

19. MINUTES OF THE LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEES**RESOLVED:**

(1) That the minutes of the following meetings of the Licensing Sub-Committee be taken as read and signed by their Chairmen as a correct record:

- (a) 2 November 2021 (pm);
- (b) 7 December 2021; and
- (c) 18 January 2022.

20. LICENSING STATISTICS

Figures were provided by the Team Manager for Licensing, D King, for the application for, renewal of and surrender of Taxi Driver Licences for the 2020/21 and 2021/22 financial years. There had been a significant increase in the number of licences surrendered and the number of renewals, and a slight increase in the number of new applications. There were currently 212 Taxi Drivers licensed by the Council, which was a 17% reduction since April 2020.

In response to questions from the Committee:

- D King felt that there was more that the Council could do to assist with the recruitment of more Taxi Drivers and referenced the report regarding the review of the taxi tariffs to be considered later in the meeting. It was highlighted that Taxi Drivers were important for the local night-time economy.
- D King did not have any data available at the meeting regarding vehicles being used that were coming to the end of their useful life but would report back to the Committee.
- D King did not have any data for the number of licensed vehicles with disabled access; Licensing Officers would check if this data could be obtained and would report back to the Committee.

The Committee felt that the figures supported the anecdotal evidence that some Taxi Drivers had gained different employment and would not return to taxi driving.

D King also presented a report which detailed the number of applications received and determinations of those applications for the period 1 October 2021 to 28 February 2022. This included Premises Licence applications and variations, Temporary Event Notice (TEN) applications, Personal Licence applications, reviews of Licences requested by Essex Police, as well as applications under the Gambling Act 2005. Included separately for information and comparison were the figures for the two previous 12-month periods running from 1 October to 30 September.

D King added that the number of TEN applications received in the previous five months were equal to the amount received in the preceding twelve-month period. It was expected that this number would increase in the period leading up to the Queen's Platinum Jubilee in June. However, there was nothing noticeable in the trends as the majority of these applications were for the extension of existing licensed hours at Public Houses.

Resolved:

- (1) That the reported Licensing statistics be noted.

21. ROAD CLOSURES / STREET PARTIES

The Team Manager for Licensing, D King, presented a report to the Committee highlighting the changes that had been made to the Road Closures and Street Parties application process, ahead of the expected celebrations for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

D King informed the Committee that the changes included:

- the waiving of the £194 application fee for community / charity events;
- a six-week application period with no legal deadlines, but a minimum four-week period would be required for the Licensing Sub-Committee to determine any applications if objections were received;
- the Licensing Team would liaise with Essex Highways, whilst the applicant would be responsible for notifying all other affected individuals or organisations;
- removal of the need for risk assessments to be submitted at the application stage; and
- removal of the requirement for public liability insurance.

D King reported that the streamlined process was now up and running, and the Council was receiving two or three enquiries per day in relation to events to celebrate the jubilee.

In response to questions from the Committee, D King stated that the Council did provide guidance for events to be held on village greens rather than the road, but it was very generalised and it would be better if the organisers contacted D King direct so that tailored advice could be provided. Planning was also taking place in relation to the Ride London cycle race which would pass through the District, where two entertainment zones would be set up and a number of local roads would be closed for the event.

Resolved:

(1) That the changes made to the Road Closure and Street Party application process for the Queen's forthcoming Platinum Jubilee be noted.

22. ELECTRIC VEHICLES AND CHARGING POINTS FOR TAXIS

The Service Manager for Regulatory Services, S Devine, presented an update to the Committee on the steps that the Council was taking to increase the provision of electric charging points within the District and encouraging taxi Drivers to switch to electric vehicles. This information note had been provided by the Council's Sustainable Transport Officer.

S Devine reported that a survey of the District's licensed Drivers had been undertaken to understand the barriers to switching to electric vehicles as this was still a rarity in Essex, unlike in London. The main obstacles to adoption were the high initial acquisition cost, the lack of public charging points and some anxiety about the range of electric vehicles. In addition, 56% of Drivers had no viable way of charging a vehicle at their home. Analysis by Officers had illustrated that certain areas of the District, such as Chigwell, Buckhurst Hill, Epping and Ongar, had no public chargers within 2 or 3 miles of the location but there were clusters of Drivers living in these areas.

S Devine believed that responses to the survey had been received from approximately 30% of the District's licensed Drivers, which was a better rate than

previous surveys. The Committee felt that there was a need to identify where public charging points should be, and to encourage Drivers to switch to electric vehicles. It was noted that the County Council was not keen to allow lamp posts to be used as charging points as they were often set back from the street.

Resolved:

- (1) That the information note provided by the Council's Sustainable Transport Officer on the potential for electric taxis to operate in the District be noted.

23. TAXI TARIFF

The Team Manager for Licensing, D King, reported that the Council's Licensing Team would be undertaking an urgent review of taxi fares applied to customers using a Hackney Carriage within the District.

D King informed the Committee that the current fee tariff had not been increased for eight years but was scheduled to be reviewed as part of the wider taxi policy review later this year. However, due to the recent unprecedented increases in fuel costs, it had been necessary to bring that review forward to support the local licensed taxi trade. A benchmarking exercise had indicated that the District had the lowest fares throughout Essex. Legal advice had been sought to ascertain if the Council could apply an emergency surcharge as an interim solution, but there was no such mechanism within the legislation. It was proposed that the Council would review its current tariff, undertake the statutory consultation before seeking formal adoption of the proposed fees.

The Committee was surprised to learn that the tariff had not been reviewed for eight years; D King explained that the tariff had been reviewed in 2017 but there had been no increases applied. The Committee felt that the tariff should be reviewed on a more frequent basis and that, given the current increases in fuel costs, an extra meeting of the Licensing Committee should be scheduled to agree the revised tariff if necessary.

Resolved:

- (1) That, given the current increase in fuel costs, the proposed review of the taxi fare tariff for the District be noted; and
- (2) That an extra meeting of the Licensing Committee be scheduled to agree the new taxi fare tariff if required.

24. REVIEW OF LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEE PROCEDURES

The Committee reviewed the proceedings of the Licensing Sub-Committee meetings held during the preceding six months to determine whether there were any issues of procedure, policy or organisation that required consideration.

Cllr P Keska commented that at a recent Licensing Sub-Committee meeting where he was a participant, there were issues with being able to hear the comments of the participants who had joined the meeting via Zoom. The Councillor felt that all participants should be in physical attendance at the meeting.

Some Members highlighted that parking at the Civic Offices was an issue as well for daytime meetings. The Committee was reminded that participants could park in the

nearby Cottis Lane and Bakers Lane car parks, whilst the members of the Sub-Committee would have four spaces reserved for them at the Civic Offices.

25. REVIEW OF CURRENT AND FUTURE TRAINING NEEDS FOR THE COMMITTEE

The Team Manager for Licensing, D King, informed the Committee that there had been no recent changes in legislation to require all members of the Licensing Committee to undertake further training. Cllr K Williamson commented that he had undertaken an online training course for Licensing, but had actually learnt more from watching the webcasts of some recent meetings.

26. MATTERS ARISING

Cllr P Keska proposed a motion that all participants should be in physical attendance at future meetings of the Licensing Sub-Committee; this motion was seconded by Cllr B Rolfe.

The Team Manager for Democratic & Electoral Services, G Woodhall, advised that meetings of the Licensing Sub-Committee were governed by the Licensing Act 2003 rather than the Local Government Act 1972, and therefore virtual participation by applicants and objectors was permissible.

The Committee accepted the advice, but Cllr M Sartin commented that Members got a better sense of the mood for an application when the participants were in physical attendance rather than in attendance via Zoom. It was also pointed out that the Government was encouraging a return to normality after the Covid lockdowns of the previous two years.

Cllr P Stalker felt that the Council also needed to be more customer focused and be mindful that applicants might have to shut their business for half a day to attend a hearing. The Service Manager for Regulatory Services, S Devine, suggested that the Council could organise the meetings more effectively so that participants were not wanting for an hour or more before their particular case was heard.

Cllr M Sartin commented that interested parties made representations in writing before the meeting stating their point of view and why. Whereas, the applicants generally only filled in the required application form and did not add a letter outlining the reasons for their application.

Resolved:

- (1) That, from the start of the 2022/23 municipal year, all participants be required to be in physical attendance at meetings of the Licensing Sub-Committee.

27. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee noted that the date of its next meeting was currently 19 October 2022.

The Chairman informed the Committee that the Service Manager for Regulatory Services, S Devine, would be retiring after 32 years' service with the Council and, on behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked S Devine for her contribution to the Council.

CHAIRMAN