

LICENSING POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF A MEETING of the Licensing Policy Committee held on Monday 21 January 2013 at 9.30am in the executive meeting room, floor 3 of The Guildhall, Portsmouth.

Present

Councillors Les Stevens (chair)
Margaret Adair
Ken Ellcome
Jason Fazackarley
Ken Ferrett
Margaret Foster
Jacqui Hancock
Phil Smith
Sandra Stockdale (Standing deputy for
Councillor Fuller)

1. Apologies for Absence (AI)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lee Mason, Peter Eddis, David Fuller, Eleanor Scott, April Windebank and Neill Young. Councillor Sandra Stockdale was in attendance as the standing deputy for Councillor Fuller.

2. Declaration of Members' Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations.

3. Minutes of the Licensing Policy Committee meeting held on 12 October 2012 (AI 3)

(TAKE IN MINUTES)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Licensing Policy Committee meeting held on 12 October 2012 be agreed and signed by the chair as a correct record.

4. Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 - Review of Vehicle and Operator Licensing Fees - Consideration of Objections (AI 4)

(TAKE IN REPORT BY THE LICENSING MANAGER)

Ian Thomson, from Fast Track and Bruce Hall, General Manager of Aqua Cars Limited were in attendance.

The Licensing Manager introduced her report and explained that it has always been the policy of the committee to recover, where possible, the cost of undertaking licensing functions. On 5 November 2008, the Committee resolved to review the fees on an annual basis to take into account inflationary and any other increased costs. Members were notified of the proposed increase in licensing fees via the Members Information Service on 30 November 2012. No objections were raised and therefore a public notice was published in The News on 15 December 2012.

The Licensing Manager also explained that in response to Mr Halls objection in which he mentioned that no consultation had taken place with the trade, she had met with Mr Hall at the Aqua Car offices to explain the increases and had apologised both personally and professionally.

During the debate members asked questions relating to the shortfall of the licensing budget, the consultation process, the recovery of the deficit, the proposed charge for a Section 49 Transfer and whether there was an option for the trade to recover the increase.

Mr Hall and Mr Thomson included the following points during their deputations: licensing have moved to 3rd floor accommodation to share costs but the service for the trade has not improved, drivers are having to queue to speak with an officer and are then sent to the parking office to pay their fee, continually increasing fees in line with inflation is wrong, Section 49 transfer fee is unreasonable, increase in fees is another burden to try to bear and may have to put increase onto the travelling public.

In response to the points raised by Mr Hall and Mr Thomson, the Licensing Manager explained that the customer service issue is a corporate improvement approved by the council. Works are currently being undertaken to the ground floor reception area. There are still two members of staff on duty as before. During the next two weeks for renewals, temporary arrangements have been put in place so five members of staff will be situated in one of the conference rooms and will be able to accept payment. With regards to the fees, these are reviewed on an annual basis whilst trying to reduce the licensing deficit. This is an on-going process. £45 for the proposed Section 49 transfer fee is not unreasonable in terms of on-going administrative costs particularly as some transfers are more complex than others. Fees are reviewed with a view to restricting increase to a level equivalent to the rate of inflation unless considered reasonable and appropriate to offset the cost of the provision of the licensing function and deficit is being addressed in a reasonable way in terms of recovering costs.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the committee consider the objections received in response to the proposed variation to licensing fees; and**

- 2. That the committee approve the increase in licensing fees in respect of hackney carriage and private hire vehicle licences and private hire operator licences, without modification and to come into immediate effect.**

The meeting concluded at 10.55am.

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Councillor Les Stevens
Chair of the Licensing Policy Committee