

General Licensing Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Court Room at Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, BN21 4UG on 1 October 2018 at 6.00 pm

Present:

Councillors Pat Rodohan (Deputy-Chair), Janet Coles, Tony Freebody, Colin Murdoch, Jim Murray, Margaret Robinson, Robert Smart, Pat Hearn and Steve Wallis

Officers in attendance:

Ed Hele, Functional Lead – Quality Environment
Michele Wilkinson, Lawyer, Housing and Regulatory

Also in attendance:

Katie Maxwell, Committee Officer

1 Minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2018.

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 January 2018 were submitted and approved and the Chair was authorised to sign them as an accurate record.

2 Apologies for absence.

Apologies for absence were reported from Councillors Belsey, Choudhury, and Tester.

3 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs) by members as required under Section 31 of the Localism Act and of other interests as required by the Code of Conduct.

There were none.

4 Advertising on Hackney Carriage vehicles.

The committee considered the report of the Interim Director of Service Delivery regarding the proposal to allow advertising on the offside and nearside of the rear of Hackney Carriages.

The committee was reminded that the Council set the conditions that were attached to vehicle licences. The current conditions were attached at appendix 1 of the report.

The Functional Lead – Quality Environment advised the committee that a letter, signed by nine Hackney Carriage proprietors, requesting a change in the condition to allow advertising on their vehicles had been received, to help provide much needed extra income, and give interested local firms the opportunity to advertise on their vehicles.

The committee supported the request and furthermore, welcomed the opportunity for local businesses to advertise on Hackney Carriage vehicles.

Resolved: (Unanimous). That the Senior Specialist Advisor for Licensing be given delegated authority to decide on whether or not to vary the vehicle licence conditions, following an application concerning advertising on hackney carriage vehicles, provided that the vehicles were not exempt from displaying the Council's livery and the guidance for advertising on a hackney carriage is followed.

5 Hackney Carriage Fares.

The committee considered the report of the Interim Director of Service Delivery regarding the request for a new fare structure as proposed by a Hackney Carriage proprietor.

Members were advised that the current fares had been in place for nine years. There were currently 113 licensed hackney carriages that were allowed to ply for hire in Eastbourne.

Following informal requests made by some hackney carriage proprietors and discussions at the Taxi Forum, all hackney carriage proprietors were contacted to on 1 February 2018 and were asked to contact the Licensing team to advise if they were in favour of a fare increase. It was made clear that should more than 50 % of the trade feel an increase was appropriate, then a report would be presented to General Licensing committee. The letter also requested proposals for a new fare structure. A copy of this letter was included at appendix 1 of the report.

The Licensing team received 86 positive responses from hackney carriage proprietors which equated to 76% of their total number. One proprietor proposed an alternative to the current fares and that proposal was included as appendix 2 of the report, which appeared to be the proposal of a sole proprietor, rather than being an agreed proposal made on behalf of the majority of the Taxi trade.

It was acknowledged that whilst the proposed increase would be of significant benefit to the hackney carriage trade, the public would be disadvantaged. Compared to other authorities in East Sussex, Eastbourne would rank joint third in the country as having the most expensive hackney carriage fares, if the proposal from the sole proprietor were to be agreed.

The committee agreed that whilst the fare structure needed reviewing they rejected the proposed new fares detailed in appendix 2 of the report. To this end, the committee agreed that the Senior Specialist Advisor for Licensing be given delegated authority to consult with the trade to develop a further proposal.

Resolved: (Unanimous) That the Senior Specialist Advisor for Licensing be given delegated authority to undertake a six week consultation exercise with the Taxi trade to draft a proposal on increasing hackney carriage fares for consideration at a future committee meeting.

6 Taxi Licensing Guidance.

The committee considered the report of the Interim Director of Service Delivery requesting the Members agreement to prepare a draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Guidance.

The Members were advised that currently Eastbourne Borough Council did not have comprehensive guidance relating to hackney carriage and private hire vehicles, although it did have licence conditions, byelaws and guidelines relating to the relevance of convictions etc. that had been in place for a number of years.

The Functional Lead – Quality Environment reported that the current landscape for hackney carriage and private hire licensing had changed significantly over recent years with smart phone apps changing the way vehicles could be booked, the change in the law allowing cross border sub-contracting of jobs and sexual exploitation incidents involving the taxi trade in other parts of the country.

Members noted that the Eastbourne Disability Involvement Group (DIG) had written to the General Licensing committee expressing their concern that at the current time they felt that the current taxi provision did not meet the needs of its disabled passengers. These concerns could be addressed in the proposed new guidance which will benefit both the trade and the Council. A copy of the DIG submission was attached at appendix 1 of the report.

The committee expressed their thanks to the DIG for their submission and for bringing this very important issue to their attention. In addition, Members agreed that this was an opportune time to provide guidance for the trade which incorporated all of the issues presented to the committee.

Resolved: (Unanimous)

1. That the Senior Specialist Advisor be given delegated authority to prepare draft guidance relating to hackney carriage and private hire vehicles, which would be considered by the committee prior to the start of an eight week consultation with the taxi trade and the public.

2. That the submission from the Eastbourne Disability Group be considered and, where appropriate, incorporated into the draft guidance for consideration at a future meeting.

The meeting ended at 6.23 pm

Councillor Rodohan (Deputy Chair in the Chair)