

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 11 January 2021

Performance Management Scrutiny KPI PP53a Percentage of service request responded to within SLA Update on Coronavirus Business Regulation

As indicated in the performance report, the performance on this indicator has dropped during the current year due in part to increased workload involved in dealing with the regulation of business compliance with coronavirus legislation. Clearly this has been an exceptional year with the Coronavirus pandemic impacting on many of the Councils activities.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Team have led on the enforcement of the various regulations which have been enacted during this year to implement measures designed to limit the spread of coronavirus. More than ten sets of regulations have required that certain categories of business close, operate in an amended manner or imposed additional requirements on the operators of different types of businesses.

During the initial lockdown in the spring and early summer the majority of the retail, leisure and hospitality industry was required to close. Staff from the team supported by neighbourhood wardens monitored compliance with the legislation and, working with colleagues around the county and in the police developed consistent approaches to the enforcement of the legislation. A significant amount of time has been spent in providing advice and support to the businesses which were allowed to operate to assist them to do so in a COVID-19 secure manner. As the legislation was implemented very quickly without the usual consultation processes, there were a number of anomalies and areas of uncertainty (for example the definition of homeware and whether a shop selling a range of goods was permitted to open if it sold some items of food).

As the regulations changed to allow various sectors to re-open, the team provided further advice and support to assist businesses to re-open safely, for example by ensuring that water systems were appropriately flushed through to prevent the risk of legionella. Advice was also given to businesses which were diversifying to provide a different range of services, for example through delivery or takeaway operations.

Future changes in legislation including requirements for the wearing of face coverings, the collection of track and trace data and the monitoring of bookings limited to a maximum of six people followed and the team had to understand and communicate these requirements to the businesses being regulated. Further regulations introduced the tier systems and the second lockdown, followed most recently by a revised system of tiering which came into force in early December.

In addition to providing advice and support and, where appropriate, enforcement action, the team has also dealt with complaints and enquiries from members of the public about potential breaches of the regulations. From mid March until mid December the team have dealt with nearly 900 additional service requests in relation to the coronavirus restrictions.

The changes to lifestyles caused by the outbreak has also resulted in an increase in the number of complaints about fly tipping, domestic noise and bonfires as people spend a larger proportion of their time at home and are more aware of their surroundings. This has impacted on the workload of the team and affected response times.

In addition the team have worked with colleagues in the public health team at the County Council, colleagues from Public Health England, The Health and Safety Executive and Health service

colleagues to investigate a number of outbreaks of coronavirus in workplaces (including the large outbreak at Greencore), schools and health and care settings.

This work has been carried out efficiently and effectively by a small team of very professional dedicated officers that I am very proud to work with.

Ruth Austen Environmental Health and Licensing Manager.

December 2020