

Licensing Committee – 15 November 2017

Present: Councillor Miss Durdan (Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Blatchford, Davies, Mrs Hill, James and Morrell.

Officers: Chris Hall (Assistant Director – Operational Delivery), Ian Timms (Assistant Director – Business and Development), Andrew Hopkins (Business Development – Marketing and Place Manager), Leigh-ann Fumagalli (Licensing Officer), Mark Banczyk-Gee (Licensing Officer) and Clare Rendell (Democratic Services Officer).

Other: Councillor Berry and West Somerset Councillor Lillis.

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

27. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Brown, Gage, Mrs Lees and Nicholls.

28. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 28 September 2017 were taken as read and were signed.

29. Licensing Service Update Report

Considered report previously circulated, which provided an update on the activities of the Council's Licensing Service, changes to legislation, current consultations and other general Licensing matters.

A summary of the activity and performance of the Licensing Service since the last meeting of the Committee was set out:-

- The performance of the Licensing Service was measured against the number of applications that were completed within 14 days of them being determined. The target was 95%.
- This target had been reached between 1 July and 30 September 2017.
- Members were provided with a comparison of the number of applications received between July and September 2017 for the preceding two years and a summary of the numbers of the licences in force and notices given as at 31 October 2017.
- Application numbers had increased across the various regimes since 2015, except for taxi and private hire vehicle, driver and operator licence applications, where there had been a decline.
- The numbers of service requests received by the service between July and September 2017, compared with the previous two years were also reported.
- Since 2015, the service had improved its record keeping, particularly with complaints and investigations.

The Licensing Manager had moved over to the Accommodation Team to provide them with interim support and to assist with work involved in the implementation of the revised refurbishment plan of the Deane House.

Although the move was initially until the end of December, it was possible that it could be extended. Therefore, firm arrangements had been put in place to support the Licensing Team. The team would take on further responsibility and be lighter on specialist licensing knowledge, which would undoubtedly impact negatively on the performance of the service.

There continued to be regular allegations made about unlicensed dog breeders. A person was deemed to be operating a dog breeding establishment by the following definitions of the Breeding of Dogs Act 1973, as amended by the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999:-

- They ran a business which involved the breeding of dogs for sale: or
- Any bitch or bitches they kept (or were kept by other persons but under a breeding arrangement with them) gave birth to five litters of puppies within a twelve month period.

This meant that a person could breed up to four litters of puppies in a year and sell them legitimately, unless they were deemed to be running a business.

The legislation was due to be reformed in October 2018, along with other Animal Licensing Acts. When this had been done, officers would issue a press release and distribute information to raise awareness of the licensing laws.

At the last meeting of the Licensing Committee, Members had requested that the service investigated whether there was the opportunity to designate any further taxi ranks in Taunton town centre.

Reference was made to the 'unofficial' rank which had formed on Bridge Street in Taunton on Friday and Saturday nights and whether this could be formalised. The question was put directly to the Transport and Development Officer for Somerset County Council (SCC) Highways.

It was understood that SCC Highways would have difficulty because on that part of the carriageway, the road width was relatively narrow and included a cycle lane on both sides of the road. There was a bus stop located on one side of the road that also impacted on the road width and visibility too. If a time restricted or permanent taxi rank was to be introduced along Bridge Street, SCC Highways would need to consider vehicle movements from both directions and the safety of pedestrian and cyclists.

The Transport and Development Officer believed that neither a time restricted nor permanent rank at Bridge Street would be a viable option.

With reference to the introduction of new ranks in other locations in Taunton, the 'Urban Realm' project was part of the Taunton Town Centre Area Action Plan and proposed the pedestrianisation of three main streets in Taunton and included additional taxi ranks. A trial scheme was scheduled for 2018.

The Licensing Service had recently issued a Street Trading Consent to the Business Development department of the Council. Licensing Officers had already been working closely with Business Development to create a quality, vibrant and dynamic economic environment in Taunton town centre. However, the street trader licensing process was found to be a barrier faced by new businesses and activities. The difficulties faced by applicants were:-

- Lengthy consultation timescales;

- Little choice in the length of consents available; and
- No ability to amend or vary a consent once issued.

Now that Business Development held its own consent, the barriers had been massively reduced. The consent included designated areas within the town which had already been used for pitches or were likely to be used in the future.

During the discussion of this item, the following points were raised:-

- Members queried how the Business Development Team would improve the Street Trading Consent.
The team would issue a permit rather than a licence. This was a more dynamic process for the Street Trading Consents. This meant that the permit could be revoked or changed at any time. The team worked in the town centre, so had constant dialogue with the stall holders. They hoped to encourage more activity within the town.
- Concern was raised about the quantity and quality of the stalls in the town centre and that it might discourage prospective businesses from trading in the surrounding premises.
The Business Development Team had formulated a policy which detailed the criteria for the types of stalls they would prefer. They wanted to visit other towns and cities and learn from what they had done to make their centres thrive.
- Members requested that the Business Development Team placed more advertisements for Taunton in railway stations and other similar locations.
- Concern was raised that once the Urban Realm project had begun, rogue traders would set up without the correct permission.
Rogue traders would be discouraged and officers would ensure that stall holders were monitored.
- Members requested that the Business Development Team attended the June 2018 Licensing Committee to give an update on the progress made with Street Trading Consents.
- Concern was raised about SCC's response to the Licensing Manager's request for additional taxi ranks in Taunton town centre. Members requested that the team submitted a further request to SCC for their suggestions on where they would allow additional taxi ranks to be located.
- Members praised the Licensing Manager and his Team for all their hard work and hoped that it would continue in the interim whilst the manager had transferred across to assist with the Accommodation Project.
The team had increased their capacity so Members should not notice any difference in the service in the short term, however, if it turned into a long term situation, then they would need to arrange appropriate cover. The team would use any money saved from the manager's salary to send staff on training courses.

Resolved that the report be noted.

(The meeting ended at 7.13pm)