

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the LICENSING AND PROTECTION COMMITTEE held as a REMOTE MEETING via Zoom on Wednesday, 9 December 2020.

PRESENT: Councillor S J Criswell – Chairman.

Councillors B S Banks, J R Clarke, Mrs A Dickinson, Mrs S A Giles, Mrs P A Jordan, L W McGuire, D J Mead, 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 Ms A Diaz.

15 MINUTES

Subject to the inclusion of Councillor J Clarke in the list of those present, the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2020 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16 MEMBERS INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

17 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 July to 30th September 2020.

The Committee were advised that delivery of both the Food Law Enforcement Plan and the Health and Safety Service Plan continued to be dominated by the current Covid-19 Pandemic.

In terms of the Food Law Enforcement Plan, the key programmed activities of compliance visits, premises inspections and other proactive visits were all categorised as 'Red' following the suspension of all inspections by the Food Standards Agency earlier in the year. Following the recommencement of physical inspections in late July and the introduction of remote 'virtual' inspections, the focus had been on the higher risk premises within the District. Although these had taken longer than normal due to need for officers and businesses to be Covid compliant. It was reported that 23 such inspections had now taken place and following the successful recruitment of two new full time Environmental Health officers, efforts were now being made to develop a future programme of food inspections.

The Committee were also advised that there had been a significant increase in the numbers of new food business registrations being received which was in part

a result of employees within the hospitality sector starting up their own home businesses or traditional 'wet' pubs wishing to offer takeaways and food deliveries.

With regard to the unplanned (reactive) work undertaken by the service (appendix 2), the Committee were advised that the number of customer complaints and service requests had reduced which reflected a reduction in the numbers eating out at hospitality establishments.

In relation to the Health and Safety Service Plan, the Committee were advised that Health and Safety work had increased significantly and was forecast to remain high for the foreseeable future due to Covid 19 with an inevitable increase in inspections. A number of queries were being dealt with by the service relating to social distancing, PPE and staff safety.

In concluding his presentation, the Acting Operational Manager (Business) was also pleased to report that recent feedback from LAEMS the Local Authority Enforcement Monitoring System for food related matters had demonstrated the Council had obtained a general compliance rate of 97.8% across its food businesses.

Arising from the report, Member requested details of the additional work that officers within the team had been required to deal with at short notice in relation to Covid-19 matters and were advised that this related to business related compliance and local involvement with the track and trace scheme. The Committee also welcomed the appointment of two new full-time Environmental Health Officers and the positive impact that this additional resource would now have on future inspections.

In response to a question as to whether there were any food businesses operating within Huntingdonshire from storage container units, the Acting Operational Manager (Business) confirmed that he had no knowledge of any operations such as these within Huntingdonshire and any such activity should be reported to the Environmental Health Team at the earliest opportunity.

Having acknowledged the difficult period which the monitoring report covered and the approach, which was being taken to addressing the ongoing issues, it was

RESOLVED

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

18 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.

An update on the outstanding appeals against the decisions of the Authority was also provided and the Committee were advised that there was now only one Appeal outstanding which was due to be heard in January 2021.

Arising from the report, Members discussed the processes by which vehicle checks and inspections were undertaken and the Committee were reminded that whilst the Authority does not have a dedicated inspection team, it works closely with the Police and other agencies in this regard. In cases where no proof of insurance can be provided, the Committee were advised of the course of action which was normally taken by the Authority in these circumstances.

Following a question regarding the change in the delegations which had been granted to officers, the Committee were assured that decision making continued to be robust and this was reflected in the outcome of the appeals which had been made and heard against officer decisions.

In response to a comment from a Member regarding a number of complaints which she had received about private hire vehicles parking in the market square in St Neots, the Committee were advised that the Licensing Team were aware of the issues and were considering the best course of action to address these matters.

Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be received and noted.

Chairman