

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

LICENSING COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1RS, at 6.00 pm on Tuesday, 30 November 2021

Present: Councillor Bob Backhouse (Chairman)
Councillors Thomson (Vice-Chairman), Atkins, Atwood, Ellis, Funnell, Hill, Lidstone, Pope, Roberts, White and Wormington

Officers in Attendance: Sharon Degiorgio (Senior Licensing Officer), Robin Harris (Team Leader (Contentious)), Gary Stevenson (Head of Housing, Health and Environment) and Louise Kellam (Democratic Services Officer)

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

LC45/21 The Chairman opened the meeting, introduced Committee Members and Officers in attendance, and outlined procedural matters of the meeting including noting the withdrawal of agenda item 10 (Request for departure from policy for a temporary trial of an electric taxi for the town centre) from consideration.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

LC46/21 Apologies were received from Councillor Allen
 Councillor Hills was not present at the meeting.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

LC47/21 There were no declarations of interest made.

NOTIFICATION OF PERSONS REGISTERED TO SPEAK (IN ACCORDANCE WITH COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 18 OR 19):

LC48/21 Mr Clayton Berry was registered to speak on item LC52/21 (Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licencing: Licence Fees and Charges 2022/2023). No other persons were registered to speak, since LC54/21 had been removed from consideration.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING DATED 14 SEPTEMBER 2021

LC49/21 The minutes of the meeting of the Licencing Committee dated 14 September 2021 were submitted.

RESOLVED – That that the minutes of the meeting of the Licencing Committee dated 14 September 2021 be approved as a correct record.

REVISED STATEMENT OF LICENSING PRINCIPLES FOR GAMBLING ACT 2005 POLICY 2022-2025

LC50/21 Sharon Degiorgio, Senior Licencing Officer introduced the report set out in the agenda. There were no questions from Members.

RESOLVED –

1. That consideration be given to the outcome of the 6-week consultation responses on the proposed revised Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Statement of Licensing Principles for Gambling Act 2005 Policy, drafted in accordance with the Gambling Commissions Guidance issued to Licensing authorities as amended and consideration as to whether further amendments are required be approved.
2. That the revised policy be recommended to Full Council for adoption.

LICENSING FEES AND CHARGES 2022/23

LC51/21 Sharon Degiorgio, Senior Licencing Officer introduced the report set out in the agenda. There were no questions from Members.

RESOLVED –

1. That the Committee approved the fee levels as set out in Appendices A, B, and C of the report from 1 April 2022
2. That the Committee noted the nationally set fees for 2022/23 as set out in Appendix D

HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING: LICENCE FEES AND CHARGES 2022/2023

LC52/21 Registered Speaker: Mr Clayton Berry

Sharon Degiorgio, Senior Licencing Officer, introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- Documented issues with the Licencing Hub had been noted, resulting in a some Licences not being chased expeditiously enough. This was being resolved and monitored by Sharon Degiorgio.
- Generally the Licencing Hub worked well, dealing with thousands of transactions each year in a range of areas, not just taxis.
- Accounts were in arrears, and when Members decided last year not to increase Licence Fees, they acknowledged that there would be a deficit increase and Fees would have to change to reflect this.
- It was acknowledged that the ongoing Covid pandemic presented a challenging time for the Taxi trade.
- Putting the Fee increase to consultation would provide an opportunity for feedback from Taxi Drivers.
- Potential discrepancy in the proposed figures for different costs to renew or apply for a licence for a 3 year period would be looked into by the Licencing Team.
- Reminders to drivers for vehicle compliance/MOT testing part-way through the year had not been issued in a small number of cases and the Hub's database had not flagged these case to be chased. The Licencing team had gone through the spreadsheet with Sevenoaks Council, who ran the database, to find the errors and resolve issues with the database's coding that meant that the missed reminders were not flagged.
- It was suggested any decision made on increasing fees was to made after the Consultation.

- Problems with Sevenoaks' Systems had had a knock-on effect to Tunbridge Wells', and some of the issues were not known until they were brought up by Complaints, but were now being monitored.
- The figure of 4% to raise Fees was decided by the Finance department approx.. 2 months ago. Since then inflation had risen further, but the figure was estimated based on costs retrospectively and was subject to change, but at the time was not in line with RPI or CPI.
- The Hub dealt with thousands of transactions every year, so there would always be a small number of issues as the system was not perfect, but it was being checked and monitored closely.
- Issues with testing reminders did not mean that Taxis were driving untested, as they required an MOT and testing prior to Licence approval as well as part-way through the year.

RESOLVED - That the Committee approved the proposed fees set out in Appendix A for publication, consultation, and implementation with effect from 1 April 2022, subject to consideration of any unresolved written objections at Licensing Committee on 8th March 2022.

TAXI CONTRACT LETTING

LC53/21 Sharon Degiorgio, Senior Licencing Officer, gave a verbal update. Points included:

- A new taxi testing contract was now in place for a period of three years.
- The difference from the previous contract was that there was now three garages that offered the testing service, rather than just the previous two.
- The contract was at no cost to the Council as all fees were paid directly to the garages by either the driver or proprietor when presenting their vehicles for the test.

Questions and discussion from Members included:

- With the onus on the driver to arrange and pay for testing, there was no risk of drivers/firms avoiding this testing as Licencing would be sending reminders and follow ups to ensure compliance.

REQUEST FOR DEPARTURE FROM POLICY FOR A TEMPORARY TRIAL OF AN ELECTRIC TAXI FOR THE TOWN CENTRE

LC54/21 Item withdrawn from Agenda.

URGENT BUSINESS

LC55/21 There was no urgent business for consideration.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

LC56/21 The next meeting of the Licensing Committee was scheduled for 08 March 2021.

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 6.40 pm.

