

Gravesham and Medway Shared Licensing Service Update

Overview of the shared service arrangement

The Shared Licensing Service sits within Gravesham Borough Council's Regulatory Services, within the Communities & Inclusive Growth directorate.

The team are responsible for discharging Gravesham Borough Council's and Medway Council's licensing functions in terms of administering and regulating the licensing regimes in respect of:

- Personal, Premises and Clubs licences for selling alcohol or providing regulated entertainment or late-night refreshment
- Temporary Event Notices for Licensing Act 2003 activities
- Taxi and private hire drivers and vehicles, and private hire operators
- Gambling premises and activities
- Sex establishments
- Scrap metal
- Charitable collections
- Street Trading
- Pavement Licensing

At the last review, which was presented in December 2024, the shared service was fully staffed with the following positions:

- Licensing Manager
- Assistant Licensing Manager
- Senior Licensing Officer
- Licensing Officer x2
- Licensing Assistants x2
- Licensing Apprentice

There have been several staffing changes, following the retirement of the Licensing Manager on 31 March 2025. As of 24 September 2025, the team became fully staffed again.

Following competitive application and interview processes, all posts except one were filled through internal promotion within the Licensing Team, reflecting the success of the structure in terms of progression opportunities and the commitment of officers and management in terms of training and development.

In recent weeks, a new Regulatory Services Manager, to whom the Licensing Manager reports (as well as Gravesham's two Environmental Health teams), has also been appointed and is due to start on 25th November.

Throughout the team's periods of reduced capacity, staff remained dedicated to ensuring a high standard of service provision resulting in statutory duties and timescales being met, and targeted officer interventions and enforcement in relation to unpaid/overdue annual premises licence fees across both authorities continuing.

Progress:

Efficiency savings. Realising actual financial savings across the two sites but maintaining delivery of the service

The planned creation of online applications for changes to licences (e.g. names or addresses), the pavement licensing applications and the interactive licensing registers for

taxi and private hire and gambling licences are now live. This has streamlined the receipt of applications and reduced some of the burden on officers arising from FOI requests.

The service receives weekly reports, extracted from its database, detailing outstanding documentation, ensuring the quick reactive officer action needed to ensure the safety of our licensees and the public.

Added resilience across the two authorities

The original restructure, in 2019, retained the same number of posts as previously existed across the two separate teams, resulting in a larger, single pool of officers to provide added resilience to cover the work of both Licensing Authorities. This benefit remains in place, with subsequent restructures being implemented to support the emerging needs of the service.

This resilience has repeatedly proved essential to cope with the additional burdens arising from new and expanding/evolving licensing regimes, and in ensuring continuity of service during periods of staff shortages and absence through sickness and annual leave, for example.

The team's ability, through their hard work and dedication, to provide an excellent shared service demonstrates the intended benefits of, and continued need for, maintaining a large pool of officers in a suitably structured team for resilience.

Availability of specialist skills across both authorities leading to increased efficiency; potential for a reduced requirement for external support from contractors etc

Access to a wider pool of specialists across both councils, e.g., Public Health, IT, Digital, Environmental Health, Legal and Finance, continues to support diversification of the advice and guidance available to the Shared Licensing Service to inform decisions, facilitate change, function effectively, and expand knowledge.

Sharing of best practice in the delivery of the Licensing Service and expansion of knowledge base of individual officers

The team continue to work effectively in a hybrid arrangement and liaise frequently with one another, including during bi-weekly team meetings and bi-weekly enforcement meetings, where they share information and collectively ascertain how to deal with more complex matters as part of cohesive and collaborative team working.

Regular attendance at the Kent and Medway Regulatory Licensing Steering Group, the Kent Licensed Victuallers Association meetings, the Safety Advisory Group and liaison with the members of these groups also supports this objective.

Delivering an enhanced digital service, making full use of available technology

Due to reduced capacity in the Digital team, there has been a slowing in new forms being added to the website. However, the team have continued to build on their suite of online licensing applications for both Medway and Gravesham.

All applications and requests for changes in relation to the below can be made via our online forms:

- Hackney Carriage and Private Hire
- Premises Licences
- Personal Licences

- Temporary Event Notices
- Charitable collections
- Pavement Licensing, and
- Many payments for applications

A suite of application forms in respect of street trading have also been developed.

The service, and their licensees, are benefiting from such solutions as online applications, automatic data population to our database, automatic reminders via email and text message, and clear yet comprehensive information and guidance pages on our website.

This assists the team in being able to cope with additional burdens and changes to licensing regimes.

Ensuring staff are adequately trained and supported

The service supports continuous professional and personal development through attendance of relevant (mostly virtual) training courses, seminars, coaching and mentoring, and experiential learning, etc.

All members of the team have completed online data protection and cyber training. They have also attended in person training on Safeguarding and Prevent.

To support our provision of career progression, two members of the team have attended management training run by The Knowledge Academy.

Management continue to liaise with staff frequently, making themselves available at all times, with an open-door policy.

Compliance and enforcement

Visits to licensed premises are continuing, either by way of proactive visits, responding to a complaint or as part of a joint operation with other responsible authorities and/or organisations. e.g. Immigration, Kent Police, Environmental Health, Trading Standards etc.

In May and September, premises licensed under the Licensing Act 2003 were visited in the company of Kent Police and Environmental Health. These joint operations have provided support and education to all parties involved and will be repeated.

In the spring, the team visited several of our licensed public houses to offer posters and advice on the 'Ask Angela' campaign. This was also supported by Kent Police, who shared the information with many of the premises along Rochester High Street.

Visits have been made to premises that open before their licensable hours. These visits were to ensure that a shop that opens for the sale of fresh bread, milk, newspapers, and the like, do not sell alcohol until their licence permits. Some of these visits have resulted in the submission of a variation application.

Officers joined Kent Police in an operation where they stopped licensed vehicles and carried out the appropriate licensing and road traffic checks. The operation was considered a success from both sides and the Special Inspector indicated that it should be repeated.

Several inspections have taken place at schools where our licensed drivers are dropping off or picking up students. This is to ensure that drivers and their vehicles are meeting their conditions.

Private Hire Operator Audits have begun this year. We review the records of the licence holder ensuring that they hold all the data required under the licence conditions. This includes checking the details of every driver and vehicle they have registered with them to confirm they hold the appropriate licence. On average, these can take 2 hours to complete.

The contract for the 'Approved Garages for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Inspections' expired on 30 September 2025. Following confirmation from Medway's legal team that, as no money was being transferred between ourselves and the garages, the procurement process did not apply, the decision was made to make this an agreement rather than a contract. The agreement is laid out in the same way as the contract; whereby registered MOT test stations carry out the pre-licence and 6 monthly inspections of all licensed vehicles on behalf of Medway Council. All six of the existing approved garages provided the relevant evidence and signed the agreement to continue. All six were approved and then visited by officers. These visits included providing the new updated inspection and failure forms, checking of records, returning a signed copy of the agreement and providing training to all those in attendance on the inspection of licensed vehicles.

Debt collection

Debt collection continues monthly. A suspension of the Premises licence or Club Premises Certificate must be issued following non-payment of annual maintenance fees, and the suspensions are lifted only once the debt is cleared. Chasing payment of outstanding fees is necessary, but an ongoing and time-consuming task. Licences cannot be revoked and therefore, licences for businesses that no longer trade are suspended.

Officers carry out visits post-suspension to ensure that the premises isn't carrying out licensable activities without the appropriate licence in place.

Since January 25, this process has meant we have retrieved approx. £17,600.00 from licence holders who had failed to make payment on time.