



GENERAL LICENSING SAFEGUARDING, SUITABILITY AND CONVICTIONS POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The Council is responsible for a multitude of licensing functions, including but not exclusively, Taxi Licensing, the licensing of Premises and persons for the sale of alcohol, late night refreshment, regulated entertainment, sexual entertainment, gambling and betting, street trading consents, houses in multiple occupation, caravan sites and animal welfare including boarding and breeding, pet shops, dangerous wild animals and zoos.

This policy covers new and renewal applications as well as any existing licences and consents for all licensing functions except Taxi Licensing, where there is a specific policy 'Safeguarding, Suitability and Convictions Statement of Policy for Taxi Licensing' adopted by the Council in November 2015.

Licences and consents may only be granted where the Council is satisfied that the individual is a "suitable person" to hold such a licence or consent.

This Policy is intended to give guidance on one aspect of whether an individual is or is not a "suitable" person; specifically, the situation where an individual has previous convictions, cautions, complaints, reprimands and/or other relevant matters.

In carrying out its Licensing functions the Council's primary objective is to protect public safety and therefore must ensure:

- That an individual is a "suitable" person
- That the public are not put at risk by individuals with a history of dishonesty, indecency and/or violence
- The safeguarding of children, young persons and vulnerable adults

The Council also has a duty to prevent harm to animals as part of the wider licensing functions and therefore this secondary objective is relevant to all animal welfare licensing activities.

There is an expectation from the public that those persons trading under a licence or consent granted by the Council are trustworthy, honest and do not pose a risk to the safety of the public or to animals in their care.

For example, a street trader serving ice cream from a mobile unit which visits residential streets within the borough may have regular contact with children. They may also know where those children live, when parents are home or not and what holiday plans they may have, by building up trusting relationships with those customers.

Most people only board their cat or dog when they are going away on holiday. While they look after their pets, the boarding establishment will know the departure and return date and address of their customers.

The operator of a house in multiple occupation or residential caravan site is, as the owner of the premises, likely to have keys and access to the individual units, for the purposes of maintenance and safety. This type of accommodation may house young or elderly people or those with specific vulnerabilities.

For these reasons it is imperative that the Council has a robust policy for ensuring that all those given a licence or consent by the Council are suitable and safe to be trusted with the safety of the public and animals and the personal information they may hold on individuals.

Assessment of Suitability

The most important questions that the Members of any Committee that decides on whether to grant, renew, suspend, revoke or refuse a licence or consent are:

1. Would I trust this person to be responsible for having access to any member of my family (children, parents, grandparents, grandchildren, husband, wife or pets), with particular regard to whether they might be alone &/or vulnerable at the time?
2. And would I trust this person with sensitive personal information about my routines and holiday plans?

If the answer to those questions is 'No', 'don't know' or 'not sure' then a licence should not be granted or renewed and should be refused or where an existing licence is in place revoked, on the grounds that Members are not convinced that the applicant is safe and suitable.

Safeguarding Considerations

Particular regard must be had for the safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults. Vulnerable persons not only includes those with learning or physical disability or impairment (including dementia), but also includes those under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or in any other circumstances which render them less capable of making decisions; this might include suffering from shock after an incident or traumatic experience.

Following the review of Rotherham's Licensing Services serious failings were identified and consequently the Council did not take sufficient steps to protect the public. Chorley Council must learn from the mistakes of Rotherham and Rochdale and ensure that the appropriate policies and safeguards are in place to ensure that only those persons that meet the suitability test are permitted to hold any form of licence or consent issued by the Council.

Therefore, it is important to not only consider convictions but also take steps to give sufficient weight to relevant personal relationships and associations with known or suspected criminals, complaints, allegations, investigations, arrests and charges, even where convictions are not secured, when making any decisions that can impact on the safety of the public.

The Licensing Committee is not a jury in a criminal court and does not have to be convinced beyond reasonable doubt of guilt. The precautionary principle should be applied in all cases.

Child Sexual Exploitation is not a remote problem that only affects other areas of the country, statistically there is evidence to support the claim that it happens everywhere, and that the people responsible for perpetrating and organising these crimes live and work in our communities. There is evidence of an association between taxi drivers, proprietors and operators and also other licenced premises, such as takeaways, pubs and off licences. As such the Licensing and Public Safety Committee and sub-committees have a clear responsibility to the public when making their decision, the consequences of failure in this respect are far reaching, not only personally for the victims, but also for the reputation of the Council.

Convictions

Although convictions are not the only consideration for the Council, they are important and clear guidelines are crucial.

The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 does apply to all licences and consents (except for those licences relating to taxi drivers). It is acknowledged that employment plays a vital role in reducing reoffending and changing behaviour, however, the Council's primary role when carrying out the licensing function is to protect public safety and ensure all those persons licensed by the Council are suitable to hold such a licence or consent.

When submitting an application for a licence or consent individuals may be required to declare any and all previous convictions, this will depend on the legislation for each individual licence or consent. Individuals may also be required to disclose convictions which are not spent for the purposes of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

The information will be treated in confidence and will only be taken into account in relation to the relevant application and the associated legislation in order to assist the Council in determining whether the applicant is a safe and suitable person to hold a licence or consent.

We will consider all convictions based upon the Council's guidelines. When considering convictions, complaints, allegations, investigations, arrests and charges the Council will be mindful of the severity of, the relevance to the licence applied for and the time elapsed since the offence or alleged offence. The age of the applicant at the time of the offences/ alleged offences will also be taken into account.

Complaints include those made directly to the Council, police or any other agency. Intelligence received from other agencies, which includes circumstances that have not resulted in a criminal conviction, caution or other disposal may be taken into account. By way of example, this would also include incidents that have resulted in a police, trading standards or RSPCA investigation, but there has been no further action due to the criminal burden of proof, if the Council is satisfied that the incident occurred based on the balance of probabilities.

The disclosure of a criminal conviction, caution or other relevant information relating to an individual's conduct will not debar that individual from being granted, retaining or renewing a licence or consent. It will depend on whether or not an individual can satisfy the Council that they are a "suitable" person to hold such a licence or consent.

The Council may not be satisfied that an individual is a “suitable” person to hold a licence for any good reason. If adequate evidence that an individual is a suitable person is not presented or if there is good reason to question or doubt the evidence provided, then that could amount to good reason to refuse a licence or consent or make any decision adverse to the licence or consent holder.

In considering evidence of an individual’s good character and fitness to hold a licence or consent and where previous convictions / cautions or other information relating to criminal matters or character are disclosed, the Council will consider:

- The nature of the offence / issue and penalty
- When it was committed / took place
- The date of conviction / issue and the length of time elapsed
- The age of the individual when the offence / incident took place
- Whether or not it is part of a pattern of behaviour
- The intent the harm could or did cause
- Any other factors which may be relevant

Greater weight will be given to recent convictions, complaints, allegations, investigations, arrests and charges and in particular those criminal offences involving dishonesty, violence, drugs, alcohol, criminal damage and sexual offences, together with serious offences connected with the driving of a motor vehicle (where relevant to a street trading consent for a mobile unit, such as an ice cream van).

The Council will, where appropriate, contact other agencies (e.g. other local authorities, the Police, Children’s Services, RSPCA) for any other information which they may hold in order to determine the application or existing licence or consent. . Any checks made with the police will be in accordance with the guidelines in the Department of Transport Circular 2/92 and the Home Office Circular 13/92. This information will be kept in strict confidence and will be retained no longer than is necessary and in any event will be destroyed in accordance with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 and good practice after the application is determined or any appeal against such determination is decided.

Whilst a licence or consent is valid, should we receive updates from the Police, of new convictions and cautions for licence/consent holders, this will allow us to decide whether action needs to be taken on the continuation of the licence or consent. It is the responsibility of each licence or consent holder, including any nominated assistant in relation to a street trading consent, to inform the Council promptly in writing of any conviction, caution or fixed penalty arising during the currency of the licence or consent. A criminal record check is required on application, and thereafter every three years for existing licence or consent holders, and nominated assistants. Applicants may wish to use the digital service provided by DBS for the annual updates.

GUIDELINES RELATING TO THE RELEVANCE OF CONVICTIONS

The Council has adopted the following guidelines relating to the relevance of convictions to which it refers in determining applications for licences and consents.

The guidelines cannot deal with every possible offence and the Council will take into account offences not specifically referred to, or any other conduct which may be relevant to an application. If an applicant has a conviction for an offence not covered by the guidelines a judgement will be made based on the factors outlined at paragraph 3 when determining the application.

Offences are given a general description in the guidelines and offences of a similar nature created in any statutory provision, modification or re-enactment, will be taken into account and interpreted in accordance with the spirit of the guidelines

The guidelines are not an attempt to provide a definition of what constitutes a “suitable person”.

Any individual who is refused a licence or consent will need to refer to the individual legislation for the details of rights of appeal against this decision.

The guidance will be used for the determination of all new applications, the renewal of existing licences or consents and the continuous review of current licences or consents where any offences are committed during their period of validity.

General Policy

1. Each case will be decided on its own merits.
2. The public has an expectation that the Council will take the necessary steps and make appropriate checks to ensure that applicants are suitable to persons to hold any licence or consent granted by the Council. One aspect of this is the extent to which previous convictions indicate that an individual is not a safe and suitable person and / or may or otherwise take advantage of the role and information that the licence or consent provides. This includes, but is not limited to, convictions for:
 - Offences against children, young people, vulnerable adults or animals
 - Dishonesty
 - Sexual offences
 - Violence and drugs
 - Traffic offences
3. Whether an applicant has any recorded criminal activity is a critical factor in making this judgement.
4. Convictions or cautions which are recorded for any offences may be considered by the Council in determining an application. This guidance refers to the most common groups of relevant offences, namely, offences against children and young persons, dishonesty, sexual offences, traffic offences, violence and drugs.

5. An offence when committed in relation to carrying on the business for which the licence or consent is granted (or complaint about behaviour) will be viewed in a more serious light and a longer period of rehabilitation will be required.

A person with a conviction for a single serious offence or a number of separate offences is not barred from applying for a licence or consent, but would normally be expected to remain free from conviction for an appropriate period (which will depend on the nature of the offence) and be able to provide supporting evidence to show that they are a 'suitable' person to be granted or to continue to hold a licence or consent (the onus is on the individual to produce such evidence).

Simply remaining free of conviction will not generally be regarded as sufficient evidence.

Consideration will be given to any patterns of offending, intent and the harm which was or could have been caused.

Multiple offences or a series of offences over a period of time are likely to give greater cause for concern and may demonstrate a pattern of inappropriate behaviour which will be taken into account. Any case which involves a sexual offence, murder or manslaughter the application / licence will normally be refused / revoked.

Consideration may be given by the Council to the specific guidance for relevance of offences and convictions in the '**Safeguarding, Suitability and Convictions Statement of Policy for Taxi Licensing**' when considering the details of individual cases for general licensing purposes. It is not appropriate to list all potential relevant offences in this document due to the wide range of licences and consents issues by the Council. This will need to be considered on an individual basis.