

LICENSING COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 5 December 2017

Present: Councillor Backhouse (Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Cobbold, Heasman, Hill, Huggett, Jamil, Lidstone, Noakes, Nuttall, Podbury, Sloan (Vice-Chairman), Williams and Woodward

Officers in Attendance: Sharon Degiorgio (Senior Licensing Officer), Robin Harris (Senior Lawyer (Contentious)), Gary Stevenson (Head of Environment and Street Scene), Cheryl Clark (Democratic Services Officer) and Sharon Bamborough (Head of the Licensing Partnership).

Other Members in Attendance: None.

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

LC53/17 The Chairman opened the meeting, introduced Committee members and officers in attendance, and outlined procedural matters of the meeting.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

LC54/17 Apologies for absence were recorded from Councillor Bulman.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

LC55/17 There were no declarations of interest.

NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS WISHING TO SPEAK (IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 18):

LC56/17 There were no visiting members who had registered to speak.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING DATED 6 JUNE 2017

LC57/17 The minutes of the previous meeting dated 6 June 2017 were noted as a correct record.

HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING: LICENCE FEES AND CHARGES 2018/2019

LC58/17 Mrs Bamborough, Head of the Licensing Partnership introduced the report which outlined the proposed review of administration fees in respect of Taxis and Private Hire Licensing. The increase largely reflected inflation and the revised fees and charges proposed were as set out in the agenda report. The next stage was for public consultation and if there were unresolved objections, these would be considered at the next scheduled meeting on 6 March 2018, prior to implementation with effect from 1 April 2018.

There was one registered public speaker. Mr H Altinbas, Treasurer and Secretary to the Tunbridge Wells Taxi Association, wished to complain at the start of this review process about the year on year increase in fees. The Association would organise as many drivers as possible to register their complaints.

Councillor Woodward referred to the schedules of accounts provided in

Appendix A and queried the reduction in salaries in the table for 2017-2018. Mr Stevenson confirmed these were projections for 7 months only. In response to queries from Councillor Williams, Mr Stevenson explained that TWBC Officers were not impacted by the national pay freeze on local authorities as they were subject to local pay and conditions and individual contribution related pay. Councillor Williams had sympathy with local taxi drivers who would be affected by an increase in fees and was disappointed if promised efficiencies and savings from the set up of the Licensing Partnership did not appear to have been achieved. Mr Stevenson pointed out that savings and efficiencies had been made in the earlier years from reductions in staff when setting up the Partnership, and without which the current increases would have been greater.

Councillor Lidstone thanked Mr Altinbas for speaking and accepted that if charges were to be increased it would be reasonable for them to be in line with inflation. He asked whether these increases would not simply be passed on by the trade to customers. Mr Stevenson explained that whilst Private Hire drivers could choose how much to charge, the Hackney Carriage trade had a Council agreed set of tariffs and it was up to the trade if they wished to apply to change the tariffs. Mrs Degiorgio advised that the last fare increases had been agreed in 2011, and since that time the Council had not received any other requests from the trade on this matter. Mr Stevenson and the Chairman both indicated that the increase in licence fees was minimal over the duration of a three year licence period.

Councillor Heasman noted the aim to break even but suggested that further efficiencies might have been achieved in officer time if the need for Licensing Sub-Committees for minor matters could be reduced by giving greater delegated decision making powers to Licensing Officers. Mr Stevenson advised that the numbers of Licensing Sub-Committees had now reduced considerably following the introduction of the computerised knowledge test within the licence application process.

The Chairman noted that the recent addition of the London Borough of Bexley would help reduce overhead costs of the Licensing Partnership in future financial years.

In the absence of further comments, the Chairman referred to the report recommendation and this was proposed by Councillor Woodward, seconded by Councillor Podbury and was by a majority agreed by the Committee. Councillor Williams asked that it be noted that he voted against the proposal.

RESOLVED:

1. That the proposed fees and charges and associated costs for licences in respect of hackney carriage drivers and vehicles and private hire drivers, vehicles and operators, as set out in paragraph 2.11, be approved for formal consultation with the trade and with the public; and
2. That subject to the consideration of any unresolved objections by Licensing Committee at its meeting on 6 March 2018, these be implemented with effect from 1 April 2018.

URGENT BUSINESS:

LC59/17 There were no items of urgent business.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

LC60/17 **RESOLVED:**
That the next meeting take place on Tuesday 6 March 2018.

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 6.30pm.