

Report to Council – 17 October 2023

Report of Licensing Committee – 28 September 2023

Licensing Committee met on 28 September 2023. The minutes are published on the council's website.

The following members were present at the meeting:

Present: Councillor Wenham (Chair)
Councillor Hofman (Vice-Chair)
Councillors Clarke-Taylor, Devonish, Feldman, Hannon, Nembhard, Osborn, Saffery, Saunders, Smith, Trebar and Watling

Officers: Senior Licensing Officer
Environmental Health Manager
Senior Solicitor
Democratic Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer (LM)

Minute 10 included one recommendation to Council.

10. Review of Licensing Act 2003 Statement of Licensing Policy

The Senior Licensing Officer presented the report to the committee, highlighting new aspects and modifications. An overview of the consultation period was provided. Emphasis was placed on the policy being effective for five years but open to amendment if needed. Notably, modifications were made to the statutory guidance, referenced at paragraphs 5.0 through 5.5 of the report, with a focus on counter-terrorism measures. Additionally, integrating a link to "Protect UK" for streamlined licence applications aligned with the approach present in other policies of Councils in Hertfordshire.

Councillor Hannon inquired if any lessons had been learned from the consultation process and the response to public concerns raised. The Senior Licensing Officer responded that a considerable portion of this policy concerned the borough, and some reactions provided valuable insights for addressing public concerns. Given its substantial significance, we learned valuable lessons from this consultation process. These insights would undoubtedly inform our approach in future consultations.

The Chair inquired about how many individuals viewed the policy during the consultation. The Senior Licensing Officer stated that over 80 people had viewed the policy; however, only three individuals completed the survey.

Councillor Devonish inquired about licence pre-application advice. The Senior Licensing Officer explained the various forms of pre-application meetings and engagement that had been made available. For instance, people could email, visit the website, or engage in a phone discussion. The service also organised site visits, for example, to a cricket club that had renovated premises, where the officer could personally assess and provide recommendations. The forms of engagement were diverse and tailored to the application's specific requirements.

Councillor Devonish inquired about the reason for counter-terrorism taking a central focus. The Senior Licensing Officer responded that the focus on counter-terrorism was due to changes in statutory guidance from the Secretary of State, particularly concerning commercial premises and the protect duty known as 'Martyn's Law.' This shift was in response to the fallout from previous incidents, for example the Manchester Arena bombing, especially within licensed venues. It emphasised enhancing measures to address counter-terrorism concerns, especially for large-scale events.

Councillor Devonish asked if councillors could help with future consultation by liaising with local businesses in the central ward. The Senior Licensing Officer agreed that it could help with future consultations. One of the original stated aims of the Licensing Act 2003, the focus was on fostering more see more community engagement in the licensing process. While the Act was clear on engaging during consultation on applications, it was less restrictive with regards to consulting on policy.

The Environmental Health Manager added that service could extend involvement in the consultation to include all ward councillors, as there were licensed premises across every ward.

RESOLVED –

That the Licensing Committee recommends to Council, acting as the Licensing Authority for the Borough of Watford, that it adopts the amended Statement of Licensing Policy for 2023-2028 as attached at appendix 3 at its meeting on 17 October 2023.