



Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

LICENSING & PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

15 September 2020

WORK CARRIED OUT BY THE LICENSING TEAM (POLICY AND APPLICATIONS) DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Report of the Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform the Committee of the work carried out by the Licensing Team (Policy and Applications) during the Covid-19 pandemic and how the team have adapted to new ways of working in order to ensure that applications and queries are still dealt with in accordance with Council Policy and Statutory Guidance.

2. Background – Lockdown in Place

- 2.1 On 23 March 2020 the Country was ordered into a lockdown by Central Government due to the ongoing Covid-19 Pandemic. The result of the lockdown was that staff were now required to work from home and all Council buildings were closed. We were already aware of the potential for a lockdown so contingency plans had already been discussed and put in place so that we could continue to provide a service albeit with changes to processes.
- 2.2 Initially there were only three members of the team including the Licensing Manager with access to Laptops and all the software required to process applications received. The remainder of the team had limited access to systems such as email. Thankfully the whole team now have access to all systems, and all are able to deal with everything received.
- 2.3 Quite quickly we had to put measures in place to continue to accept applications and process them. This meant that applications which would normally be received in person from the applicant (driver and vehicle renewals) at the Customer Service Centre on Granby Street would now be received electronically via email.
- 2.3 Staff contacted applicants who were booked in for appointments in the days after lockdown and beyond and advised them of the new process of emailing documents and forms to the team and payments being taken over the phone. Applicants were also ringing the team to find out what they needed to do and were being advised of the new procedures.

- 2/4 The decision was taken that we would renew vehicle licences after the 23 March 2020 without the requirement for the vehicle inspection to take place – the Government issued guidance that MOTs which expired after 23 March would automatically be extended until October 2020.
- 2.5 In addition GPs stopped all non essential appointments meaning that drivers were (and still are) unable to obtain Medicals and other reports such as Diabetic Reports. The decision was taken to renew licences subject to these being submitted as soon as possible once such appointments can be made. In the event of non compliance in the submission of these reports once they can be obtained, steps can be taken to suspend licences until such time as the satisfactory medical or report is produced.
- 2.6 New driver applications were put on hold as many of the checks that are required including practical driving tests, knowledge tests, English language assessments, medicals cannot be undertaken – people can still apply online should they wish and these are processed as far as they can pending the receipt of the other satisfactory checks.
- 2.7 In terms of other licensing processes within the team we have continued to receive applications under the Licensing Act 2003 - indeed on the day of lockdown we were served with a review application by Leicestershire Police. We have worked closely with Democratic Services to implement new online meetings using Microsoft Teams and the Licensing (Hearings) Sub Committee was the first meeting to sit using this technology.
- 2.8 Due to the number of enquiries received daily by telephone from applicants, the amount of work being received in our generic email account and lack of IT capability throughout the team at the time - the decision was taken to switch the telephones off.
- 2.9 A comprehensive voicemail was put in place directing people to our webpages where all the information needed was placed with comprehensive step by step instructions on what people needed to do to renew their licence.
- 2.9 All driver, vehicle and operator licences renewed have been emailed to licence holders as PDF documents. In terms of badges these are to be posted out when we have access to our specialist printer –(see 3.4) MOGO the supplier of our plate and signage materials offered a service to print and make the plates and signs on our behalf and post them to applicants. This has been in place since May and will be reviewed in coming months when we start getting back into our offices where we can make the plates and door signs in house and hand them to licence holders at the Customer Service Centre.
- 2.10 Worthy of note has been the trades patience and understanding throughout the last months since lockdown. They have adapted well to new procedures and been extremely patient and polite when staff have made contact to take payments for applications which in times where the trade have struggled financially is a positive reaction.
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3. Number of Applications processed and licences issued up to and including 1 September 2020

3.1 The team have processed the following numbers of applications and issued licences:-

Driver Renewals – 590
Private Hire Vehicle Renewals – 586
Hackney Carriages – 117
Private Hire Operators – 36

Licensing Act 2003

New Premises – 16
Notification of Interest – 2
Transfer – 15
Vary DPS – 12
Changes to address/name – 33
Variations – 4
Personal Licence (New) – 25
Personal Licence (change to address/name) – 34

Gambling Act 2005

Small Society Lottery – 1

Other

Animal Welfare Licences – 2
Skips (New/Extensions) – 30
Scaffolding/Hoarding (New/Extensions)– 31
Temporary Street Cafes – 18
Street Trading (New/Renewals) – 8

3.2 We have also held nine hearings to deal with three new applications for new premises licences that attracted representations, three reviews (one which involved an interim steps hearing) and a variation application. As previously mentioned, the Licensing (Hearings) Sub Committee was the first meeting to take place using Microsoft Teams and feedback from attendees has been excellent

Easing of Lockdown restrictions and the future

3.3 Throughout the last few months work has been ongoing with the Digital Transformation Team to get our paper forms online. Work is well advanced with the driver renewal and vehicle forms to get them published so that we can accept applications in a much more streamlined way and reduce the need for face to face interactions with licence holders other than for the collection of plates/door signs and for us to check original documents. Other forms are also scheduled for digitalisation so that eventually all applications can be submitted online.

- 3.4 The team now has an office in City Hall – which has been risk assessed and deemed covid safe. The room is set up and ready for staff to go in and work and print off the badges that we have issued since March and get them posted out. In addition, we are working closely with Customer Services Management to reintroduce appointments at the Customer Service Centre on Granby Street from around November time. As previously stated, the need for extensive numbers of appointments will be reduced due to the move to online application processes.
- 3.5 The reopening of the testing station at the beginning of August has meant that vehicle inspections can now go ahead and as of 7 September (after only new applications/vehicle changes and renewals were being tested) vehicle testing will be back up to full speed carrying out all types of inspections. Vehicles which are now due a six-month inspection as the licence was renewed in March will now be tested and going forward all vehicles renewed without inspection are to be tested.
- 3.6 Reminders to licence holders about annual fee payments due under the Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Act 2005 are now being scheduled in to be sent out in the coming weeks so that we collect income that would have been collected earlier in the year.

4 Recommendation

- 4.1 Members are asked to note the contents of the report.

5 Financial, Legal and Equalities Implications

Financial Implications

- 5.1 No significant financial implications for the Council are expected to arise from the working arrangements described in this report.

Colin Sharpe, Deputy Director of Finance, ext 37 4081

Legal Implications

- 5.2 During the Covid 19 pandemic, it remains the position that all matters must be dealt with in accordance with the relevant legislation and current government guidance.

There are ongoing delays in the judicial system regarding the listing of licensing appeals.

John Moss, Solicitor, Legal Services, ext 37 3010

Equalities Implications

- 5.3 Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

There are no direct equality implications arising from this report as it is for noting, however equality considerations need to be taken into account when developing the online applications to ensure they are accessible to those using assistive technology. Also need to ensure the service is accessible for all, this includes the website, telephone and online access.

Sukhi Biring, Equalities Officer, 454 4175

6 Background Papers – Local Government Act 1972

None

7 Consultations

Head of Legal Services

Head of Finance

Equalities Team

8 Report Author

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