

LICENSING COMMITTEE

11 JANUARY 2016

Present: Councillor J Brown (Chair)
Councillor K Crout (Vice-Chair)
Councillors S Bolton, I Brown, J Connal, F Ewudo, M Haley,
K Hastrick, M Hofman, M Mills, T Rogers, M Watkin and
S Williams

Also present: Councillor N Bell

Officers: Environmental Health and Licensing Section Head
Senior Licensing Officer
Business Compliance Officer
Senior Solicitor
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (IS)

15 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2015 were submitted and signed.

16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/ COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

No apologies were received.
Councillors Derbyshire and Silver were absent.

17 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY)

None.

18 LICENSING FEES AND CHARGES 2016/2017

The Committee received a report of the Head of Community and Customer Services. The Senior Licensing Officer explained the proposed changes to the licensing fees and charges. He pointed out that most of the fees and charges remained unchanged, although there were some exceptions to this. He detailed the recommendations contained in paragraph 2.2 of the report and asked that the recommendations be considered for approval so that the Head of Environmental Health and Licensing Section in consultation with the Chair of the Licensing Committee, may authorise such changes. He fully explained how the changes to the charges reflected the cost to the Council of processing these matters.

He then went on to address paragraph 3.5 of the report, describing in more detail how the fees reflected the change in the requirements for taxi and private hire drivers who needed to re-sit the knowledge test, as they had already successfully completed the training element.

He also explained the changes to the pavement licences, particularly how renewal involved less work and therefore less cost, which resulted in the reduced fees.

He then spoke about the fees for sex establishments and sexual entertainment venues. He advised that the reduction in renewal fees reflected the fact that most of the necessary work was incurred at the initial application stage. However the increase in fees for variations to such licences was to allow full cost recovery and were reflected in the high costs, especially as a sub-committee would be required.

He pointed out that overall there would be a £5,000 reduction in fees, but this was necessary to ensure that the Council did not over charge.

The Senior Licensing Officer then addressed paragraph 3.8 of the report and asked that the Head of Environmental Health and Licensing be delegated immediate authority to be able to amend certain charges, in consultation with the Chair of the Licensing Committee. He fully explained the necessity for such flexibility.

The Chair recognised Councillor Bell and explained to the committee members that he wished to ask some questions. The committee agreed for him to speak. The Chair advised him that once the committee had spoken he would be invited to pose his questions.

Councillor Williams noted the 68% reduction in the permit for street trading - tables and chairs and asked for the reason.

The Senior Licensing Officer explained that this was for renewal only. If there were no proposed changes, then the process was simplified and the Council incurred less costs.

Councillor I Brown asked how Watford's charges compared to other local authorities.

The Senior Licensing Officer stated that the Council operated on a cost recovery basis. As a result the Council did not necessarily compare to other areas as this might result in the Council over or under charging for services.

Councillor Mills noted the decrease in fees for sex establishments and asked if the Council made a profit last year in this area.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Section Head explained that no precise hourly record was kept, so it was difficult to provide a definitive

answer. However, officers anticipated less time needing to be spent this year, reflecting the reduction in charges.

Councillor Bolton asked two questions, if there was a formula in place to calculate fees for cost recovery and given the clear reduction in pavement licences, was there a reason for this.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Section Head explained that whilst there was no formula, the department based any fees on officers' experience of how much time a given service would take to process.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Section Head went on to explain that the reduction in the cost of pavement licences reflected the time taken by officers to process the licences. New applications took more time, needing visits etc. With the Enforcement Officer in post renewals took less time and also reflected the improved working relationships within the town.

Councillor Williams then asked about the private hire booking app, Über and mentioned a discussion at the previous meeting.

The Chair said that whilst it was not on the meeting agenda, officers may wish to respond.

The Business Compliance Officer said he would be happy to assist and firstly explained what Über was and that it was a legal method of booking a private hire vehicle. He explained that the former Licensing Manager may have been referring to a stated case in London. He explained that this was not applicable in Watford and that the court case had failed and therefore had confirmed the legality of Über.

Councillor Bell spoke briefly about this and the problems facing taxi drivers, stating that the Council should support hackney carriage drivers. He went on to ask why there was such an increase in the cost of the knowledge test and the repeat knowledge test.

The Business Compliance Officer stated that this applied to new drivers only and it was in order to effect cost recovery, reflecting the improved training which in turn had reduced the need for repeat tests.

The Chair ensured that all committee members agreed the recommendations contained in paragraphs 2.2, 3.5 and the schedule of charges.

RESOLVED –

1. that the fees and charges set out at appendix 1 of the report, for the financial year 2016/17 be approved.

2. that the Environmental Health and Licensing Section Head, in consultation with the Chair of the Licensing Committee, be delegated the authority to increase or decrease charges in respect of provision of:
 1. compulsory door signage for hackney carriages;
 2. Disclosure and Barring Service, and Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, checks;
 3. licence badges and plates; and,
 4. the knowledge test training day.

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UPDATE ON WORKING PARTY CONVENED TO DETERMINE HACKNEY CARRIAGE/PRIVATE HIRE SERVICES FOR DISABLED AND VULNERABLE PASSENGERS

The Committee received a report of the Head of Community and Customer Services. The Business Compliance Officer provided an interim update to the Committee as detailed within the report.

He explained that the final recommendations would be confirmed this month and presented to the Licensing Committee on 29 February.

Councillor Watkin stated that in a recent conversation with a wheelchair user, she had stated that she could not get a suitable cab during school times as all taxis were in use for the schools.

The Chair mentioned that she had experienced similar issues at school times and surmised that it was not just wheelchair compatible taxis that were in short supply at such times.

The Business Compliance Officer explained that this was simply an issue of the number of vehicles available.

Councillor Williams commented that whilst there was a good taxi service in Watford, the Council should strive for a gold standard.

The Chair confirmed that no other members wished to ask a question or make a comment.

RESOLVED –

that the committee note the report.

The Meeting started at 7.30 pm
and finished at 8.00 pm

Chair