

GENERAL LICENSING COMMITTEE

14 MARCH 2017

PRESENT – Councillor Nutt (in the Chair); Councillors L. Haszeldine, C. Hughes, B Jones, Mrs. Jones, Kane, Lawton, Lee and Newall (9)

APOLOGIES – Councillor Stenson. (1)

OFFICERS – David Burrell, Private Sector Housing and Licensing Manager; Amy Wennington, Lawyer; and Allison Hill, Democratic Officer.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE – Mr Grumblatt and Mr. Leighton, Members of the Public.

L22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

L23. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of this Committee held on 22 November 2016.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

L24. MINUTES – Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meetings of the General Licensing Sub-Committees held on 22 November 2016 and 17 January 2017.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes be approved as a correct record.

L25. PROPOSED CHANGES TO TAXI LICENSING FEES AND CHARGES FOR 2017-2018 – The Director of Economic Growth submitted a report (previously circulated) to invite Members to approve proposed changes to the fees and charges relating to the licensing of hackney carriages and private hire vehicles, their drivers and operators. The proposed fees have been based on the actual cost of administering and where appropriate enforcing the relevant legislation relating to such licences.

It was reported that Full Council at its meeting on 28 January 2016 delegated the setting of fees and registrations within the remit of the General Licensing Committee to that Committee to enable in depth consideration to be given by Members in a specialist Committee.

The submitted report detailed at the end of the 2015/16 financial year there was a surplus of £6,175 in the private hire budget with an additional surplus of £7,085 for the hackney carriage budget which resulted in £13,260 being carried over into the 2016/17 financial year.

For the 2016/17 financial year a surplus of £36k was envisaged due to lower than anticipated recharges against the taxi licensing budget and an increase in new driver applications.

The submitted report also referred to the planned move from a predominately paper-based service to an electronic service from April, 2017; the appointment of a temporary officer employed for 12 months to undertake time-consuming data cleansing and scanning of documents from all current files; the ceasing of renewal appointments and the trade will be advised that all applications must be submitted by a given date during the month that their renewal is due; a proposed charge of £35.00 per appointment for those applicants who require support with the completion of forms and guidance regarding documentation (not £38.50 as stated in the submitted report); and the upgrading of the IT systems along with supplementary staff training and the introduction of an Electronic Document Management System which will be funded from the 2016/17 budget surplus.

The proposed changes to the fees were outlined in detail in the submitted report including a reduction of £49 in respect of driver licences as a result of £23k surplus and the proposal to reduce the driver licence fees by £20k for the forthcoming year 2017/18 in order to reduce the surplus to be carried into the 2018/19 budget to around £3k.

Members questions related to the new IT system and if on line applications will be possible; the estimated budget increase cost in relation to agency staff and training expenses and the reasons for this increase; and the safeguarding training undertaken by new drivers.

General discussion ensued on the charges for driver licence renewal and in particular that there was no obvious financial benefit for drivers to renew for one or two years. The Private Sector Housing and Licensing Manager advised Members that the majority of drivers generally renewed their licences on an annual basis but would take the comments of Members and the two members of public who attended the meeting into account when looking at the charges for next year.

The two members of the public who attended the meeting also made comments regarding the increases in the budget for CCTV monitoring and professional fees and consultancy and the Private Sector Housing and Licensing Manager gave the rationale behind these increases

The submitted report also outlined the informal consultation process with all licence holders that will be carried out following Members approval of the proposed fees and although licence fees are not subject to statutory advertisement and consultation, Officers believed that it was good practice to involve and inform licence holders and take on board any comments from the trade when planning the taxi licence fees and charges for the next year.

RESOLVED – (a) That Members approve the proposed fees relating to hackney carriage vehicle and driver licences, private hire vehicle and driver licences and private hire operator licences as detailed in the submitted report from 1 April 2017.

(b) To approve the commencement of the informal consultation with all licence holders.