

# **PROTOCOL ON THE OPERATION OF LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEE HEARINGS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS**

## **1. Introduction**

The Licensing Act 2003 and the Licensing Act 2003 (Hearing) Regulations 2005 provide flexibility to Licensing Authorities in determining their own hearing procedures. Section 78 of The Coronavirus Act 2020 provides further powers to Councils to hold remote hearings in accordance with regulations. In accordance with the Local Authority and Police Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panels Meetings (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, all Licensing Sub-Committee hearings held during the Covid-19 restriction period will take place remotely using a 'virtual' format. This will usually be via Zoom video conferencing meeting. This document aims to give details on how the meetings will take place and establish some rules of procedure to ensure that all parties find the meetings productive.

## **2. Prior to the Hearing**

Once the date for a hearing has been set, an electronic appointment will be sent to all relevant parties. This will include a link to access the virtual meeting as well as guidance on the use of the technology involved. The electronic appointment should not be shared with any other party.

Before a remote hearing, parties are encouraged to submit brief email submissions, at least 24 hours before the hearing is due to start summarising the points they wish to make at the hearing and the outstanding issues. Although this is voluntary, these written submissions are likely to assist in the conduct of the remote hearing and the decision making process. These should be sent to the e-mail address of the clerk as shown on the front of the agenda papers for the meeting.

## **3. Format**

For the duration of the Covid-19 restrictions period, all Licensing Sub-Committee hearings will be delivered by Zoom video conferencing. This will be accessible via the web or by downloading the app to a PC, laptop, I-Pad etc or mobile/landline telephone and the instructions sent with meeting appointments will cover how to do this which will be sent at least five clear days in advance of the hearing. A weblink to view and, where appropriate, participate in the meeting will be included with the electronic appointment for the virtual meeting and will also be published on the Council's website, on the same page as the agenda for the meeting.

## **4. Meeting Agenda**

An agenda setting out the items for the hearing will be issued in advance to all parties to the hearing in accordance with statutory timetables. This will include details of the

license application or variation together with all representations on the matter. The agenda will also be published on the Council's website – [www.havering.gov.uk](http://www.havering.gov.uk) in the normal way.

## **5. Format of the Meeting**

Although held in a virtual format, Licensing Sub-Committee Hearings dealing with new licences or variations to existing licences will follow the standard procedure with the following principal stages. Panel Members may ask questions of any party at any time. Questions are usually taken after each person has spoken. Should a review of a licence be held during this period, further guidance on the procedure for hearings of this type will be issued by the clerk.

- The Licensing Officer presents their report
- Objectors to the application make their representations. Parties who are speaking should not repeat the information which they have already given in writing in their representation. They will be able to expand on the written information given, provided the information remains relevant. Any additional information should be limited to the grounds of their representation(s). For example, if they are objecting on the grounds of Public Nuisance, then they should confine their comments to matters relating to Public Nuisance.
- Responsible Authorities and Other Persons will make their representations.
- The applicant responds to the representations made.
- All parties will be given an opportunity to sum up if they wish. The hearing will then conclude.
- The Sub-Committee will then deliberate in private with the Legal Adviser and Clerk present.
- The Sub-Committee will announce the decision in writing to all parties.
- Notification of the Sub Committee's decision will be given within the period of five working days beginning with the day or the last day on which the hearing was held in accordance with the regulations. The notification of decision will include information about the right of appeal as appropriate

## **6. Meeting etiquette and rules**

All parties should be aware that the sheer volume of virtual meetings now taking place across the country has placed considerable strain upon broadband network infrastructure. As a result, conference calls such as those used for the meeting may experience intermittent faults whereby participants lose contact for short periods of time before reconnecting to the call. The guidance below explains how the meeting is to be conducted, including advice on what to do if participants cannot hear the speaker, and etiquette of participants during the call.

For some participants, this will be their first conference call or virtual meeting. In order to make the briefing productive for everyone, the following rules must be adhered to and etiquette observed:

- Parties are advised to log on at least 10 minutes before the hearing is due to start. A telephone number of an officer will be provided in case of technical difficulties on the day.
- The meeting will be presided over by the Chairman who will invite participants to speak individually at appropriate points. All other participants will have their microphones muted by the Clerk until invited by the Chairman to speak;
- If invited to contribute, participants should make their statement, then wait until invited to speak again if required;
- If at all possible, participants should find a quiet location to take the Zoom meeting where they will not be disturbed. Background and potential noise interruptions can disturb participants;
- Virtual video backgrounds can easily be used to avoid distractions and preserve the privacy of participants if they are calling in from their homes;
- The person speaking should not be spoken over or interrupted and other participants will normally be muted whilst someone is speaking. If there are intermittent faults during the call then the speaker will repeat from the point where the disruption started. Whilst intermittent disruption is frustrating, it is important that all participants remain professional and courteous.

## **7. Deliberation**

At the conclusion of the hearing, the Sub-Committee, together with the clerk and legal advisor, will remain in a virtual meeting to deliberate on their decision. The decision of the Sub-Committee will be circulated to all parties in writing.

Under Regulation 14 of the Licensing Act 2003 (Hearings) Regulations 2005 the licensing authority may exclude the public from all or part of the hearing where it considers that the public interest in doing so outweighs the public interest in the hearing or part of that hearing taking place in public. In addition there may be information in the agenda pack pertaining to the hearing be exempt from publication or discussion in public under Schedule 12A of The Local Government Act 1972 as amended. In these circumstances the public will be excluded from part of the whole hearing as appropriate. There may be a closed zoom conferencing which will be arranged by the clerk. Full copies of restricted agenda packs will be distributed to relevant parties in advance of the hearing.

## **8. After the Hearing**

The notice of the decision of the Sub-Committee will be circulated to all participants within five working days of the hearing. Minutes of the meeting will also be published on the Council's website.

For any further information on the hearing, please contact [luke.phimister@onesource.co.uk](mailto:luke.phimister@onesource.co.uk), tel: 01708 434619.