

Committee(s)	Dated:
Licensing	23 May 2022
Subject: Pandemic: New and closed licensed premises 24 March 2020 to 1 April 2022	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	1,2,12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
If so, how much?	n/a
What is the source of Funding?	n/a
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	n/a
Report of: Juliemma McLoughlin – Executive Director Environment	For Information
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Summary

The hospitality sector was hit hard nationally by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic with bars and clubs faring the worst.

The Licensing Committee has received regular updates on the effect of, and the response to, the pandemic in relation to the sector. As we are now implementing the Government's 'Living with Covid' strategy, at the Committee's request, this report provides more detail on the number of premises that closed permanently as a result of the pandemic.

The evidence shows that between 24 March 2020 and 1 April 2022:

- 86 premises closed due to the licence being surrendered or the business going into liquidation and the licence lapsing.
- 80 applications for new licences were received, of which, 76 have been issued and one is still being processed. The other three were withdrawn.
- 27 licences were formally suspended for non-payment and, of those, 19 remain suspended.

In summary, despite the pandemic, the number of new licences issued was similar to the number of those that ceased.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

1. Note the contents of this report.

Main Report

Background

1. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in the Government imposing varying levels of restrictions on the hospitality sector, from full closure to a fast-changing array of restrictions meant to curb the spread of the virus in these settings.
2. Most Square Mile hospitality businesses rely on footfall from office workers and faced exceptionally challenging trading conditions during the pandemic, exacerbated by the Governments 'work from home' guidance.
3. As we moved through the pandemic, the hospitality sector adapted to the changing restrictions with pivoting business models, adaptations and variations to licences, to allow trade to be maximised within the restrictions imposed. Moves to maximise takeaway provision, al fresco dining (facilitated by the City's business friendly 'Al Fresco Dining Policy') and a number of Government and City of London grants, all contributed to the revival of the sector each time restrictions were eased. It is evident that there is a great appetite for those who live, work and visit the City to enjoy its vibrant hospitality offer.
4. There is no discretion in law to waive licence fees. Non-payment of fees must result in suspension of the premises licence under section 55A of the Licensing Act 2003. Fees were payable whether the business was able to trade or not due to Government restrictions.
5. Officers collaborated with colleagues at the Local Government Association, Greater London Authority, Institute of Licensing and the London Licensing Managers Forum to lobby the Home Office to change the legal position. They were unwilling to do so.
6. The City of London's COVID-19 Recovery Grant was provided, in two rounds in 2021 and 2022, to support the sector and assisted in covering the licensing fees.
7. The City adopted a 'soft suspension' approach whereby licences were not suspended immediately following non-payment, and premises were permitted to trade with a payment plan in place. Formal suspension of licences only commenced from November 2021 where fees remained outstanding, and no payment plan was in place.
8. In a 'normal' year there are always a number of premises that close as businesses change. New businesses open in those vacated premises or in new premises as buildings are developed and completed.
9. Not all premises that surrender a licence close to trade, it may be an adjustment as an alcohol licence is no longer needed but the food or soft drink offer remains. Conversely, not all premises that gain a new licence open to trade, these are instead maintained to enable future use.

Current Position

10. During the period 23 March 2020 to 1 April 2022, 86 premises closed due to the licence being surrendered or the business going into liquidation and the licence lapsing. In the same period, the City received 80 applications for new licences of which 76 have been issued and one is still being processed. The other three were withdrawn. Further detail is provided in appendices 1 and 2.
11. The table below shows that the ward with the most closed licences and new licences was Bishopsgate with 16 closed and 23 opened, followed by Castle Baynard with 12 closed and 3 opened.

Ward	Number of closed licences	Number of new licences
Aldgate	7	2
Bassishaw	5	2
Billingsgate	2	1
Bishopsgate	16	23
Bread Street	6	2
Bridge And Bridge Without	3	4
Candlewick	1	2
Castle Baynard	12	3
Cheap	4	2
Coleman Street	2	7
Cordwainer		2
Cornhill	1	2
Dowgate	1	0
Farringdon Within	10	6
Farringdon Without	2	3
Langbourn	3	0
Lime Street	1	4

Portsoken	0	4
Queenhithe	0	1
Tower	4	4
Vintry	2	3
Walbrook	4	2

12. The following table shows that the type of premises most affected by closed licences were restaurants (20), takeaways (15), pubs (12) and offices (10).

Premises use	Number closed
Build Soc. Counters	1
Cafe	5
Club	1
Fast food with seating	1
Hotel / Guest house	1
Insurance broker	1
Mobile food unit	1
Other.Financial Trading.	1
Other Gen. Offices	10
Prof. services	1
Proposed Premises - Rest/Cater	6
Public House	12
Restaurant	20
Small Retailer	3
Supermarket	2

Takeaway	15
Workplace Catering	5

Between 23 March 2020 and 1 April 2022, 27 licences were formally suspended for non-payment and, of those, 19 remain suspended. Enforcement work is being undertaken in relation to these. Further detail is provided at Appendix 3.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

- Strategic implications – None
- Financial implications - None
- Resource implications - None
- Legal implications - None
- Risk implications - None
- Equalities implications – None
- Climate implications - None
- Security implications - None

Conclusion

13. The number of licensed premises in the City of London has not reduced significantly despite the very challenging restrictions and trading conditions the hospitality sector faced during the Covid 19 pandemic.
14. A number of licensed venues remain closed; however, the licence may be maintained as 'live' whilst the longer-term viability of the business or site is assessed. There remains some flux and uncertainty as to the longer-term effects of reduced footfall in some areas of the City.
15. It is anticipated that with many of the new buildings in the City nearing completion, the number of licensed premises will remain at existing levels or increase. This is because new premises will replace those which close, balancing the average numbers.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Premises licences closed 24 March 2020 to 1 April 2022

- Appendix 2 – New premises licence applications 24 March 2020 to 1 April 2022.
- Appendix 3 – Premises Licences suspended for non-payment of fees 24 March 2020 to 1 April 2022.

Background Papers

- Covid-19 Updates City of London Licensing Committee 21 May 2020 to 2 Feb 2022 -
- <https://democracy.cityoflondon.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeed=123>

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