

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

12 December 2017

Graham McAndrew, Executive Member for Environment and Public Space

A brief summary of the Environment and Public Space portfolio

1. Licensing

The council is the licensing authority for wide range of activities governed by legislation. The major areas of licensable activity are:

issued by the Licensing team:

- taxis
- licensed premises (pubs, bars and clubs)
- gambling
- temporary events

issued by Environmental Health team:

- houses in multiple occupation
- animal welfare (animal boarding, dog breeding, dangerous wild animals, riding establishment, pet shops and zoos)
- environmental permitting
- skin piercing
- street trading consent.

1.1 Taxi licensing

Much work has been carried out over the last 12-18 months to ensure robust policies and procedures are in place regarding taxi licensing and enforcement. I am pleased that this is enabling both members and officers to make well-evidenced decisions which can be robustly defended if appealed.

All new drivers and those renewing their licence have to undergo training which covers legislation relating to taxis, customer care, driver safety, safeguarding and disability awareness. I am talking with surrounding

districts about the possibility of expanding this training programme into their areas.

Currently there are 372 licenced taxi drivers and 316 licensed vehicles in East Herts.

Since the start of the financial year, the team have processed 42 new driver applications with 20 existing drivers attending update training. The team have also investigated/dealt with complaints about 28 taxi drivers.

The council's Taxi Licensing Convictions Policy came into effect in August 2016. It delegates to Jonathan Geall, Head of Housing and Health, decisions about whether a taxi driver can be considered a 'fit and proper' person to hold a licence. This does not detract from the role of members, as the Head of Housing and Health consults with the Chairman of the Licensing Committee when making these decisions and the policies officers follow are always for members to consider and decide upon. See <https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/becomealicensedtaxidriver>

In this financial year so far, the Head of Housing and Health has determined eight cases. Over the same time period, a total of seven decisions have been appealed to the magistrates' court – two appeals were dismissed (the council's decision was supported), two appeals were upheld (the driver was successful), two are still to be concluded and one magistrates' court decision is the subject of a judicial review.

Over the summer, East Herts officers and I met officers and members of Uttlesford District Council. Uttlesford are concerned that they may be seen as a relatively easy and cheap place to get a taxi licence. As a result, Oliver Rawlings, Service Manager – Licensing and Enforcement, is currently assisting Uttlesford DC to review its policies and procedures. He is due to make recommendations to Uttlesford's Committee in December and it is hoped that this exercise will result in Uttlesford's policies matching ours more closely.

1.2 Licensed premises & gambling

The night time economy is significant in the district, particularly in Hertford and Bishop's Stortford. Across the whole district, there are currently 484 licensed premises and another 37 licensed clubs (membership clubs such as the Royal British Legion and the like).

The Licensing and Enforcement team take complaints about premises very seriously and in the first half of 2017/18, the number of visits / complaints investigated totalled 20.

So far in 2017/18, there have been 38 applications to vary licences or for new licences. In 33 cases, there were either no objections from the responsible authorities, including the Police and Environmental Health, or the applicant made changes in light of objections. The remaining five applications were considered by the Licensing Sub-Committee.

The team is currently drawing up a new Licensed Premises Position Statement that will stand alongside the existing Statement of Licensing Policy. This will be ready by January 2018. This position statement will cover:

- who the relevant 'stakeholders' are, going beyond responsible authorities alone, and what should their reasonable expectations be of the licensing process
- an outline of the Licensing Team's expectations of how the responsible authorities could make their representations so as to make decision-making as transparent and robust as possible
- triggers for enforcement action
- an articulation of the benefits of well-run licensed premises to the district – economic and cultural/entertainment
- how the council will proactively support best practice in the night time economy, for example, by promoting the use of Live ID and making best use of CCTV.

The team also processes around 1,300 temporary event notice applications for one-off events involving alcohol and/or entertainment.

There are few gambling establishments in the district, with just 15 gambling licences currently in force.

2. Environmental Health

2.1 Food safety and the safety of commercial activity

The Environmental Health team are responsible for the enforcement of food hygiene and safety legislation in approximately 1,800 food businesses and for the enforcement of health and safety legislation in approximately 2,500 commercial premises. In addition to the 1,800 food businesses, the team is responsible for four approved premises – two meat products producers, one ice cream producer and a dairy.

The Environmental Health team works to support new and existing businesses comply with food hygiene law. Currently, 95% of businesses have a food hygiene rating of three or more (out of five).

The team also supports East Herts Safety Advisory Group regarding larger scale events in the district. Such events in East Herts can range from 50 participants to 10,000. It is therefore important that these events, particularly the larger events, are appropriately supported. Members of the team will work directly with event organisers to provide advice on controls and checks that need to be in place to ensure the event is run safely and that any food is produced hygienically.

These events include:

- Standon Calling
- Hogsozzle
- Cazfest
- Buntsfest
- Wilkestock
- Bishop's Stortford Music Festival
- Hertford Rock in the Park
- Christmas markets.

2.2 Ensuring housing standards

The Environmental Health team also ensures standards in the housing sector. This element of their work comes under the remit of the Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing.

2.3 Air quality

I see the council's proactive stance with regard to air quality as something the council should rightly be proud of.

There are three air quality management areas in the district where air pollution levels are frequently elevated – Gascoyne Way in Herford, Hockerill junction in Bishop's Stortford and London Road in Sawbridgeworth. While the council is one partner among many, we have taken the lead in putting in place a detailed Air Quality Action Plan, fully updated and published in May 2017. See <https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/airquality>

The ultimate aim will be to remove the need for the AQMA status in these areas by reducing the air pollution there. Work currently underway includes:

- promoting electric and low emission vehicles – supported by the £163,100 Defra grant for this purpose granted in 2016 and the 18 month secondment of an officer from Hertfordshire County Council's transport team to work with East Herts to assist in delivering the

sustainable transport agenda following the member task and finish group

- the recruitment of Claire Spendley, Service Officer – Environmental Health (Environment) to act as the council's specialist on air quality (along with focusing on contaminated land and flooding issues). Prior to joining East Herts, Claire set up the Oxfordshire Air Quality Network to promote a joined up approach, a role East Herts is already taking across Hertfordshire and Essex
- proactively leading on the local and now regional Clean Air Day programmes. See <https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/CleanAirDay>

I have taken a great interest in this area and am proactively encouraging other authorities and key partners, such as Stansted Airport, to work with us.

Through a task and finish group work is underway to evaluate and review the council's Climate Change and Carbon Reduction strategy and action plan in line with Government policy. I anticipate the outcome of this in early 2018.

3. Community safety, police liaison and CCTV

3.1 Community safety and police liaison

The council takes the lead in co-ordinating the East Herts Community Safety Partnership, which consists of the council, Police, HCC, representatives of the Police and Crime Commissioner's office and other partners. I regularly join East Herts officers at the Police's Monday morning meeting to review issues arising over the weekend. This is an excellent way to maintain good working relationships with the Police.

The council leads on the production of the Partnership's annual Community Safety Strategic Assessment. This reviews the patterns of crime and disorder in the district and establishes priorities actions accordingly. The current priorities are (a) to protect vulnerable people and (b) keep crime low. See <https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/article/35648/Community-Safety-Partnership--Plan>

To further these aims, the council has worked closely with partners to access project funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner. During the 2016/17 bidding round, the East Herts Partnership was particularly successful in gaining support for three projects – Op Stomp to reduce the likelihood of vulnerable people becoming victims of crime, Business Watch to enable businesses to stay in contact via radio links and Rural Watch providing similar radio communication in the rural settings.

I and other members are working with officers and the Police to assess to need and support for introducing Live ID equipment into late night establishments in Hertford and Stortford whereby everyone entering would have their ID checked to assess whether an underage person is using fake ID and/or to bar those with a known record of causing trouble. The Partnership will make a bid in December. We are also co-ordinating a bid for a restorative justice project that would support mediation with offenders and victims to encourage offenders to better understand the impact of their actions.

3.2 CCTV

A review of the CCTV cameras in the district monitored and maintained through our partnership arrangement with Stevenage, Hertsmere and North Herts councils by the Claire Carter, Service Manager – Community Wellbeing and Partnerships who previously managed the London Borough of Havering's two CCTV control rooms prior to joining East Herts.

I have asked Claire to seek the views of local ward and town council members as part of this review. We anticipate this happening early in 2018.

4. Parks and Open Spaces

The council has a number of parks and open spaces. The Parks and Open space service's main responsibilities include:

- management and development of parks, open spaces and playgrounds owned by the council (over 100 parks, 40 main parks, 59 playgrounds) in support of recreation, sport and health and wellbeing objectives
- grounds maintenance of publicly accessible amenity land owned by the council, for example public green space in housing estates; village greens, some verges and the like
- landscape/tree protection advice to the council including applications for tree work in conservation areas and to protected trees.

The major project in Parks and Open Spaces is currently the development of Castle Park. Castle Park brings together two neighbouring green spaces – Castle Gardens and Sworder's Field in Bishop's Stortford.

The proposals will make the improved park better for people and wildlife and will make the most of its historical heritage. Our proposals focus around four main areas, events and recreation, biodiversity, conservation and infrastructure. We want Castle Park to be a community hub and provide space for a range of events and recreational activities, while also enhancing the park for wildlife. We are also proposing to protect and

conserve Waytemore Castle and carry out archaeological surveys to help us understand how the Castle was once used. Another major enhancement for the park will include a new community building with halls, a café and public toilets plus improvements to the pathways in the park giving greater accessibility. The plans are backed by funding from the National Lottery.

We are also starting the process for re-tendering the grounds maintenance contract. A task and finish group will be meeting over the next few months to look at key service areas for the new tender specification.

5. Waste Recycling and Street Cleansing

Our Waste and Recycling service covers the following elements:

- domestic waste/recycling/composting collection
- commercial waste
- clinical waste collection
- waste strategy development
- county wide working on waste partnership activities
- street cleansing and abandoned vehicle contracts
- public conveniences.

We dedicate resources to Environmental Inspections to monitor our streets and public open spaces owned by the council to ensure environmental standards are maintained and investigate environmental crime (litter, fly tipping, dog fouling).

We also provide support for residents for lost dogs and prevent stray dogs from being in danger of traffic or a nuisance to people.

Our key projects this year have included procuring a joint waste contract with North Herts District Council and a pilot programme for litter enforcement. One of our biggest good news stories this year was in relation to a joint fly tipping prosecution with two other authorities where a 25 year old serial fly-tipper was sentenced to 10 months in prison after pleading guilty to five counts of fly-tipping household waste across Hertfordshire.