

Only licensed shop in Gifford loses licence

Residents in an East Lothian village face a 'dry' Christmas after its only shop lost its licence to sell alcohol.

The Nisa store in Gifford was ordered to stop selling booze at a special meeting of East Lothian Licensing Board on Thursday after it was claimed it had been mismanaged and may have been operating without a valid licence for two years.

Concerns about the running of the shop, which took over from the Co-op in 2021, were raised by the board's trading standards officer after she visited last month chasing non-payment of the annual licence fee.

The board was told the officer found a single member of staff manning the shop who did not speak English and could not provide any of the documents which should have been available to her.

After raising concerns subsequent visits found a lack of training papers, new staff who claimed to be living in a house in Gifford and no evidence the premises licence manager, named as Mr Kokulabavan Jeyarasa was present.

Police enquiries subsequently found Mr Jeyarasa was already a registered premises manager in Dumfries, where he lived, which meant he could not be the manager at Gifford, and raised questions about the validity of the licence.

Reports from police and the licensing standards officer giving

details of further concerns about the operating of the shop to the board were not released to the public as some of the information is part of an ongoing police investigation.

However the licensing officer told the board: "I have seen no proof or evidence that Mr Jeyarasa has any control over the premises and I am of the opinion he has not been at the premises for some time."

Mr Jeyarasa attended the meeting but declined to comment on the allegations made against him.

Board convener Councillor Lachlan Bruce said: "It is clear to me that there have been breaches of the licence and it is clear to me that there is obvious mismanagement of this premises.

"It is clear to me Mr Jeyarasa has not been acting as a fit and proper premises manager and as such our only option is to revoke the licence and review his personal licence."

The premises licence was immediately revoked by the board.

A spokesperson for East Lothian Council said about the withheld papers: "There is an ongoing police investigation and the papers put before the Licensing Board contained information not suitable for the public domain. Redacted papers will be uploaded to our council website in due course as well as the meeting minutes."

by Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter

