

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Licensing Committee

Meeting held 14 December 2017

PRESENT: Councillors David Barker (Chair), Adam Hurst, Andy Nash and Cliff Woodcraft

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andy Bainbridge, Lisa Banes, Jack Clarkson, Neale Gibson, George Lindars-Hammond, Josie Paszek, Vickie Priestley, Mick Rooney and Gail Smith.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

4.1 The minutes of meetings of the Licensing Sub-Committee held on 9th, 14th and 21st November 2017 were approved as correct records.

5. DETERMINATION OF LICENCE FEES

5.1 The Chief Licensing Officer submitted a report on the Licensing Fees Review (Determination of Fees) for the 2017/18 financial year and attaching, as appendices, a breakdown of the Licensing Service's budget for 2017/18, proposed fees for the different licensing services and functions, details of the statutory fees and a schedule of fees relating to the Safety of Sports Grounds.

5.2 Ibrar Hussain made representations on behalf of GMB, referring to a list of issues he wished to raise, which had been circulated to Members of the Committee before the meeting. He raised initial concerns with regard to the delay in the report being submitted to the Committee, and the fact that the GMB had not been consulted on the licence fees prior to this meeting. Mr Hussain stated that it would be helpful for the taxi trades if there was more detail in the report, explaining how the fees had been determined, and how the funds raised through licence fees were used for the purposes intended. He raised concerns at the standard of service being provided in respect of the taxi trade, referring specifically to a recent increase in errors in correspondence and/or taxi licences being sent to drivers. Although he was aware of staffing issues within the Licensing Service and of continuing problems with regard to the IT system, Mr Hussain considered that action was required urgently to remedy this position. He also made reference to the problems caused by a

reduction in enforcement work carried out by Licensing staff, which he presumed had been as a result of current staffing issues being experienced. Mr Hussain stated that he believed that a number of these problems would be resolved by the Council having a dedicated Taxi Licensing Service. He requested that the Chief Licensing Officer should investigate, and address the following issues:-

- Audited details of accounts to be made available to the taxi trade, together with an explanation of how all fees were set, and details of the expenditure incurred throughout the year, including any surplus;
- Look at Private Hire Operator Fees, with increase in the bands, such as the Transport for London type band structure, or Doncaster, as the current structure of charges was not suitable;
- Explore, in detail, enforcement staffing level structure, and how best it was funded;
- Annual Fees Report must be presented to the Committee by February/March every year, to come into effect in April;
- More detailed work was needed in terms of exploring the Licensing Service, how best it could become autonomous with an Advisory Board, whilst under the Council umbrella, with the Licensing Committee setting policy and determining individual cases;
- Licensing Service Forward Plan agreed for policy reviews; and
- An explanation as to how stakeholders/users of the Licensing Service were better consulted on service provision from the very outset, and not at the end of the process.

5.3 Clive Stephenson, Licensing Strategy and Policy Officer, stressed that he was attending this meeting on behalf of the Chief Licensing Officer, and was not fully aware of all the details connected to the issues/concerns now raised. He reported that there was a restructuring programme planned in respect of the Place Portfolio, known as 'Place Change Programme', and that Business Strategy and Regulation, which included the Licensing Service, was one of the three Services to be reviewed. In terms of staffing issues, Mr Stephenson stated that there were presently four full-time posts that were vacant, which had resulted in a number of problems for existing staff, in terms of workload, and which had particularly affected the levels of enforcement work. It was hoped that, following interviews which were to be held shortly, a number of the administrative posts would be filled. Mr Stephenson stated that the Service had looked at the banding in respect of Private Hire Operator Fees, and had determined that it would be difficult to make any amendments to the current structure of charges.

5.4 In response to further questions raised by Ibrar Hussain, and Members of the Committee, Mr Stephenson stated that the Service had experienced major problems with regard to the IT system, which had resulted in specific problems with regard to the administration of Licensing Act business, but which had also affected

the administration of the taxi licensing business. In terms of staffing issues, he stated that the Service had been able to recruit two additional administrative staff and that there were now only four officers in the Enforcement Team, which had resulted in the decrease in levels of enforcement work.

- 5.5 RESOLVED: That the public and press and attendees be excluded from the meeting before further discussion takes place on the grounds that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, if those persons were present, there would be a disclosure to them of exempt information as described in paragraph 5 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.
- 5.6 Samantha Bond reported orally, giving legal advice on various aspects of the report.
- 5.7 At this stage in the proceedings, the meeting was re-opened to the public and press and attendees.
- 5.8 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-
- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the representations made by Ibrar Hussain, on behalf of the GMB, and the responses to the questions raised; and
 - (b) requests:-
 - (i) the Chief Licensing Officer to:-
 - (A) submit a report on the Determination of Licence Fees for 2018/19, to a meeting of this Committee in February or March 2018; and
 - (B) provide Ibrar Hussain with a detailed written response to the questions/issues raised at the meeting; and
 - (ii) the Director of Legal and Governance to include an item on those future Committee agendas, giving the taxi trade representatives the opportunity to raise any general concerns/issues they have, as and when there is an item of relevance to the trades on that agenda.

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