

LICENSING COMMITTEE

11 January 2024

Present: Councillor R Wenham (Chair)
Councillor M Hofman (Vice-Chair)
Councillors M Devonish, S Feldman, A Grimston, P Hannon,
L Nembhard, T Osborn, C Saunders, G Saffery, R Smith,
M Turmaine and D Watling

Officers: Associate Director of Housing and Wellbeing
Senior Licensing Officer (AY)
Democratic Services Officer (LM)
Senior Solicitor

11 **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Allen-Williamson and Trebar

12 **Disclosure of interests**

There were no disclosures of interest.

13 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 28 September 2023 were submitted and signed.

14 **Review of Cumulative Impact Assessment under Statement of Licensing Policy 2023-2028 policy**

The Senior Licensing Officer presented the report to the committee, providing a rundown of the context and history behind the Cumulative Impact Assessment. No significant changes occurred in the town centre, as highlighted in the report, which incorporated data from the Police. The Police recommended the continuation of the existing policy, noting that crime figures remained consistent with those of 2019 despite the impact of COVID-19. Given the absence of

significant improvement or deterioration, it was proposed to maintain the current policy.

The Senior Licensing Officer responded to a question about how Watford compared to nearby towns, emphasising that the report focused on Watford. The police area was identified as a matter of concern, and unfortunately, no benchmarking data was available at the time. There was a discussion about enhancing the survey distribution to ensure a higher response rate than in previous surveys.

There was a deliberation about enhancing the survey distribution to ensure a higher response rate than in previous surveys. The Senior Licensing Officer explained that the communications team would handle the distribution, as they routinely performed this task for other departments. They were aware of the issues and had implemented changes, including switching to a different platform due to accessibility concerns. Additionally, the Officer was reminded that councillors had recommended sending the survey directly to them for distribution within their respective wards.

The Senior Licensing Officer discussed the various groups who would be consulted, including the Police. The council's assessment encompassed environmental health, addressing noise complaints, and incorporating feedback from businesses and residents. Additionally, other responsible authorities were approached in the process.

In response to a query about whether the policy was overly restrictive for businesses, the Senior Licensing Officer clarified that no feedback indicated that businesses found the restrictions burdensome. Exemptions were built into the policy, particularly for establishments such as restaurants. The Officer highlighted that the policy focused on the nighttime economy from 10 pm onwards, emphasising the necessity of specific measures like entry systems and door staff. While there was a strong encouragement for these policies, it was clarified that there was no strict obligation to refuse applications. The presumption, instead, leaned towards granting applications with appropriate conditions.

There was a discussion about the level of alcohol-related crime, referencing information from the current statement set in 2021. The consensus explored why the Police identified it as an issue. The discussion specifically delved into alcohol-related offences occurring between 7 pm and 4 am, with alcohol being a prominent factor in these instances. The exemption applied to premises where patrons sat down to consume alcohol. The focal point of the discussion was post-10 pm, aimed at addressing and decreasing the incidence of alcohol-related offences during this timeframe.

In response to a question about engaging licensed premises, the Senior Licensing Officer mentioned writing to licensed venues directly and through Pub Watch. Enforcement officers attended monthly Pub Watch meetings.

The Associate Director of Housing and Wellbeing responded to a question regarding the impact of police measures on businesses in Central Watford and concerns about restrictive policies. Emphasis was placed on the continuation of an existing policy, with constant feedback monitoring and engagement with various entities such as improvement districts, Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, and the economic development team. The Director mentioned actively talking to businesses, understanding their restrictions and barriers to growth, and being part of the Better Business for All initiative. Notably, the council was recognised by the Federation of Small Businesses for its approach to supporting small businesses through regulation, marking a pioneering effort in the country. Regarding police data, it was stressed that the information submitted by the Police was their evidence and data, making it challenging for council officers to comment on it. The suggestion was made that if the committee desired more information, they could invite the Police to discuss the data directly.

The committee members discussed the figures, considering population growth and its statistical implications. In response, it was clarified that the Police could only provide data based on reported incidents. Population figures were limited to census data for 2021, as the policy had not been in place long enough to assess the borough's population changes. Despite a slight decrease in licensed premises, the number of reported incidents remained consistent. It was emphasised that the available data could only reflect what was on record, and it was noted that a significant portion of footfall in the town centre comprised non-Watford residents.

There was a further question about the data provided by the Police, specifically regarding the concerning nature of one part of the data - sexual assault being alcohol-related, as indicated on page 7. Concern was expressed about the number of incidents involving females aged 13 or over, particularly noting that the figure was in the 30s. The Senior Licensing Officer explained that this categorisation was based on the Police's classification, and he committed to obtaining more details from the Police about this specific aspect.

There was a discussion around training provided by the council for licensed premises, emphasising the Better forum as a more suitable platform for an in-depth examination of crime data and the purpose of that forum, including deep dives. Various initiatives were highlighted, such as the White Ribbon campaign, the Priority Safety Community Protection Plan, and police operations targeting

nighttime activities. Training for frontline workers, focusing on identifying predatory behaviour, was mentioned. The Safety Community Policy was underscored as encompassing numerous initiatives. The Licensing policy was positioned as a tool to achieve objectives within the town centre, aligning with the broader Council plan that emphasised vibrancy from planning policies to economic development. The impact policy played a crucial role in achieving these objectives.

RESOLVED –

That the Committee approve the renewal and continuation of the cumulative impact assessment and cumulative impact policy for the town centre.

That the cumulative impact assessment be put out to consultation as set out in paragraphs 7.1 to 7.3 of the report, with the addition of consulting councillors as tabled during the Committee, with the results of the consultation being presented to the March Licensing Committee.

Chair
Licensing Committee

The Meeting started at 7.00 pm
and finished at 7.45 pm