

LICENSING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF A MEETING of the Licensing Committee held on Friday, 10 January 2014 at 9.30 am in the Council Chamber, floor 2 of the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillors Les Stevens (Chair)
David Fuller (Vice-Chair)
Phil Smith (Deputy Chair)
Margaret Adair
Peter Eddis
Ken Ellcome
Jason Fazackarley
Ken Ferrett
Margaret Foster
Jacqui Hancock
Lee Mason
Sandra Stockdale

1. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Aiden Gray, Eleanor Scott, Frank Jonas and April Windebank. Councillor Eleanor Scott was represented by Councillor Peter Eddis.

2. Declarations of Members' Interests (AI 2)

There were no declarations.

3. Annual Review of Licensing Fees (AI 4)

(TAKE IN THE LICENSING MANAGERS REPORT)

The Licensing Manager introduced her report and explained to members of the committee that it has always been the aim of the committee to work towards total cost recovery where possible when undertaking all of the various licensing functions. She explained that the fee increases had been calculated by finance and that the increase in the Hackney Carriage vehicle renewal-extension would only result in a net increase of 76p per day.

A deputation was heard from Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson who explained that as part of the administration of the Council he was responsible for putting the budget together and that many difficult decisions had to be made. He explained that wherever possible full cost recovery was being met. The taxi trade cannot be seen to set aside from this. He accepted that Southampton City Council do charge less for a licence and that as they already licence Eastleigh discussions had taken place regarding them also taking on Portsmouth, if this was what the trade wanted. Councillor Vernon-Jackson also referred to spreading full cost recovery over a 5-year period as an option.

Councillor Vernon-Jackson left the meeting at this point as he had another meeting to attend.

Chris Dixon, Hackney Carriage trade representative asked if the trade could be given some time to discuss the 5-year proposal as although the suggestion had been muted at the consultative meeting the week before it had not been fully proposed. The chair, Councillor Stevens, proposed a 10minute recess to allow the trade to discuss the matter. All members and officers left the chamber.

When the committee reconvened, deputations were then heard from the following persons.

Chris Dixon, Hackney Carriage trade representative thanked the committee for the opportunity to discuss the 5-year option. He mentioned that the trade are having a hard time and that they realise the council needs to recover costs. The trade had reluctantly agreed to go along with the 5-year plan.

Carolyn Holmes, Hackney Carriage Proprietor, explained that she had been in the taxi trade for over 40years. This is such a quiet period for drivers and a massive hike in fees. Motoring and living costs have all gone up and this is yet another increase that the drivers have to absorb. She questioned the employment costs of the licensing department. She also reluctantly endorsed the 5-year option.

Viv Young, Hackney Carriage trade representative strongly objected to the massive hike in fees. He explained that drivers have ever increasing costs for maintaining the vehicles and insurance and yet have not had an increase in fares since 2010. There has been a noticeable decrease in fares since the closure of the Dockyard and yet in Southampton they have the cruise ships, premier football club and West Quay but their licence fees are less. Drivers work long shifts due to a lack of work and low wages. He felt that partial recovery was far more palatable and accepted that the trade need to do their bit. He mentioned that drivers have to put up with drunks and abuse, and 'no payers' and get nothing in return. Travel tokens have been stopped and replaced by bus passes which is good for the buses but not the taxi trade. He felt the increase in fees between the HC and PH driver was unfair.

Bruce Hall, General Manager of Aquacars explained that he supported the 5-year option but asked to see the figures broken down over the 5year period.

Written deputations were also received from Ian Hunter and Nizam Ahmed which were circulated to the members.

In response to some of the points raised by the deputations, the Licensing Manager explained that a review of the service was undertaken 18months-2years ago, and that there was a constant process of review to make efficiencies and savings. She continued to explain that the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage fees differ in costs because they cannot cross subsidise. There are less Hackney Carriage licences but with the same overheads. Following on from the consultative meeting the week before, a breakdown of fees over a 5-year period had been prepared by finance. As a point of clarity, the Licensing Manager explained that after the meeting in November had been adjourned, she had met with the trade representations shortly after to discuss the options and it was not until Wednesday of last week that the

trade had submitted their proposals. The proposed figures for a 5-year spread to meet full cost recovery were circulated to the committee.

Members' questions

Members sought clarification on which licences would need to go out to public consultation and which must be agreed today, when the fees were last increased, whether the fares could be increased to help with the increase in fees, how many Private Hire operators there currently are and how many cars they operate and questioned whether the deficit has been this big since 2010.

In response to members' questions, the Licensing Manager explained that the report also contained increases for street trading consent and amenity on the highway licences, neither of which are subject to public consultation. She also explained that if members were to choose either 3year or 5year full cost recovery, members could only agree the cost of fees for 2014/15. Members are not able to set the fee increase, for example, for year5 today and that this would be reviewed every financial year. She explained to the committee that they could review the licence fees at any time and the local authority does not set the fares for private hire.

Members' comments

Members were mixed in their views. Some felt that the recurring theme seemed to be too many drivers all seeking less work. Other members expressed their support to the trade in what must at some times be a difficult and unpleasant job. They appreciated that the trade provided an almost 24hour service and that they are an integral part of the transport system. Members also accepted that most of the drivers were also residents in the city and that rather than look at the trade as a whole, they should look at the impact the increase would have on the individual. Members also recognised the council commitment to meet full cost recovery.

RESOLVED that;

- 1. The committee noted the contents of the report and agreed to meet full cost recovery over a period of 5years.**
- 2. The following fees are to be implemented with immediate effect; Street Trading Consent, Amenities on the Highway Permits, Sex Establishments, Private Hire Driver Licence @£78 and Hackney Carriage Driver Licence @£88.**
- 3. Delegated authority was granted to the Head of Health, Safety and Licensing to**
 - a) advertise the following fees and charges which are subject to formal public statutory consultation: Private Hire Operators Licence @£418 and Hackney Carriage Vehicle Licence renewal @£196 & extension @£331 for Year 1 and**
 - b) that subject to no representations being received, implement such fees and charges.**

The meeting concluded at 12.35 pm.

Signed by the chair, Councillor Les Stevens.