

GENERAL LICENSING COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 12 January 2021

PRESENT – Councillors B Jones (Chair), Clarke, Crumbie, Donoghue, Dulston, Haszeldine, C L B Hughes, Lee, Newall, K Nicholson, A J Scott and Snedker

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Allison Hill (Democratic Officer), Graham Hall (Head of Community Safety), Brian Murray (Assistant Licensing Manager), Colin Dobson (Licensing Manager) and Bethany Symonds (Lawyer)

LG12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

LG13 MINUTES OF THE GENERAL LICENSING COMMITTEE

Submitted – the Minutes (previously circulated) of the meetings of the General Licensing Committee held on 28 July and the Special on 10 November, 2020.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meetings of the General Licensing committee held on 28 July and 10 November, 2020 be approved as a correct record.

LG14 MINUTES OF GENERAL LICENSING SUB COMMITTEE

Submitted – the Minutes (previously circulated) of the meetings of the General Licensing Sub Committee held on 28 July, 8 September, 20 October and 1 December, 2020.

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meetings of the General Licensing Sub Committee held on 28 July, 8 September, 20 October and 1 December, 2020 be approved as a correct record.

LG15 REVIEW OF TAXI LICENSING FEES 2021/22

The Director of Economic Growth submitted a report (previously circulated) to invite Members to determine the licence fees relating to hackney carriage and private hire drivers along with their vehicles and operators.

It was reported that fees are reviewed annually, based on the cost recovery of administering and where appropriate enforcing the relevant legislation relating to such licences; and in respect of taxi licensing, legislation permits the Council to recover all or part of the costs of providing the taxi licensing service, including its administration and control (i.e. enforcement or supervision). Surpluses must be carried forward and deficits may be carried forward to future years within each ring-fenced licensing budget.

The submitted report outlined the effects of the on-going Covid-19 national emergency on the taxi trade and on maintaining the licensing function during unprecedented times; and the taxi provision has been impacted by the hospitality industry that has been hit particularly hard as a result of the

pandemic; and many in the trade have elected not to renew their licence at the moment and this has had the effect of significantly reducing the licensing budget and the option to suspend a licence when not being used has been offered where applicable by the Licensing Department to help ease the financial burden.

It was also reported that at the beginning of the first lockdown in March 2020 a Licensing Enforcement Officer left the organisation but it was not possible to recruit a replacement due to on-going restrictions, which placed additional pressure on the service, however it was reported that a new officer had recently been recruited and commenced working with the team; and although the introduction of a new on-line taxi licensing application system had been approved prior to the lockdown period, it was still in the process of being developed so staff were not able to benefit from the advantages remote applications provided. Work continued with this system and it was reported that it was on track to be operational by Spring 2021.

The LGA has produced guidance in a document called 'Open for Business', which states the activities that can be included when calculating the fee on a cost recovery basis and these were detailed in the submitted report.

It was reported that there was a current combined deficit to the taxi and private hire licensing budget of £11,291 as a result of reduced income following Covid-19 restrictions and there will be a projected total loss of income due to Covid-19 at the end of the financial year of £22,002; and the submitted report proposed that at this time it would be unreasonable for the taxi trade to be placed under additional financial pressure by an increase in fees for 2021-22 as any deficit can be recovered centrally.

Members discussed the report and in particular questioned the reasons for the deficit and how the service had ensured the safety of passengers with the loss of a Licensing Enforcement Officer.

RESOLVED – That the fees in respect of Hackney Carriage Vehicles; Private Hire Vehicles; Driver Licence; and Operator's Licence be retained at their current levels.