

REGULATORY SERVICES COMMITTEE MEETING

MINUTES

of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth, on Wednesday 4 December 2019 from 7.30pm to 7.55pm.

Councillors present: Councillors Martin Trevett (Chairman), Steve Drury (Vice-Chairman), Joy Mann, Shanti Maru, Roger Seabourne and Alison Wall (substitute for Donna Duncan).

Officers: Matthew Roberts, Team Leader Projects and Compliance
Mike Simpson, Committee and Web Officer

RG07/19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Donna Duncan (Alison Wall substituted), Stephen King, Stephen Cox (substitute for Stephen King) and Paula Hiscocks.

RG08/19 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Regulatory Services Committee Meeting held on 19 June 2019 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed by the Chairman

RG09/19 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

None received.

RG10/19 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

There was none.

RG11/19 REVIEW OF LICENSING FEES AND CHARGES

The Team Leader for Projects and Compliance introduced the Fees and Charges report, to be effective from 1 April 2020. It was previously agreed that the report would be presented to the Committee prior to going out for public consultation in December/January, but did not require consideration by the Regulatory Services Committee as the proposals were under the remit of the Leisure, Environment and Community Committee.

Since the beginning of the year a review for all discretionary fees for Licensing had been undertaken by Officers in conjunction with Finance. Members were asked to note that this review did not look at fees which were set by Government (which included premises licences and temporary event notices, for example).

By law, the Council can only set licensing fees based on cost recovery. The review therefore concentrated on the administration work involved when processing the relevant applications, costs of developing policies, special equipment, materials or resources required and monitoring and compliance work.

The review undertaken was a partial cost recovery exercise as it excluded some on-costs (i.e. cost of running the building). If on-costs were applied, the proposed fees would be considerably higher than neighbouring authorities which could lead to significant reductions in volumes and subsequent income.

The estimated total increase in revenue as a result of the review was approximately £8,520 based on existing volumes which would partially cover the costs of processing the relevant licences by the department.

The proposed fees also included new services such as the ability for customers to apply for dual licences, charges for replacement equipment such as brackets and door stickers and exemptions. A new tiered fee charging structure for private hire operators was also proposed, based on the number of licenced vehicles per operator.

The fees exceeded the proposed 4% inflation rate as they were based on partial cost recovery and had been carefully determined.

The recommendation agreed by Leisure, Environment and Community Committee was Option 1, to increase fees as proposed based on partial cost recovery.

The Chairman said that as the fees had not been reviewed for more than three years the increases proposed might appear steeper than was really the case. The Team Leader for Projects and Compliance said the delay in drawing up a new fee tariff was due largely to not having an officer in post.

A Member asked whether the budget was managed by Watford Borough Council, and what were the exemptions? The Team Leader for Projects and Compliance said it was not a shared service so revenue would belong to Three Rivers. He said that Watford Borough Council had its own licensing arrangements in place and although their tariff was used as a benchmark, as was Chiltern District Council, there were clear differences between Watford and Three Rivers, one of which being a night-time economy that necessitated the issuing of more taxi licences.

With regard to exemptions, the Team Leader for Projects and Compliance said they applied to operators who for whatever reason did not wish to display a plate e.g. when conveying VIP passengers.

A Member referred to Appendix 1 and the proposed fee of £1.60 for an internal plate holder replacement. The administrative costs in processing such a small fee would far outweigh the sum charged, and there surely was an argument for applying a minimum charge of £10. The Team Leader for Projects and Compliance noted the suggestion, and said it would form part of the consultation.

A Member cited some of the other low fees listed, and agreed that there was a strong case for applying a minimum charge of £10.

A Member was concerned that the Regulatory Services Committee would not see the results of the public consultation, but instead went back to the Leisure, Environment and Community Committee. It was requested that, in the event of any significant issues arising from the public consultation, an extraordinary meeting of the Regulatory Services Committee be convened, although Members accepted the public response was unlikely to warrant it.

POST MEETING NOTE:

The report was presented to the Committee as a courtesy and to obtain any feedback. The budget for the fees was within the Leisure, Environment and Community Committee although the setting of the fees would be for Policy and Resources Committee to recommend to Council as part of the budget setting process.

A Member asked why Three Rivers issued a scrap metal licence to a specified trader when it had obtained permission from County to operate. The Team Leader for Projects and Compliance replied that the District Council was required to issue a licence to scrap metal dealers, and there had been recent changes to legislation in this area.

A Member suggested that the £10 minimum charge for licensing fees form part of the recommendations for introducing at a future date. The Team Leader for Projects and Compliance said the concern was that a considerable price hike might deter operators from updating their equipment, and the Council would be unaware of it.

A Member asked whether street-trading licences allowed vendors at one-off events to trade in areas outside the issuing authority, and cited ice-cream vans at a cricket match at Merchant Taylors' School that were not licensed by Three Rivers. The Team Leader for Projects and Compliance replied that ice cream vans, of which Three Rivers had a dwindling number, were required to obtain a licence from this authority but the Council would not necessarily know of transgressions.

Councillor Martin Trevett, seconded by Councillor Steve Drury, moved the recommendations as set out in the report but adding two additional recommendations that in the unlikely event of significant issues being raised in the public consultation an Extraordinary meeting of the Regulatory Service Committee be convened, and a minimum charge of £10 to licensees be considered for introducing at a future date.

On being put to the Committee the recommendations on the Licensing fees with the two additional amendments was declared CARRIED by the Chairman the voting unanimous.

RESOLVED:

That the Members of the Committee agreed:

- i. To authorise that Option 1 be submitted for public consultation and afterwards to Leisure, Environment and Community Committee, Policy and Resources Committee and Full Council.

- ii. That TRDC Environmental Health fees will match those of Watford Borough Council, a shared service.
- iii. That in the unlikely event of significant issues being raised in the public consultation an Extraordinary meeting of the Regulatory Services Committee be convened, and
- iv. A minimum charge of £10 to licensees be considered for introducing at a future date.

RG012/19 REGULATORY SERVICES COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Regulatory Services work programme and had nothing to add to it.

Both items were expected to be discussed at the February meeting of the Regulatory Services Committee, and in particular the Polling Station statutory review as it needed to be addressed prior to the local elections in May 2020.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee noted the items included in the work programme.

CHAIRMAN