

OVERVIEW OF LICENSING 2021 - 2022

Executive Summary

This report has been drafted to provide the Licensing Committee with an overview of the Licensing Department's work in 2021 – 2022. This year has some seen a partial return to normality following the disruption caused by the COVID 19 pandemic. As such, the report outlines some of the steps taken by the department to continue to work in a post-pandemic society and adapt our processes moving forward together with usual statistics and overview of the year.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That the report be noted.

The Committee has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

Background Papers: None.

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report has been drafted to provide the Licensing Committee with an overview of the Licensing Department's work in 2021 – 2022.
- 1.2 The department has taken steps to assist drivers and businesses to continue to work where possible, however as Covid continues to decline, the Department has had to work hard to ensure that we return to pre-Covid standards and meet our requirements as a licence issuing authority and continue to ensure the safety of the travelling public and to achieve this has worked closely with Environmental Health and Surrey Police.

2.0 Implications

Financial and Risk

- 2.1 None arising from this report.

Equalities and Human Resources

- 2.2 None arising from this report.

Legal

- 2.3 The Council is the licensing authority for the purposes of the Licensing Act 2003, the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 and the Policing and Crime Act 2017 for matters such as Premises Licences and Taxi and Private Hire.

3.0 Corporate Strategy

- 3.1 The Council's statutory responsibilities contribute to promoting a strong and vibrant economy and the protection of the local and travelling public.

4.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 4.1 None.

Overview of the year

Following the drastic changes made in the 2020/2021 year which allowed the Licensing Authority to ensure it was maintaining standards whilst also minimising interruption to drivers (see the “Overview of Licensing 2019-2020” from the October 2020 Licensing Committee and “Overview of Licensing 2020-2021” from the June 2021 Licensing Committee for further information) the department has continued to work hard to maintain a balance between delivering a high level of service and ensuring the safety of the travelling public.

Details of the numbers of licences received and issued (with comparison to last year) can be found in Appendix 1.

Audit

As part of the Woking Borough Council Internal Audit Plan for 2021/22 agreed by the Standards and Audit Committee, an external Audit Company (Mazars) carried out an Audit of the control frameworks adequacy and effectiveness of Taxi Licensing processes.

This audit was included in the Plan due as part of a cyclical review. The last review in the 2017/18 financial year received an overall satisfactory assurance which brought about six recommendations, all of which were taken on board and used to improve the processes.

The 2021/2022 Audit Plan identified three areas where improvement was available.

- **Monitoring, Inspections and Enforcement – Penalty Points and the documenting of decisions**

This came about because the Penalty Points Policy had been misunderstood and the Auditors misconstrued why *less* than the maximum number of points had been issued. The points system table indicates the maximum amount of points that can be issued and this was explained in the post report review with the Audit Team

- **Application process – Cover Sheets**

The suggestion of coversheets on reviews was previously raised in the 2017/2018 Audit Report recommendation and it was one that the Licensing Department had put into practice. Unfortunately the audit took place at the time of the Covid Pandemic with the majority of officers working from home. Consequently a cover sheet on a paper application was not possible, or not centralised, due to changes in working practices. Regardless, the department took on their suggestion and have implemented a digital cover sheet on the Iken document management system which can be accessed and edited by all officers and helps provide a clearer picture of officers checking the status of an application, and ensuring all documents are received before issuing the licence. One of the previously raised recommendations was raised again in this report relating to attaching coversheets in the relevant system.

- **Staff Training**

The Audit team suggested that formal or external staff training could be a requirement. It was pointed out to the Audit Team that both the Senior Licensing Officer and the longer serving Licensing Officer had attended various training courses prior to the pandemic, however the newest member of staff, who had started in August 2020 (at the height of the pandemic) had not yet been able to carry out any external training due to the working practices (all staff working from

home) not allowing it, and due to no external companies offering courses during the Covid Pandemic.

Hackney Carriage Fare Preliminary Investigation

Recently the department has received a petition from the Hackney Trade in light of the rising fuel costs and general cost of living, requesting a re-evaluation of the Fare Chart for Hackney Carriages (i.e. the metered, maximum rate they can charge).

The Fare prices for Woking's Hackney Carriages have not been fully evaluated for a number of years and as such it has been decided to carry out a thorough overhaul of this process. This process is not swift which may mean some drivers will struggle with the current rates until such time as they can be adjusted.

The proposed process at this time is to use a method for working out the fares based on a number of factors (not just fuel costs, but all associated costs with owning and driving a Hackney Carriage). This method is tried and tested and has been upheld at a Judicial Review in a neighbouring authority and so we feel it is robust and will provide a benefit to the drivers. This method will be taken to the Executive so that we can have the authority to carry out the necessary changes and further reports will be presented to the Councillors in relation to this change.

Appendix 1 – Figures for 2021-2022 with comparisons to previous year

	Sep-21		Oct-21		Nov-21		Dec-21		Jan-22		Feb-22		Mar-22		Apr-22		May-22	
Driver Applications received	15	(+6)	13	(-5)	28	(-1)	52	(+15)	36	(+18)	31	(+14)	39	(+25)	13	(+4)	20	(+7)
Driver Licences issued	17	(-4)	13	(-5)	16	(-12)	39	(+16)	39	(+19)	26	(+12)	43	(+18)	21	(+6)	18	(+2)
Vehicle Applications received	58	(-9)	55	(+3)	57	(-5)	46	(-1)	44	(+8)	45	(+4)	42	(-16)	29	(+2)	33	(+5)
Vehicle Licences issued	58	(-10)	57	(+8)	61	(-1)	48	(+3)	46	(+11)	41	(+0)	44	(-14)	29	(+2)	36	(+1)
Premises Licences	8	(-1)	6	(-4)	12	(+5)	6	(-1)	7	(+5)	14	(+8)	10	(+3)	7	(+3)	5	(-5)
Personal Licences	3	(-1)	3	(-5)	3	(+2)	8	(+6)	4	(+3)	7	(+5)	7	(+3)	1	(-1)	3	(-4)
Temporary Event Notices	17	(+13)	17	(+11)	33	(+29)	10	(+6)	7	(+6)	7	(+7)	23	(+22)	14	(+11)	15	(+5)

Current drivers	529
Current vehicles	456
Current licenced premises	258
Current licenced clubs	38
Current personal licence holders	1268
Current pending premises licences	3
Current pending drivers apps	52
Current pending vehicles apps	0