

# **Report to Licensing Committee**

**Date of meeting: 13 October 2021**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Subject: Licensing Sub-Committee Meetings**

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**Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry, 01992 564246**

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## **Recommendations:**

**That the Committee consider how they would like to continue holding their Sub-Committee meetings, either virtually on Zoom or in the Council Chamber or as a hybrid meeting.**

## **Background**

Over the past 18 months or so, because of the pandemic, we have been holding Licensing Sub-Committee meetings virtually, via Zoom. This was undertaken as a necessity to enable the Council to continue to carry out its business as usual.

Since the country has opened up again and face to face meetings have become viable and, in some cases, a legal necessity, we have continued to hold Licensing Sub-Committee meetings on Zoom. We had been advised that as the licensing laws came under a different Act, we could continue holding these meetings virtually. Virtual meetings continued to be held due to the fact that in the early days of the relaxation of the meeting restrictions, it was still uncertain how safe face to face meetings were and the Civic Offices were not ready at that time to accommodate full public meetings.

## **Report**

1. We now, however, need to consider the situation and make a more formal decision on how (and where) we hold the Licensing Sub-Committee meetings. The pros and cons are listed out below. It should be noted that following legal advice, any taxi driver licensing meetings will have to be physical meetings as they come under a different Act. This would also be true for any Gambling or Street Trading applications as they too come under different legislation.
2. However, premises applications and associated application categories can still be held virtually.
3. In coming to a decision on whether to hold a meeting, either virtually or physically, members should consider the following.
4. For / Against holding virtual meetings:
  - Members of the public attending the Sub-committee will not have to wait in the Civic Offices for their case to be heard, they would be at home or their office monitoring the meeting until needed;
  - Occasionally there may be technical/connection problems which may mean an objector or applicant could not participate. All technical difficulties that have occurred have been addressed and not impacted upon the proceedings;
  - The same may be said for the members of the Sub-committee although we do always have a fourth member attending in case of problems;

- Participants remain muted throughout the meeting, this allows focused attention, on the speaker;
- It is easier to exclude or mute a disruptive abusive speaker (with Chairman's permission);
- Interested members of the public can watch the meetings live via the webcast;
- There is also the Working Greener aspect of not travelling into the office with reduced carbon emission associated with reduced travel;
- Internet speeds may limit the effectiveness, but meetings can be accessed from anywhere (with Invite).

5. For / Against holding physical meetings in the Civic Offices:

- These will be held in a more formal situation, in the Council Chamber, where it may be said to be easier to question witnesses;
- No technical difficulties would interrupt the meetings;
- The meetings would also be webcast for interested members of the public to watch;
- As these will be daytime meetings it must be noted that the Council Offices now have significantly less parking available, aside from Council officers, the building will hold outside partners for the Council, such as the library, CAB and VAEF and also the private tenants on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. We will also have lost the rear car park;
- Members will also have to book their own parking space or if unavailable, park at the nearest public car park;
- Officers cannot guarantee a second private room to hold their private deliberations in;
- It may be possible to have witnesses join the meeting virtually to give their statements as happens presently at Planning Sub-Committee meetings (Hybrid meeting);
- It is easier for the Chairman to sign the decisions sheet of that meeting.

6. Members are asked to consider the alternatives and indicate how they would like the Licensing Sub-Committee meetings to continue.