

Crime and Disorder Select Committee
Overview Meeting 2022
27 January 2022
Administration, Democratic and Electoral Services

Context

Members are reminded of the Council's Vision that supports decision-making:

A place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm

- This means the Borough will be a place where:
 - People live in cohesive and safe communities
 - People are supported and protected from harm
 - People live healthy lives

A place that is clean, vibrant and attractive

- This means we will enjoy:
 - Great places to live and visit
 - Clean and green spaces
 - Rich cultural experiences

A place with a thriving economy where everyone has opportunities to succeed

- This means that the Borough will have:
 - A growing economy
 - Improved education and skills development
 - Job creation and increased employment

The Council plays its part in making sure this is achieved by being a Council that is ambitious, effective and proud to serve.

- This means that we will make sure that we provide:
 - Financial sustainability and value for money
 - Dedicated and resourceful employees
 - Strong leadership and governance

Performance Reporting

Performance across the Council Plan was reported on a six-monthly basis to Executive Scrutiny Committee. Please see the link:

<http://www.egenda.stockton.gov.uk/aksstockton/users/public/admin/kab71.pl?cmte=SCR>

ADMINISTRATION, DEMOCRATIC AND ELECTORAL SERVICES

Assistant Director – Margaret Waggott

Relevant services include:

- Licensing

COUNCIL PLAN 2021-2024

The Council Plan sets out the aims and objectives for all services and is refreshed on an annual basis.

The key 2021-2022 priorities for Administration, Democratic and Electoral Services are attached at Appendix 1.

EMERGING ISSUES

For the second year the service has pulled together responsible authorities in collaborative working and has continued to adapt and respond to the pandemic and changes to legislation. The service has continually updated members and the different licensed trades of the guidance, regulations and responsibilities, the most recent being Plan B regulations. This included collaborative working with business and finance colleagues on the distribution of grants to sectors of the licensed trade not covered by other schemes.

Strong communication links with the trade made at the beginning of the pandemic have remained and as a result enforcement action being taken against problem premises has been very low.

At a time when opportunity for individuals to take advantage of services impacted by the pandemic increased, we continued our proactive operations and statutory duties, albeit in new and different ways, identifying unlicensed activity, keeping the existing trade licensed and ensuring public safety.

Building on an unlicensed dog home boarder prosecution the service has continued to investigate unlicensed animal activities and issued three cautions for unlicensed dog breeding and increased the number of dog breeders who are licensed.

The service continued joint working with Cleveland Police Road Unit and carried out a recent operation stop checking taxis and private vehicles, over 20 vehicles were stopped at random with only minor noncompliance issues to report, no vehicles were immediately suspended, or further enforcement action needed, an indication vehicle maintenance and safety has continued during the pandemic.

The service further developed the pavement licensing regime first introduced in the Business & Planning Act 2020 and recently extended until September 2022, resulting in the introduction of a renewal process for businesses and following consultation the continuation of over 40 pavement licences.

The service increasing pace with our digital agenda and improving the customer journey and are close to completing phase one of the GOSS project, which means all application forms, renewal forms and payments will be made available online or have an online element. Feedback from the taxi trade on the improvements made has included:

08/11/2021	NICE N EASY.BRILLIANT	Licensing	Taxi Licence Renewal	very satisfied
11/11/2021	I found the service excellent easy to use and follow. Thank You	Licensing	Taxi Licence Renewal	very satisfied
17/11/2021	Nothing to improve.It is perfect!	Licensing	Taxi Licence Renewal	very satisfied
23/11/2021	MUCH EASIER COMPLETING ONLINE	Licensing	Taxi Licence Renewal	very satisfied
27/11/2021	Excellent service	Licensing	Taxi Licence Renewal	very satisfied

The Gambling Act 2005 statement of policy was reviewed in 2021, and the updated policy is to be adopted later this month following consultation with stakeholders. The number of gambling premises within the Borough continues to fall, with evidence to suggest online gambling is increasing.

The current private hire & hackney carriage licensing policy was approved in 2021 adopting the Department for Transport's 'Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards' and was embedded through the year with the trade.

PRIORITIES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

We continue to identify service improvements for the trade and help place shape through the strengthening of working relationships with our partners and continue to explore the further capabilities of Goss for phase two back office and data storage functionality and capabilities.

When required the service will continue to provide COVID-19 business restrictions advice. Where breaches are reported or found we will continue to investigate and if needed enforce under COVID legal provisions.

The impact of the pandemic on the licensing service will be further felt throughout 2022 and beyond as the trade emerge from restrictions the service will have to consider Covid sustainability. As grants diminish and statutory annual fees and renewal fees are requested it is anticipated alcohol licensed premises, gambling licensed premises, taxi and private hire driver and vehicles and animal activities premises will decline.

The current street trading regime is outdated and ineffective to deal with the increase in requests from business and the redevelopment of the town centers. A review of the current policy is needed with an aim to prevent obstruction of the streets and ensure the safety of persons using them whilst recognising the importance of businesses to the local economy and the character of the area.

As a service we are going to continue to undertake proactive engagement campaigns to promote public safety across all areas of licensing, in particular the service actively participates in National Licensing Week, Responsible Gambling Week and an annual safety campaign around explosives (fireworks).

To tackle tax avoidance in the hidden economy the HMRC are introducing tax conditionality checks for private hire and hackney carriage drivers, private hire operators and scrap metal operators, meaning local authorities will not be able to renew licences for these activities without carrying out tax checks, this could affect numbers renewing licences if they cannot provide the information needed to determine a licence.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As the use of outside space is further encouraged there will be an increase in business taking advantage of legislation allowing removable furniture on the highway, there will be further opportunity for this as the town centres development begin.

The Department for Transport are in the process of reviewing the 2010 Best Practice document which contained minimum standards for taxi and private hire vehicles, which when published may mean a review of the current Taxi and Private Hire policy.

POTENTIAL AREAS FOR IN-DEPTH REVIEW

Members are reminded that topics are being sought for the Scrutiny Work Programme 2022-2023. Using the information provided as part of the performance updates and this Overview meeting, the Committee is invited to identify potential topics for review within this theme.

Proposed topic suggestion to be considered at Executive Scrutiny Committee on 22 March 2022.

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APPENDIX 1: COUNCIL PLAN – KEY PRIORITIES 2021-2022 (ADMINISTRATION, DEMOCRATIC AND ELECTORAL SERVICES)

Making the Borough a place where people are healthy, safe and protected from harm means creating a place where:

- People live in cohesive and safe communities
- People are supported and protected from harm
- People live healthy lives