

**Leeds**
CITY COUNCIL**Elections and Regulatory Services**Civic Hall
Leeds LS1 1UR

Contact: Zoe Carter

Tel: [REDACTED]

Date: 23 December 2020

Entertainment Licensing
Leeds City Council
Civic Hall
Leeds
LS1 1UR

Dear Sirs/Madam,

REVIEW APPLICATION UNDER THE LICENSING ACT 2003**PREMISES: TAAG, Unit 2B St George House, 40 Great George Street, Leeds, LS1 3DL**

Please accept this formal representation by an officer on behalf of the Environmental Protection Team (EP). I am the Environmental Health Officer with Leeds City Council's Environmental Health Section.

My duties include investigating complaints for premises contrary to The Health Protect (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020.

On the 04th July 2020 The day businesses could reopen, Licensing team reported a visit to Taag where they witnessed Music and Dancing.

I spoke to the licensing officer who had visited and they advised that music could be heard from the street and people were seen dancing and not social distancing. They advised they spoke to Mr Taaghobi and instructed him to implement Covid Safety measures.

I rang Mr Taaghobi to discuss the complaint received and Mr Taaghobi told me that his experience was much different and that he believed Licensing were happy with what they found. I advised Mr Taaghobi of a few measures he needed to implement; Drinks are to be served at tables and customers should remain seated unless to go to the bathroom or exit, staff and customers were to wear masks if not sat down, music was to be at background level which means you should be able to have a normal conversation without one having to raise their voice, dancing was prohibited and I advised Mr Taaghobi that Taag would be monitored.

Mr Taaghobi advised me that he and his staff found it difficult to manage customers and enforce covid rules once his customers had had a drink. I advised him that it is his responsibility as the owner to ensure the safety in his venue by implementing these and that if he wants to continue opening he has to begin enforcing it.

On the 12th August 2020 Social media videos were brought to our attention and EP team raised another Service Request (SR). The videos showed dancing amongst customers and staff and no social distancing occurring. A Colleague, Philip Jackson made contact with Mr Taaghobi via



email. On 18th August, Mr Taaghobi emailed Mr Jackson advising that the complaint was false and listed all the measures he had in place. These measures were extensive and correct under the Covid guidelines available at the time. Mr Jackson then spoke to Mr Taaghobi where he said he would “Stress importance to my staff regarding the volume control of music levels to make sure we go above and beyond as a venue, to prevent the spread of Covid”.

On the 18th September 2020 a customer of Taag made the following complaint that was forwarded to EP Team:

Complainant and 5 friends attended Taag at 19:30 for a Bottomless Brunch. When they arrived the music was extremely loud, so much so that they literally had to shout to hear each other. They were given a small table, like a booth that was only suitable for a table of 4 but they had booked for 6. They had to sit like sardines next to each other. None of the staff were wearing any PPE. When the waitress came round to fill up drinks she would touch the rim of the Prosecco bottle to the rim of the glass – this bottle was used for all the different groups in the venue so there is concern that the bottles weren't 'table specific'. Only 1 person could use the toilet at any one time – but the DJ is stationed right next to it so customers had to pass very close to him. The complainant says they felt very uncomfortable and unsafe and asked to leave within 15 minutes of arriving.

This complaint was also supported by continuous reports from West Yorkshire Police that on 26th and 27th September 2020, Customers of Taag had been witnessed again dancing on tables and having no social distancing measures in place.

In light on of the continuous complaints and conversations with Mr Taaghobi my colleague Karl Sheldon and I made a site visit on 02nd October 2020. On arrival to Great George Street, we could hear the music from Taag on the cross roads at the end of the street. We entered and saw that everyone was seated and staff were wearing masks. Mr Taaghobi was in, drinking with a friend and so we spoke to both Mr Taaghobi and the DJ advising the music was too loud and shouldn't be heard from outside. I discussed that a number of agencies had had a lot of involvement with Taag and that if it continued formal action may be taken. He was cooperative and immediately turned the music down, reassuring us that he would keep it there and that he was trying to adhere to government Covid guidance.

On the 08th October 2020, 5 days after Mr Sheldon and I had been to site and Mr Taaghobi discussed the measures he had in place, West Yorkshire Police report that they had witnessed a student event at Taag and that there were 40+ people there. Whilst the shutters were down and by the time they were raised everyone was seated, to hold an event was a breach of regulations.

We received a further complaint on the 10th October from another customer of Taag:

Date of incident: 10/10/2020

Timeframe of incident: Between 6pm - 8pm Details of incident:

I was there to celebrate a friend's birthday with 5 others.

1) Not all members of staff were wearing a mask correctly i.e. below the nose and/or taking the mask off to speak

2) Too many people in a very small venue - lack of social distancing

3) Each new round of drinks were brought out in dirty and already used glasses i.e. lipstick stains round the rim of the glass

4) Inconsistent rules for different guests i.e. at the start 2 guests were told off for standing up and dancing however as time went on they did it again and were not told off.

There was a very large group in the corner of the room where there were a lot of people coming and going, standing and dancing and it was allowed

5) We are a table of 6 but was really a table for 4 people and felt the venue were just trying to cram in as many people as they could

6) *People were often not wearing masks i.e. waiting in line for toilet and members of staff. Some people were told to wear masks and other people weren't.*

7) *Often multiple people going into a single toilet. At the venue there was a total of 2 single toilets.*

8) *We saw guests hugging and dancing with the waitresses*

14th October 2020 EP and Public Health served a direction order on Mr Taaghobi, ordering Taag to close between the hours of 18.00- 07.00 and there to be no celebratory gatherings. The direction order was served for 28days and was reviewed every 7 days.

In conclusion, Mr Taaghobi has on a number of occasions explained what measures he supposedly has in place and shows that he is aware of what is expected of him. The continuous videos and complaints evidence that he does not care to implement them. Mr Taaghobi has repeatedly breached Covid regulations and has taken advantage of the councils approach to support businesses through this difficult time rather than use enforcement. Mr Taaghobi has taken no precautions to protect himself, his staff or his customers from the public health risks posed by Covid-19.

In view of the issues referred to, and the failure of Mr Taaghobi to operate responsibly and in safe manner in light of the Coronavirus Pandemic, I support the review and also ask that the committee revoke this premises license.

Yours faithfully

Zoe Carter
Environmental Health Officer
Environmental Protection