

## LICENSING COMMITTEE

7 July 2020

Present: Councillor G Saffery (Chair)  
Councillor A Dychton (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors A Grimston, I Hamid, K Hastrick, M Hofman, A Khan,  
R Martins, B Mauthoor, M Mills, J Pattinson, D Scudder, R Smith,  
I Stotesbury and R Wenham

Officers: Environmental Health Manager (Commercial)  
Senior Licensing Officer (AY)  
Democratic Services Officer (JK)  
Senior Solicitor

### 1 **Apologies for absence**

There was a change of membership for this meeting; Councillor Scudder replaced Councillor Bolton.

### 2 **Disclosure of interests**

There were no disclosures of interest.

### 3 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 9 March 2020 were agreed. They would be signed once members and officers returned to the Town Hall.

### 4 **Review of Sex Establishment Licence Policy**

The committee received the report of the Senior Licensing Officer which sought approval for a revised Sex Establishment Licensing Policy after the expiry of the current policy later that month.

A consultation exercise had taken place and responses had been received from the police, the Business Improvement District (BID) and the sole existing licence holder for the premises located on Market Street. The police and the BID were content with the existing policy. However, the licence holder requested that either an additional sexual entertainment venue be permitted in The Parade, in

line with an earlier policy or one sexual entertainment venue (SEV) be permitted within a consolidated area encompassing Market Street and The Parade.

The recommendation in the report was to move to a larger consolidated area where one SEV would be permitted. There had previously been a SEV on The Parade which had closed and the limit in the area had been reduced following that closure. It was noted that Watford had a diverse night time economy and that the change would still mean that any SEV would remain within the town centre policy (LP3) area. The existing premises had been trading for over a decade under the current regime.

The committee noted the BID and police responses to the consultation to retain the existing policy and questioned the need for any changes. Officers underlined that the proposed policy would retain the number of premises as one. The existing premises was considering moving and the proposed policy would not open the way for a second premises for them or for other operators. The council, as the licensing authority, would retain control and each application would have a wide consultation process to include the police, local residents, councillors and others and would be judged on its merits. Additionally, the premises would need to apply separately for an alcohol licence which would also be subject to a consultation process.

Following the receipt of consultation responses, informal discussions took place with the police. Whilst they retained their opposition to additional premises, there were some community safety advantages to the venue relocating to The Parade where other premises which required policing resources were situated. There were also benefits such as more CCTV, taxi ranks, lighting and access. Committee members noted the footfall levels on The Parade which included more young people and children. However, it was also noted that Market Street had high footfall levels and the existing premises was located next to bus stops.

Discussing the powers the council had over the frontages of SEVs, officers drew the committee's attention to the standard conditions for these premises. These included limits on advertising and required windows to be blacked out. No changes were suggested to these conditions.

Taking the council's place-shaping role into consideration, members had concerns that on the renewal of the proposed policy there would be pressure to further increase the number of SEVs permitted on The Parade. It was felt that the proposed policy would make it more difficult for licensing sub-committees to reject SEV applications in that area.

Members asked about public responses to the consultation and officers confirmed that Watford Central Residents' Association had been consulted but

no response had been received. The committee felt that they would want to hear more views of the public in order to justify the changes as they had been put forward by the current licensed premises.

The committee discussed extending the existing policy for a further period of time. During this time, a further consultation could take place. There was support for this option amongst the committee. Officers noted that the council had a lot of discretion in the consultation process and the committee had had input into previous consultation exercises for other policies. Details of the questions and suggested consultees could be brought to the committee in advance of the consultation taking place. This would allow the committee the opportunity to have more input into the process. It was proposed that details of the consultation could be brought to the March 2023 meeting of the Licensing Committee. A consultation exercise could then take place in time for a policy to be agreed at the meeting in July 2023 before the policy expired.

The length of the extension of the existing policy was discussed; officers advised that given the current uncertainty and the recovery process from Covid19 a further extension of three years would be most sensible. Any longer than three years would risk the policy becoming out of date. Additionally, it would allow the policy to dovetail with the renewed vision for the town centre. The committee were also advised that the policy could be renewed sooner should it be appropriate to do so.

It was reiterated that there was no desire by the committee for the number of SEVs to increase. The location of premises needed careful consideration and members noted that the council had a family-friendly town centre policy. It was, however, the case that anyone could make a licensing application in any location. The policy provided a framework upon which applications would be determined and licensing sub-committees could decide to determine applications in accordance with the council policy or give reasons why they departed from it.

Following a question about whether the policy was open to challenge, officers noted that following consultation, a revised policy was being put before the committee who were giving it serious consideration and debate before coming to a decision.

The chair proposed an amended resolution which was agreed by the committee.

RESOLVED –

that the existing policy be extended for a further three years and that officers agree the terms of the next consultation exercise with the Licensing Committee prior to the expiry of the policy.

Chair  
Licensing Committee

The meeting started at 7.00 pm  
and finished at 8.00 pm