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| <b>COMMITTEE</b> | <b>CENTRAL LICENSING COMMITTEE</b>                             |
| <b>DATE:</b>     | <b>15 March 2021</b>                                           |
| <b>TITLE:</b>    | <b>THE IMPACT OF THE COVID 19 CRISIS ON LICENSING SERVICES</b> |
| <b>PURPOSE:</b>  | <b>FOR INFORMATION</b>                                         |
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## 1.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1 The Licensing Unit administers and enforces the law in a wide range and a variety of businesses.

1.2 The unit license the following sectors in order to protect the users, businesses and the communities of Gwynedd from any detrimental impacts; and take enforcement measures where required to keep users of licensed services safe.

- Alcohol and entertainment licensing (including events) and gambling.
- Personal alcohol licences
- Animal permits including pet shops, riding establishments and dog breeding establishments.
- Taxi vehicles, drivers and operators.
- Caravan sites
- Licensing of scrap metal dealers.

1.3 The following table demonstrates how many of the various licences are currently administered and enforced across the County -

| Number of licences                                                                                                       |                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <br>1,001 Alcohol Premises            | <br>66 Gambling Premises   |
| <br>301 Vehicles and 503 Taxi Drivers | <br>35 Animal Permits      |
| <br>477 Caravan sites                 | <br>26 Scrap Metal Dealers |

## 2. THE IMPACT OF THE COVID 19 CRISIS ON LICENSING SERVICES

2.1 Since March 2020, in response to the Covid pandemic emergency, the Public Protection Services have had to adapt and prioritise in order to contribute to the effort to control the spread of the Covid-19 infection.

2.2 Licensing service officers have been implementing a much wider role within the Public Protection Services during the Pandemic. This is because so many officers in the other

Units, such as the Food Unit and Health and Safety, have nearly all been redeployed to responsive work and to giving guidance in relation to Covid infection clusters in schools, homes for the elderly and establishments and other workplaces.

- 2.3 The Track, Trace and Protect Service for Covid-19 cases was established initially by officers in the Food and Health and Safety Unit, and Licensing and pollution control service officers have been responding to the information that derives from the Track, Trace and Protect Service data.
- 2.4 This means that Enforcement officers within the Licensing and Pollution Control Unit have been responding to complaints of lack of compliance with Covid regulations in a variety of non-licensed premises as well as licensed premises such as public houses, restaurants and caravan sites.
- 2.5 The Public and businesses have found it difficult to cope with the constant changes in the rules; and service officers have been key in advising businesses how to adapt to keep everyone safe; especially as hospitality businesses re-opened over the summer.
- 2.6 The Marketing Development and Tourism Unit of the Economy and Community Department have been working closely with our officers to ensure that they send current information on the regulations to businesses via information bulletins that also include the latest guidance on financial support.
- 2.7 Officers have been working very closely with the Police throughout the pandemic; sharing key information in order to prevent the spread of Covid. Regular joint pro-active patrols were conducted in the popular tourist villages and towns during the summer, 2020 as well as in Bangor and Caernarfon at night and weekends - in order to give advice to businesses and customers on the regulations. The response to this was positive, as the regulations changed so often, it was an effective way of finding what measures caused the most problems for businesses.
- 2.8 Although licensed businesses on the whole strived to comply under extremely difficult circumstances; some businesses ignored the regulations; and officers had to serve informal and formal notices including 8 Premises Improvement Notices under the Welsh Government's Coronavirus regulations. One convenience shop also received a closure notice.

### **3. THE LICENSING UNIT'S ROUTINE WORK**

- 3.1 Like many other public services; the Licensing Unit is no exception to the fact that our ability to provide some 'routine' services has been challenging, and the restrictions have meant that we have been unable to do some things; or we have had to adapt to do them in a different way.
- 3.2 Maintaining a system of licensing individuals and businesses is essential to ensure Health and Safety and consistently high standards; fairness and a good service to the Public. Because of this; the various Licensing systems administered are statutory services; and we have had to work in a different way over the last few months in order to continue to provide these services in accordance with the law.
- 3.3 Licensing officers have held virtual interviews and tests with applicants; enforcement inspections have been conducted virtually some times due to the risks of face to face meetings. As you will be aware, the General and Central Licensing Sub-Committees have

been held virtually since July 2020, with a number of taxi, premises and one Licence Review applications determined by the members of this Committee.

- 3.4 For obvious reasons, there has been a significant reduction during the year in the number of Temporary Events Notices; however, 108 various premises licences and personal licences have been processed since the 1st of April 2020, and 341 various taxi licence applications.

#### **4. MOVING FORWARD**

- 4.1 The experiences of last year show that coming out of lockdown is especially challenging and the Service's workload will again significantly increase over the next few weeks, as businesses try to adapt in accordance with the requirements, to try and keep people safe; and to avoid stricter regulations once more.
- 4.2 Our officers are ready once more to support businesses and to use Enforcement powers when required. We will work closely again with other departments, and the Police and will strive to keep a high profile in our communities. Three engagement officers have been temporarily appointed to the Test, Trace and Protect service; and they will support the work of our Enforcement officers out in the communities; raising awareness where needed.
- 4.3 The Welsh Government and the UK's Vaccination Programme have been particularly effective thus far; but it will not completely eliminate the risks to health, and it will be necessary to be particularly careful when re-opening licensed premises such as public houses and night clubs.
- 4.4 It is anticipated that many applications to vary premises licences will be received; as businesses try to adapt their internal and external spaces to operate safely.
- 4.5 The Government is giving the situation careful consideration; and is taking advice from the Scientists in terms of what to do regarding holding large events. It is understood that 'experimental' events will be held in some counties, such as Conwy, where a licensed event will take place; with careful supervision in terms of the impact on the spread of the infection. Gwynedd has been a very popular location for all types of events in the past; and we will await further guidance from the Government regarding when it will be safe to recommence staging events in our County.
- 4.6 It will also be necessary to review policy documents in the next 12 months , starting with the Statement of Licensing Policy, under the Licensing Act 2003. All licensing authorities are required to review the policy every three years. Gwynedd Council's Statement of Licensing Policy is due for review; and we have been working to reconcile minor changes to the draft Policies across North Wales. When the situation allows, we will seek to submit the new draft Policy to the Committee, prior to the public consultation in the summer.