

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
LICENSING COMMITTEE

held on 13 March 2018

Present:

Cllr D Harlow (Chairman)
Cllr Mrs H J Addison (Vice-Chair)

Cllr M A Bridgeman	Cllr R Mohammed
Cllr I Eastwood	Cllr M Pengelly
Cllr J Kingsbury	Cllr C Rana

Apologies: Councillor K Howard

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Committee held on 23 January 2018 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor R Mohammed declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in minute item 3 – Overview of Licensing 2017/18 – arising from his position as a taxi operator. The interest was such that Councillor Mohammed left the Chamber during consideration of the taxi part of the agenda item. Joanne McIntosh, Legal Services Manager, stated that the report could therefore be dealt with in two parts, firstly the alcohol related matters and subsequently the taxi matters.

3. OVERVIEW OF LICENSING 2017-18

Jon Herbert, Licensing Officer, reported that that much work was taking place in the area of alcohol licensing, including enforcement and inspection of premises licences. The relaunch of Best Bar None was taking place, led by Business Liaison with the Licensing team undertaking assessments of premises and licensing advice. An annual report from Best Bar None was available and the initial letters were being circulated to every licensed pub and bar to encourage their participation in the scheme, with a minimum of 30 premises being expected to take part. An initial steering group meeting had been held to consider the criteria which would be used for assessment. Screenshots from the Council's website were circulated as well as a sample letter to illustrate the branding being used. A mobile phone app was being developed to provide guidance to members of the public who were interested in voting, as long as details of public transport links in Woking. A People's Choice award would also be available, along with some specific award categories for restaurants. The focus of the scheme was to ensure a safer night-time economy.

Following a question by Councillor Eastwood, it was stated that the premises successfully completing the accreditation process would be marked gold, silver or bronze and given a plaque and a sticker to display. Jon Herbert stated that the award categories were still under development and were likely to change, with the expected addition of awards for restaurants.

Following a question by Councillor Mohammed, it was noted that shops selling alcohol had not previously been involved in the scheme, as the focus was on premises where the public could consume alcohol on the premises.

Councillor Pengelly welcomed the scheme, noting that the four Licensing objectives would form part of the assessment criteria, and asked whether compliance with the objectives would apply to the People's Choice award. Jon Herbert stated that the objectives would be broken down into smaller categories and that the public would tend to just vote on the app, although they would have access to the licensing information available on the Council's website.

Additionally, Councillor Pengelly suggested that a hygiene element be incorporated into awards in the restaurant category to demonstrate high standards and it was noted that consideration was being given to setting a minimum of hygiene rating of 'four' and above, in liaison with the Environmental Health team. The figure of 30 premises was regarded as a minimum and it had been four years since the scheme had last been operated, although many of the larger brewery chains required their pubs to participate.

The Chairman stated that it was important to encourage as many of the independent local premises as possible to take part so that the standards across the Borough could be heightened. Reference was made to requiring premises to be a member of Pubwatch and Matt Cobb, Senior Licensing Officer, stated that the work on Pubwatch was ongoing, sharing information and discussing local issues. However, the number of participating premises had reduced due to the recent fall in crime levels during the night-time economy. Joanne McIntosh added that there were currently no particular areas of concern to report to the Committee in the area of alcohol licensing.

The Committee moved onto the area of taxi licensing (Councillor Mohammed left the Chamber for the remainder of the item).

Matt Cobb stated that the new taxi handbook was now available on the Council's website which acted as a knowledge base for drivers, Councillors and members of the public. A Private Hire Operator's handbook was also available and set out the expectation of the operators, which was useful for potential applicants. The Surrey-wide Conviction Policy was being adhered to following its recent approval, with the Council already having been carrying out the vast majority of the standards contained within it.

The new BTEC qualification had been agreed at the previous meeting and work was taking place to ensure that all drivers were made aware that they had a time limit of three years to gain the qualification. Consideration was also being given to other courses, for example by organisations such as City and Guilds, as drivers were coming forward to state that a similar course had been completed, which could be accepted by the Council as an alternative to the BTEC. Stickers would be provided to the drivers to display in the cars once the qualification had been completed and registered with the Council.

Child Sexual Exploitation training was being provided by Barnardo's and all drivers were required to undertake the course immediately to raise their awareness of this vital area.

Also contained within the report were statistics setting out the number of drivers working within the Borough and details of licence revocations and suspensions.

Following a question by Councillor Kingsbury, it was noted that the reaction of drivers to the handbook contained information they should be already aware of, and that a couple of taxi drivers had objected to having to undertake the BTEC qualification as an existing driver. A total of 272 requests for temporary event notices had been received over the past year, all to be processed in a statutory timeframe, with generally around 300 expected each year. Regarding the six or seven garages in the Borough, along with the test centre in Guildford, which were licensed to carry out vehicle inspections for taxis, officers were considering placing the contract back out to tender so that improvements could be made to the process.

Following a question by Councillor Rana, Matt Cobb undertook to email the Committee with the number of Hackney Carriage drivers and Private Hire drivers operating in the Borough. One of the differences between the two services was that Private Hire drivers were not required to keep a log of their journeys, however the introduction of CCTV at the town centre taxi rank should assist with keeping the two types of taxis separate.

Councillor Pengelly welcomed the increase in reporting annually which benefited scrutiny and stated that the number of revocations was in line with expectations. Officers were thanked for their extensive work over the past year.

Following a suggestion by the Chairman, it was noted to be beneficial for members of the Licensing Committee to have access to the Taxi Handbook for when queries were received by members of the public, which could be viewed online or in paper format. Members would be made aware of the handbook in the annual Members training session.

RESOLVED That the report be noted.

4. VOTE OF THANKS

Councillor Kingsbury thanked the Chairman for chairing the meetings of the Committee over the past Municipal Year.

The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm
and ended at 7.35 pm

Chairman: _____

Date: _____