



BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

LICENSING SUB COMMITTEE - A

THURSDAY 1 OCTOBER 2020

**NAKIRA, QUEENSGATE, 121 SUFFOLK STREET QUEENSWAY,
BIRMINGHAM, B1 1LX**

That having considered the application made and certificate issued by West Midlands Police under Section 53A of the Licensing Act 2003 for an expedited review of the premises licence held by RP Restaurant Limited in respect of Nakira, Queensgate, 121 Suffolk Street Queensway, Birmingham B1 1LX, this Sub-Committee determines:

- that the licence be suspended pending a review of the licence, such a review to be held within 28 days of receiving the Chief Officer of Police's application

and

- that Anton Gasparov be removed as the Designated Premises Supervisor

Before the meeting began the Sub-Committee was aware of the amended Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 2) (England) Regulations 2020, the updated version of the Guidance entitled 'Closing Certain Businesses and Venues in England' originally issued by HM Government on 3rd July 2020, and the Guidance entitled 'Keeping Workers and Customers Safe in Covid-19 in Restaurants, Pubs, Bars and Takeaway Services' issued originally by HM Government on 12th May 2020 and updated regularly thereafter.

The Sub-Committee was also aware of the special local lockdown measures (specifically for Birmingham) which had been announced by HM Government on Friday 11th September 2020, then introduced on Tuesday 15th September 2020. These measures were an attempt to control the sharp rise in Covid-19 cases in the city.

Furthermore the Sub-Committee was aware of the further national measures to address rising cases of coronavirus in England as a whole, which were announced by HM Government on 22nd September 2020. These national measures had been published on the "gov.uk" website on that date, and detailed the new requirements for all businesses selling food or drink (including cafes, bars, pubs and restaurants), ordering that all such premises must be closed between 22.00 hours and 05.00 hours. Other requirements for such premises included seated table service, wearing of masks, and participation in the NHS Test and Trace programme. These measures were an attempt by HM Government to control the sharp rise in Covid-19 cases nationally.

The pandemic had continued to be the top story in the national news across the Spring, Summer and now into the Autumn of 2020; the Birmingham lockdown, and also the new national measures announced on 22nd September, had been very widely publicised and discussed both in news reports and on social media. The Prime Minister, together with HM Government's Chief Medical Officer and Chief Scientific Officer, had recently resumed the televised 'Coronavirus Briefing' broadcasts which had been a feature of the first few months of the pandemic.

Members heard the submissions of West Midlands Police, namely that in August 2020, when the new arrangements for reopening were being publicised and the lockdown was being eased for licensed premises such as pubs and bars, the Police had observed a general failure by the Nakira premises to follow the Government Guidance. Upon visiting the premises at around 05.00 hours on 22nd August 2020, Police found that loud music was playing at a volume which made conversation difficult, and also observed that there was no social distancing or limitation of numbers of patrons to allow for safe operation as per the Covid-19 requirements. 50 to 60 people were estimated to have been inside, with a further 15 to 20 outside. The Police ascribed these failures to unsatisfactory management by the premises licence holder and the designated premises supervisor.

The explanation given by the premises was that the people in the premises on 22nd August had in fact been "staff", who had been "carrying out maintenance work". This explanation was not accepted by the Police Officers who attended at 05.00 hours and witnessed that the large numbers of people at the premises were dressed for a night out, and loud music was playing.

It was also observed by Police that the premises licence holder was even in breach of an existing condition on the licence, namely that any operating beyond 04.00 hours must be notified to Police in advance. The Police were therefore concerned that the premises licence holder was being reckless in its style of operating, and was endangering public health by risking the spread of Covid-19.

A further visit on 26th September at 00.40 hours found the premises to be trading, in direct defiance of the order from HM Government that all premises serving food and drink must close by 22.00 hours. Around 20 to 30 people were found inside the premises, and social distancing was not being observed.

The Police explained that the premises' decision to trade in this unsafe manner, which was not compliant with the Government Guidance, was an overt risk to the health of individuals, families and local communities, at a time when the country is experiencing a national emergency. The Covid-19 virus is a pandemic which has required all licensed premises to act responsibly and in accordance with both the law and the Government Guidance when trading, in order to save lives. It was therefore a flagrant risk to public health for any licensed premises to breach the Government Guidance by trading in an unsafe manner.

Attempts by the Police to advise those at the premises had not been accepted. Police had requested that the premises supply the Covid-19 risk assessment which is a mandatory requirement under the Government Guidance; this had not been forthcoming. The recommendation of the Police was therefore that the Sub-Committee should suspend the licence pending the review hearing.

A recently-appointed Director of the company which holds the premises licence then addressed the Sub-Committee. Having heard his submissions, the Sub-Committee agreed with the Police that the causes of the serious crime appeared to

originate from unsatisfactory internal management procedures at the premises. The Sub-Committee was not impressed with the Director's representations, or his answers to questions. He stated that he was new to the industry and "still learning". Whilst he stated that he did not deny responsibility or make excuses, he asked that the Sub-Committee take into account what he called the "mitigating circumstances".

However the "mitigating circumstances" centred around the suggestion that staff inside the premises on the night of the 22nd August, who had been cleaning, had been taken by surprise by large numbers of people (dressed for a night out) who had invaded the premises late at night; the Director stated that although the correct course would have been for those staff to call the Police, the staff had been reluctant to do so. The Director ascribed the reluctance to involve the Police to the Afro-Caribbean background of the staff and customers. The Sub-Committee found this to be a highly unusual approach for any premises licence holder to take, and not something that inspired confidence in the management arrangements at the premises. All in all, the Sub-Committee considered the licence holder to have failed to take its responsibilities seriously.

The Sub-Committee therefore determined that it was both necessary and reasonable to impose the interim step of suspension to address the immediate problems with the premises, namely the likelihood of further serious crime.

The Sub-Committee considered whether it could impose other interim steps, including modification of licence conditions, but considered that this would offer little to address the real issues, which were the unsatisfactory practices and the irresponsible attitude shown by the licence holder, both of which were a significant risk to public health in Birmingham.

However, the Sub-Committee determined that the removal of the designated premises supervisor was a very important safety feature given that it was this individual who was responsible for the day to day running of the premises, ie the decision to defy the Government Guidance in order to trade as usual. Therefore the risks could only be properly addressed first by the suspension of the Licence, and secondly by the removal of the DPS, pending the full Review hearing.

In reaching this decision, the Sub-Committee has given due consideration to the City Council's Statement of Licensing Policy, the Guidance issued by the Home Office in relation to expedited and summary licence reviews, and the submissions made by the Police and by those representing the premises licence holder at the hearing.

All parties are advised that the premises licence holder may make representations against the interim steps taken by the Licensing Authority. On receipt of such representations, the Licensing Authority must hold a hearing within 48 hours.

All parties are advised that there is no right of appeal to a Magistrates' Court against the Licensing Authority's decision at this stage.