2 to the report which set out the detailed responses to the consultation exercise. A summary of the findings from each response was also provided by the Operational Manager (Business).

In reviewing the responses from the consultation, clarification was sought as to why (with the exception of the designated locations) the requirement to keep dogs on leads at all times only applied to road carriageways and verges with speed limits of 40mph or less. The Committee were advised that this was a condition which had been carried forward from the previous dog control orders and was intended to reflect the fact that roads designated with this speed limit tended to be located in the more urban parts of the District where traffic flow was much busier.

Questions were also asked with regards to the number of problems with stray dogs and 'dog attacks' referred to within the consultation responses. In response the Committee were advised that the majority of the latter related to situations involving two dogs and the District Council dealt with very few incidents of dogs

attacking members of the public. Members were please to note that issues relating to stray dogs were decreasing in numbers and that the District Council had a contract with Wood Green Animal shelter to assist with the rehoming of dogs that they were not able to reunite with their owners.

Whereupon and having noted that the new PSPO would need to be publicised for a period of 20 days before it comes into effect on 20th October 2020, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that a new Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) covering the control of dogs as outlined in Appendix 1 to the report submitted be approved; and
- (b) that the Chief Operating Officer in consultation with the relevant Executive Councillor be authorised to make minor amendments to the conditions and scope of the PSPO as required.

(At 14.16pm, Councillor S Giles joined the meeting, during the discussion on this item).

14 SUSPENSION AND REVOCATION OF PRIVATE HIRE AND 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 the last meeting of the Committee under delegated authority.

Members were advised that despite the difficulties arising from the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Licensing Team had continued to offer a service to the licensing trade and members of the public. In contrast, it was reported that a number of authorities had stopped processing new driver and vehicle applications, whilst there had also been some who had not been in a position to deal with taxi matters at all during the period.

Members were advised that in response to previous comments, the report had been re-formatted and attention was drawn to the outstanding matters at Section 3. The Committee were informed that there were a number of appeals pending and these were primarily the result of the impact of Covid-19 on the Court system, which had resulted in delays to appeal hearings. However, it was reported that dates for the majority of the cases outstanding had now been confirmed, such that it was hope that the matters outstanding would be reduced during the next reporting period.

Arising from the report and with reference to the appeals which were pending, Members referred to the introduction of the new licensing policy and the change in the delegations which had been granted to officers. The Committee were reminded that routine matters which sat within the policy guidelines would now be taken by officers, although the Chairman and Vice-Chairman continued to be consulted on significant matters requiring an immediate revocation. Members welcomed the immediate rejection of those applications where incorrect information had been included within the application forms.

In response to a question concerning the vetting process for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicle applications, the Committee were reminded that all applicants who wished to apply for a new licence or renew an existing one were required to make certain declarations upon their application form. All applications were subsequently checked and confirmed with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and the Criminal Records Bureau. The safety of the public remained a primary concern in any decision to grant or renew an application and the Licensing and Protection Sub-Committee continued to take a dim view of any cases of non-declaration.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be received and noted.

Chairman