

# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...A REGIONAL MANAGER



by Fiona Dickie, PCA

The PCA team is embarking on a number of visits to pubs around the country in conjunction with the six regulated pub companies.

Following on from our Engagement Manager's experience of a day in the life of an Admiral Taverns' Business Development Manager, I set out to discover how Stonegate supports their tied tenants on a daily basis and was accompanied by Regional Manager Stephen Lindsley-Frost.

The day began with a visit to the Lord Morpeth pub in Bow, London. This pub has a fantastic history and dates back to 1848 when it served many in the suffragette movement. Today the pub is vibrant and chic and serves award winning pizzas to its clientele as well as a variety of drinks.

The tenant, Lukasz, is experienced, as he also has another pub, but is new to the Lord Morpeth and was six weeks into a one-year tenancy agreement and negotiating a five-year tenancy.

Upon entering the premises, Lukasz had identified some repairs that required completing, but was positive about this and discussed with Stephen what needed to be done. He shared with me that Stonegate had also recently sent out a contractor to assess some of the outstanding jobs.

The Pubs Code regulation 11 (1) provides information on the type of agreement and condition of the premises as set out in the Schedule of Condition. This is a recording of the property's condition at the start of the tenancy.

I saw how Stephen showed Lukasz how to report repairs online using Stonegate's PubHub portal, which Lukasz felt would be a useful tool for him.

Stephen then referred Lukasz to the Schedule 1 information he had previously received. Schedule 1 gives the tenant information they need to know at the start of their tenancy. It includes details on the type of tenancy and any obligation to purchase tied products. A description of the premises and maintenance and repair obligations and procedures and information about rent, deposits and insurance amongst further information. I asked Lukasz a few questions around this, and he was unfamiliar with Schedule 1 and the Pubs Code. This is not unexpected as whilst our latest survey showed that 84% of tenants were aware of the Code, there are also a number that aren't.

Information for new tenants sent out by Stonegate contains all their Pubs Code pre-contract information, including an introductory letter from myself as the Pubs Code Adjudicator. Lukasz shared with me that he was too busy with the new business to have read everything that had been sent to him and I noted he had been sent an email with a number of attachments to it. I enquired as to what might have encouraged him to engage more with the contents of the email. He replied that he would have preferred something which was quicker to absorb, such as a TikTok video with a brief overview of the Code and links to click to direct you to the information needed.

It is not a great surprise that busy tenants cannot find the time to read several email attachments. Though it is a challenge for pub companies, finding appropriate and even innovative ways to share Pubs Code information with them would be advantageous.



Fiona Dickie and Lukasz the tenant of the Lord Morpeth Pub

After thanking Lukasz for his time, we said our goodbyes before moving onto the Park Tavern in Finsbury Park. This is a traditional wet led pub, run for the last 49 years by the current leaseholder Dennis, who is now approaching retirement and employs a manager to oversee the day-to-day running of the pub.

Dennis was happy in his relationship with Stonegate and did not have many issues to raise with Stephen on our visit. There was clearly a good relationship between the two. Dennis had heard of the Pubs Code but did not really understand what it did in any great detail.

Dennis shared that he had less than 3 years left on his term, and so I discussed with Stephen how Stonegate sought to avoid large dilapidations bills for tenants coming to the end of their tenancies. He explained that leaseholders are offered a mid-term survey at no cost to them, so they can be clear on what works are outstanding.



Fiona and Dennis, the tenant of the Park Tavern in Finsbury Park

From here we moved to our last pub of the day, The Sheephaven Bay, which is located just off Camden Town High Street. This is a traditional Irish pub, with multiple TVs showing all the latest sporting events and a busy kitchen serving food. It is run on a long lease by Pat, who is very aware of the Pubs Code as he is currently going through the Market Rent Only (MRO) process for the second time.

We spoke at length about the MRO processes he had been through and how they differed. What stood out the most for Pat was he had been served with a schedule of dilapidations when considering taking on a new MRO lease the first time 5 years ago, works which his pub company would have expected him to complete at that stage. However, this time he had not received a schedule of dilapidations and Pat felt this was a big improvement in the process.

I was able to speak virtually with the consultant representing Pat in his current MRO negotiations and was delighted to hear that his positive comments about the current MRO process.

Pat had no issues or concerns to discuss with Stephen during the visit and he told me that the two of them got along well. Before leaving I asked Pat a final question, about what difference the Pubs Code had made in his opinion. He replied that the Pubcos used to be like the big football clubs, in that they held all the power, but he now felt like the balance of power had shifted a little bit in favour of the tenant. I think he summed up perfectly the aim of the Pubs Code!



Fiona with Pat, tenant of The Sheephaven Bay

My day accompanying Stephen was enjoyable and insightful, and it was good to understand how a Regional Manager works to build and keep a good tenant relationship. A piece of learning taken from my visit was the need for accessible Schedule 1 information for new tenants, and this is something I expect the pub companies to look at closely.

I offer my thanks to Stephen for allowing me to accompany him on a typical day and to James Richards Stonegate's Code Compliance Officer and his team, for giving me such an opportunity.

To find out more about the Pubs Code go to <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/pubs-code-adjudicator>