



LICENSING COMMITTEE

Monday, 20 July 2020

LICENSING SERVICES RESPONSE TO COVID-19

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of the actions taken by Licensing Services to assist licensees during the Covid-19 global pandemic and now, with the easing of lockdown, in the recovery phase.

Is the report Open or Exempt?	Open

Wards Affected:	All
------------------------	-----

Cabinet Member:	Councillor Mary Rudd, Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Health
------------------------	---

Supporting Officer:	Chris Bing Legal and Licensing Services Manager 01394 444408 chris.bing@east Suffolk.gov.uk
----------------------------	--

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Covid-19 has adversely impacted the licensing trade and the nighttime economy in East Suffolk, like the rest of the UK, in a very significant way.
- 1.2 Pubs and restaurants were closed for 15 weeks, between 23 March 2020 and 4 July 2020.
- 1.3 Latitude, one of the biggest music festivals in the country, which usually brings 40,000 thousand people to Henham Park near Southwold over 4 days in July, was cancelled.
- 1.4 There has been little business for the taxi trade when schools have been closed, people have not been socialising outside their home and there has been limited shopping in stores.
- 1.5 East Suffolk Licensing has played, and is continuing to play, an important role in supporting licensed premises and licensed drivers, to maintain and, where possible and practical, keep running their businesses in incredibly challenging circumstances.

2 LICENSED PREMISES

- 2.1 On the evening of 20 March 2020, in his televised address to the nation, the Prime Minister requested that licensed premises close to prevent the spread of the coronavirus (Covid-19). On 23 March 2020, Regulations came into force requiring licensed premises to close.
- 2.2 The steps Licensing Services have taken to support licensees of licensed premises during lockdown have included:
 - Permitting licensees to defer paying their Premises Licence fee until 30 September 2020.
 - Advising premises which wished to remain open as to how to lawfully provide takeaways and off sales.
 - Issuing credits for the application fees for Temporary Event Notices for events which were unable to go ahead.
 - Signposting licensees to central government grants and hardship funds which they may be eligible to claim.
- 2.3 Licensed premises were able to reopen from 6am on 4 July 2020. Licensed premises are being encouraged to make greater use of outside space to be able to accommodate and serve a sufficiently large customer base, to make running the business viable, whilst upholding social distancing “1 metre plus” requirements for public health reasons.
- 2.4 To this end, under the Business and Planning Bill which is currently going through Parliament, district councils are to be given powers to issue Pavement Licences, to permit the placement of stalls on highway adjacent to premises to sell or serve food or drink and to permit tables and chairs on the highway for the consumption of food and drink. The only statutory consultee on a Pavement Licence is the Highway Authority (Suffolk County Council). However, in addition to the sole statutory consultee, ESC will also be consulting with Town/Parish Councils, district Councillors, Environmental Health and the Police on Pavement Licences. The 3rd reading of the Business and Planning Bill is due to take place in Parliament on 20 July 2020. Once the Bill becomes an Act, and the Act becomes law, there will be a 7 days statutory consultation period and then a further 7 days for a Pavement Licence application to be determined. Therefore, the parliamentary timetable and statutory requirements are such that East

Suffolk Council's Licensing Services is likely to be able to start issuing our first Pavement Licences from late July 2020/early August 2020.

- 2.5 The Council's Asset Management team is also issuing land licences, wherever possible, to licensed premises wishing to use ESC land for tables and chairs for their customers. These land licences are also being issued by ESC at no charge to licensees.

3 TAXIS

- 3.1 The steps Licensing Services have taken to support hackney carriage and private hire drivers during lockdown have included:
- Permitting licensed drivers to spread the cost of their annual licence upon renewal by granting 3 month licences rather than just 12 month licences.
 - Sourcing alternative garages for mechanical inspections, when garages closed because of Covid 19, to enable vehicles to remain licensed.
 - Agreeing to drivers installing protective screens in their vehicles to protect both drivers and the travelling public and so give the public greater confidence to continue to use taxis during lockdown.
 - Signposting licensees to central government grants and hardship funds which they may be eligible to claim.

4 COMMUNITY EVENTS

- 4.1 On 8 July 2020, Licensing Services rolled out a scheme to facilitate Town Councils and community groups in holding fairs and markets over the summer.
- 4.2 With some towns in East Suffolk currently subject to street trading regulations, the council will be viewing street markets, fairs and other related commercial events as community events, which do not require a street trading licence or consent.
- 4.3 The council wants to encourage outdoor events, during the summer months. Therefore, organisers will only be asked to complete an application form for a Single Event Trading Licence (which can cover multiple days), to provide food safety information on what each stall will be selling and Public Liability insurance for the event. Unlike applications for street trading licences, there will be no consultation required with a range of third parties and there will be no fee. Licensing Services has also committed to turning these applications around within 24 hours.

5 FUTURE OUTLOOK

- 5.1 The Licensing Service's key objective now is to help the licensed trade to recover from the damaging impact of Covid-19. The licensing trade and hospitality sector make a significant contribution to the local economy, especially the night-time economy in East Suffolk. They are also an important part of the tourist offer in East Suffolk.
- 5.2 In January 2020, East Suffolk Council had issued 1072 Premises Licences and Club Premises Certificates. Indeed, East Suffolk Council was bucking the national trend of closures with a small but steady growth in the number of licensed premises since 1 April 2019. On 1 July 2020, there were only 2 fewer licensed premises than there had been on 1 January 2020. In this period, 9 Premises Licences were surrendered, 2

Premises Licences lapsed and 1 was revoked. There was also one fewer Club Premises Certificate issued. However, 11 new Premises Licences were granted.

- 5.3 The full impact of Covid-19 on licensed premises may not yet be truly reflected in the statistics, with some premises choosing to maintain their Premises Licence but defer the payment of their annual licence fee until September 2020. Therefore, the figures reported to the October 2020 Licensing Committee should give a clearer picture as to the impact of Covid-19 on the number of licensed premises in East Suffolk.
- 5.4 In the short term, as a result of the impact of Covid-19, the total number of licensed premises may fall further but the challenge for the Licensing Service, and the wider Council, is to try to use whatever leverage it has and support it can give to reduce the number of closures to the absolute minimum by supporting existing licensees, whilst encouraging those looking to start up new businesses in the licensed trade and hospitality sector.
- 5.5 In terms of the impact of Covid-19 on taxis, there is already a clearly identifiable trend, with a reduction in the number of licensed vehicles and licensed drivers, both Hackney Carriage and Private Hire during lockdown. However, we have not been accepting new applications from prospective drivers during lockdown and this, coupled with the granting of 3 month licences, is likely to mean the figures reported to the October 2020 Licensing Committee, will give a truer reflection of the impact of Covid 19 on the taxi trade.

East Suffolk Council issued licences

	1 April 2019	1 January 2020	1 July 2020
Licensed premises (including social clubs)	1059	1072	1070
Hackney carriage vehicles	-	136	108
Hackney Carriage/Private Hire drivers	-	237	223
Private hire vehicles	-	349	301
Private hire drivers	-	352	341

- 5.6 The challenges faced by the licensing trade and hospitality sector to recover from Covid-19 are significant and should not be underestimated. However, the Council's Licensing Services working together with other service areas from across the council and in partnership with other responsible authorities, with licensees and with local

residents, will seek to continue to address these challenges, rebuild and, in time, return to growing, East Suffolk's licensed trade and hospitality sector.

6 HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO THE EAST SUFFOLK BUSINESS PLAN?

- 6.1 Licensing plays an important role in the building of a strong, sustainable, and dynamic local economy and in ensuring East Suffolk remains a safe place for our communities.

7 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 To note and consider Licensing Services response to Covid-19 to support licensees.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the report be noted

APPENDICES - None

BACKGROUND PAPERS – None