

Calling time on The Spey Lounge

Councillors have decided that an Edinburgh pub will call last orders early as punishment for failing to control drunken “riots” which left customers and staff hospitalised.

The Spey Lounge was reported to the council for the second time in six months over incidents of violence and disorder which police said staff had “lackadaisical attitude” towards.

The Leith Walk boozer had to shut for two weeks in September after being slapped with a suspension for a “litany” of noise complaints about the bar’s karaoke machine and reports of assaults and thefts.

The council’s licensing board heard on Monday that despite this, reports of “punching, spitting, kicking, punching and biting” persisted once the doors were opened again.

PC Greig Stephen from Police Scotland’s licensing department highlighted two incidents which officers attended last month which he said demonstrated “lack of good management and control of the premises”.

The first, in the early hours of 5 December, involved an off-duty female member of staff who was “seriously assaulted,” leaving her unconscious and requiring treatment at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh for a fractured eye socket.

PC Stephen continued: “The modus operandi of all the assaults included punching, spitting, kicking, punching and biting to

the head and involved multiple male and female patrons who were present at the time.

“At 22 minutes past one in the morning the manager on duty phoned 999 to report the serious disturbance. The call handler heard her say ‘it’s a riot now’ which would lead to suggest that it was indeed escalating into an incredibly serious situation.”

He said in total eight police officers – amounting to “a whole team” of Leith officers – had to attend to deal with the incident.

“All the attending officers noted evidence of drunkenness amongst patrons during this incident and a lack of management and control of the premises.”

PC Stephen added staff showed a “lackadaisical attitude” dealing with the chaos and made no real effort to expel troublesome drinkers.

They were also said to have allowed customers to go behind the bar and get plastic cups so they could keep drinking after closing time.

“There is clearly a lack of good management and control in the premises. Patrons are not advised appropriately that they need to leave the premises at the relevant time.”

Detailing the second incident, from the evening of 9 December just four days later, the officer said three males entered the pub with one of them “violently striking” another male “without any provocation or interaction” after ordering a drink.

The board heard that staff called an ambulance after the male collapsed unconscious – but not police “which allowed the three suspects to leave the area”.

Police enquiries are ongoing into both incidents.

PC Stephen said: "It's my opinion that these incidents, which occurred just two months after the suspension, showed disregard for licensing objectives.

He added management and staff showed disregard for "preventing public disorder, securing public safety, preventing public nuisance and preventing and improving public health".

Alistair MacDonald, the solicitor representing Spey Lounge, argued most of the customers are "great people" and "valued customers that do not cause any problems".

He added many many "treat this almost like a social club, a home from home".

"This is where they go, this is where they meet their pals and they go and sit here for a few hours, don't cause any problems and then they go home.

"Some of them are so regular that our clients get worried if some of them don't come in."

The board agreed to introduce a 10.30pm closing time for the pub instead of issuing another suspension, however Licensing Board Convener Cllr Louse Young said it was their "last opportunity" to clean up their act.

She said: "I feel that the suspension should have been a massive wake-up call and we should have seen in effect a shining example of the operations happening when we're talking about two months later.

"I am concerned about their ability to be robust with this.

"I don't think that makes it okay to have a culture and a way of behaviour that has been evidenced in this premises."

by Donald Turvill

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