

18 JANUARY 2008

**NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Friday, 18 January 2008.

- p Cllr L R Puttock (Chairman)
- p Cllr A E J Shotter (Vice-Chairman)

**Councillors:**

- p G C Beck
- p J A G Hutchins
- p Mrs P Jackman
- p Mrs M McLean
- p J Penwarden
- A W Rice TD
- p W S Rippon-Swaine

**Councillors:**

- p R F Scrivens
- p Mrs B Smith
- e M S Wade
- p S S Wade
- p P R Woods
- e Mrs P A Wyeth

**Officers Attending:**

Mrs M Dunsmore and T Hetherington and, for part of the meeting, Miss T Harwood, Mrs D Holmes, A Michel and Mrs R Rutins.

**29. MINUTES.**

**RESOLVED:**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2007, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**30. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

No declarations of interest were made by members in connection with any agenda items.

**31. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.**

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

**32. REVENUE ESTIMATES 2008/2009 (REPORT A).**

The Committee considered the draft revenue estimates for 2008/09.

Members were informed that the estimated revenue expenditure for 2008/09 was £680,000 which was an increase of 3.3% from the original 2007/08 budget for the Committee. Members were also made aware that in order to achieve a 3% Council Tax increase further budget reductions totalling £547,000 were required.

The Committee reiterated their endorsement of the expenditure plan bid for the Enforcement Officer post.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That it be recommended to the Cabinet that the revenue estimates for 2008/09 be approved; and
- (b) That the Cabinet be recommended to agree the detailed estimates and the additional items set out in Appendix 2 to Report A to the Committee.

**33. DISTRICT AND PARISH ELECTIONS MAY 2007 – COSTS AND ASSOCIATED MATTERS (REPORT B).**

The Committee discussed the costs of the elections in May 2007 and the costs of low usage polling stations.

Some members expressed their concern regarding the cost per elector at the identified low usage stations, in particular at Fritham Free Church where the cost was estimated as £15.57. It was felt by some that this was too great a cost for such a small minority and that these individuals should be encouraged to vote by post. On the other hand, other members felt that it was an individuals' democratic right to vote and that stations should be provided whatever the cost.

Members recognised that, in the case of Fritham Free Church, the delayed poll could have led to a lower turnout and this might have impacted on the voting statistics. The Committee had agreed at their last meeting not to implement changes at the low turnout stations until after the next parliamentary elections, when further statistics could be gathered and when a more meaningful comparative analysis could be made.

Members considered the results of the Citizens' Panel Survey of the involvement in, and perception of the elections.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the report be noted; and
- (b) That no action be taken in respect of low usage polling stations at this stage but that the matter be considered further after the next parliamentary elections.

**34. APPLICATION TO INCREASE THE GENERAL TARIFF FOR HACKNEY CARRIAGES IN THE DISTRICT (REPORT C).**

The Committee considered the request made by the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Owners' Association to increase the general tariff for Hackney Carriages in the District.

Mr M Hunt, Chairman of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Owners' Association was in attendance and addressed the Committee. He stated that the ethos of the Association was to strive to be proactive in its approach to ensure the quality of the taxi fleet. The Association had met recently to discuss the implications of fuel and other related cost increases and considered that an increase was necessary to cover these additional costs.

With the agreement of this Committee the last tariff change was implemented on 31 January 2007. It was usual policy of the Committee to review the tariffs every two years and increase tariffs by an inflation only increase based on the Index produced in the Monthly Digest of Statistics.

Officers informed members that figures taken from the Monthly Digest of Statistics showed that from April 2006 to October 2007 fuel had increased by 10.93%. Whilst recognising that different Local Authorities set their tariffs at different times throughout the year, they considered that other neighbouring authorities would more than likely consider a change in their tariffs due to the dramatic increase in petrol and diesel prices.

The Committee recognised that the Association were reluctant to further increase tariffs as this could lead to loss of business but had no real choice other than to do so in the light of the increase in fuel prices.

The Committee were supportive of the proposals set out by the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Owners' Association. They considered that the maximum fare should be increased to compensate for the recent fuel price increase, but were aware that operators could charge customers less if this was commercially viable.

**RESOLVED:**

That the maximum hackney carriage fares be increased as shown in Appendix 1 to these minutes.

**35. CONSIDERATION OF CHANGES TO TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE LEGISLATION IN THE ROAD SAFETY ACT 2006 (REPORT D).**

The Committee considered changes to Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle legislation in the Road Safety Act 2006.

The legislation repealed the 7 day contract exemption for private hire operators, vehicles and drivers. This now meant that any vehicle defined as a private hire vehicle had to be licensed as such by the Council. The new requirements would now apply to a wider range of vehicles and operators including chauffeurs, executive hire cars and hotels cars etc. The new regulations would come into force on 28 January 2008.

The legislation meant that the Council could now carry out suitability and safety checks on a wider range of vehicles, and it was hoped that this would help users feel more secure when travelling.

These changes will also impact on stretched limousines. However, this type of vehicle does not currently comply with council policy and as a result the vehicle policy will be dealt with as a separate issue by the Committee at its next meeting in March.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the power given under Section 52 of the Road Safety Act 2006 giving Licensing Authorities the power to suspend or revoke a taxi or Private Hire Vehicle driver's licence with immediate effect where they are of the opinion that the interests of public safety require such a course of action be noted;
- (b) The removal of the 7 day contract exemption in respect of private hire operators, vehicles and drivers be noted;
- (c) That it be agreed that when assessing profitability in the case of a non-profitable occasional voluntary service, the calculation be carried out by reference to the method devised and tested by HM Revenue and Customs and in force at the time; and
- (d) That a change to local the knowledge section of the driver awareness test be authorised so that assessment be primarily by way of route planning ability.

**36. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS 2007/08 AND KEY TARGETS 2008/09 (REPORT E).**

The Committee considered key achievements for 2007/08 and key targets for 2008/09.

The Committee were pleased to hear that the majority of the licences to be renewed under the Licensing Act 2003 had now been completed.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the assessment of performance against the Committee's 2007/08 targets be agreed; and
- (b) That the proposed SMART targets for 2008/09 as set out in Appendix 2 to Report E to the Committee be agreed.

**37. CORPORATE CONSULTATIONS – INCLUDING CITIZENS' PANEL AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S PANEL (REPORT F).**

The Committee reviewed the Citizens' Panel and Young People's Panel consultations undertaken in 2007/08 and discussed possible topics for questionnaires to be considered for input into the programme for 2008/09.

The Committee felt that it was necessary and important for the Young People's Panel's views to be sought on the texting service and community safety issues.

The Committee looked forward to receiving the results of the questionnaire which sought the views on the impact of the licensing hearings, held under the Licensing Act 2003.

**RESOLVED:**

That the corporate consultations conducted in 2007/08 be noted.

CHAIRMAN