

Update on the Licensing Service – September 2021

Through the pandemic the licenced sector adapted to the changing restrictions, with a number of premises temporarily closed or operating differently to mitigate the measures imposed on them by the stepped regulations falling from the early part of 2021, with most if not all premises that could open and chose to open operating by the lifting of step four on the 19th of July.

Pubs and nightclubs have been one of the worst affected sub-sectors this is likely a consequence of businesses being closed or disrupted for long stretches at a time. Pubs have been less able to offer a takeaway service when closed and have had partial restrictions, such as earlier closing times and substantial requirements around eating even when open. Nightclubs have remained closed by law since March 2020 until July 2021.

The start of the year again posed a number of significant challenges to the Licensing Team and this has continued in 2021. Workloads have been unsustainably high during many months, and this trend has continued on the full re-opening of the economy. Officers have had the task of understanding all the changes to relay the information to the trade on what they can and can't do; this in turn has been a thought-provoking task and at times unclear and inconsistent with so many changes.

Officers have also carried out visits to premises, particularly ones that may have raised concerns with non-compliance with regulations; these visits continue even as we return to a more business as usual norm as complaints are now being received expressing concern about licensable activities, music events and noise from licensed premises.

Partnership Working

Public protection managers are attending a weekly meeting with Police colleagues to ensure we are working collaboratively addressing any relevant Covid concerns and complaints relating to businesses in Wiltshire. These meetings are also being reflexed at a higher level to ensure a cohesive multi-agency response across the county to multi-disciplinary issues.

Now we have a clearer picture of how the hospitality industry is operating, the joint agencies are making decisions on when to carry out any additional evening / weekend working in partnership to make best use of resources, however all agencies are still carrying out their own positive work.

The encouraging outcome from the last 18 months has been the strengthening of partnership working, with agencies supporting each other and heightened awareness of the abilities and boundaries we individually operate within. This means we are working with a common goal to ensure the safety of our communities and to engage and encourage our business to operate in a positive and safe way for their customers.

Enforcement

During the past 18 months, Wiltshire Police, and the local authorities have been operating the 4 E's – Engage, Explain, Encourage, Enforce, but as the pandemic has continued, we have moved into the 4th E for serious breaches or where previous engagement has taken place.

From March 2020 to July 2021, Public Protection received 1,127 Covid related complaints and 579 enquires across all business types.

Licensing Applications

New premises applications:	Closed/surrendered licences
2021: 59 (to date)	19 (to date)
2020: 67	20
2019: 53	7

Operationally

Like most of the population we are still working from home with the very occasional visit into the offices.

The web pages of the licensing service are constantly being updated to reflect the current requirements under the relevant regulations and take note of national and local guidance.

2020 Euros

The 2020 UEFA European Championship was a major opportunity to attract customers who wanted to watch live matches in the great atmosphere provided by hospitality venues.

Wiltshire Council Licensing and Wiltshire Police engaged early with licensed premises planning to show the Euro 2020 games, discussing good management practices they needed to consider and have in place to deal with any issues that could have arisen.

The tournament began on 11th June and ended on 11th July and therefore premises were required to comply with Steps 3 of the Covid regulations following the delayed implementation of step 4 until 19th July.

The football passed off with few premises requiring interventions for Covid and licensing compliance issues, Police were operating regular patrols and these focused on identified areas requiring visits.

Fetes, festivals, and large-scale events

The pandemic has had a significant impact on festivals and events taking place in Wiltshire during the first seven months of this year with numerous events including festivals, local community fetes, sporting, theatre shows, having to be cancelled or re-arranged due to the restrictions under the stepped regulations

The Licensing team and Public Health had been continually overwhelmed with request for information and advice on the ever-changing regulations and guidance documents in relation to events.

As we emerged from the stepped regulations in the middle of July and events could take place with Covid mitigations measures but no restrictions, the number and types of events taking place increased, from music events to wedding receptions, this has also been noted by the increase in the number of temporary licence applications received daily. Although numbers received for August are still down on 2019 by 30% there does seem more confidence from organisers that planned events will attract sufficient members of the public to make them viable.

2021 (Date Tens received)

Month	Tens	Late tens		Total
Jan	2	1		3
Feb	8	2		10
March	20	0		20
April	43	7		50
May	64	13		77
June	110	16		126
July	115	42		156
August	112	44		156

Licensing Sub Committee Hearings

In 2021 to date, six virtual hearings have taken place, in comparison in 2020 when four hearings took place, two of which were virtual hearings. In 2019, seven hearings were required. Thank you to all Members and colleagues who have enable the due legal process to continue during this challenging period.

Personal Licences

In 2017 changes to the Licensing Act 2003 gave a discretionary power to Licensing Authorities to revoke or suspend a Personal License. Prior to April 2017, only the magistrates' court had the power to revoke or suspend a personal licence where the licence holder had been convicted of a relevant offence.

Licensing Officers are currently consulting on a new process to consider our policy for dealing with personal licence holders who may be convicted of offences, foreign offences, or civil penalties for immigration matters. A summary of a proposed procedure with relevant supporting legislation will shortly be presented to the Committee for consideration. It is proposed to, as far as possible, to follow existing Committee precedent to ensure a straightforward procedure that follows the principles of natural justice.

Ask Angela Campaign

After the positive engagement by the trade in 2018, Licensing are seeking to relaunch awareness of the 'Ask for Angela' initiative which aims to reduce sexual violence and vulnerability by providing customers with a non-descript phrase they can use to gain assistance from staff members in order to be separated from the company of someone with whom they feel unsafe due to that person's actions, words, or behaviour.

Pub watches and licensed premises have again indicated their support for this important safety net, and I have asked our communications colleagues to assist with the wider promotion to the public to re inform them of the scheme.



Animal Licensing

As part of the 2018 Animal regulations, inspectors must be suitably qualified by October 2021 to carry out animal activity inspections; prior to the first lockdown all relevant council licensing officers had attended one of the five-day courses run by The Pet Industry Federation in London. The final requirement being to pass a series of assignments linked to the five welfare needs across the differing premises and species now covered by the regulations. Covid has made this task difficult as the assignments must be linked to physical inspections across the spectrum of premise types, however Licensing is on course to have a number of officers who will have achieved the level 3 certificate by the required date.

During the lockdowns nationally there has been an increase in dog owning with puppies in high demand which has seen a phenomenal increase in the price for certain breeds.

There are currently 25 licensed breeders in Wiltshire.

Animal licensing visits / inspections to both commercial and domestic premises are now being carried out.

One of the interesting premises recently visited was Hope Nature Centre in Southwick nr Trowbridge, where they have continued to improve the premises with new infrastructure, ensuring the welfare of the animals and public are catered for.

The premises currently has an Exhibition of Animals licence under the Animal Welfare Regulations 2018 and extensive work has been carried out for the last couple of years with the APHA (Animal and Plant Health Agency). Following the completed work and a request by the Licensing Authority, the APHA have issued a 14(1)(a) Dispensation Direction under the Zoo Licensing Act 1981, because of the small number of the kinds of animals kept in a Zoo.

Software Transformation update

The Public Protection Team are currently undertaking a systems transformation to a new software called Tascomi; two Licensing Officers have been delegated to carry out data mapping and configuration for Licensing to ensure that data from the previous system M3 Northgate can be migrated to the new system. As Licensing consists of a large variety of licences and application processes, this task has been very time consuming, challenging, and complicated.

Latest Team News:

Teresa Issacson has recently returned from maternity leave.

Emma Bachelor recently got married and is now Emma Hyde.

Licensing Officers

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