

11 SEPTEMBER 2009

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, 11 September 2009.

- e Cllr P R Woods (Chairman)
- p Cllr A W Rice TD (Vice-Chairman) (in the chair)

Councillors:

- e G C Beck
- p W H Dow
- p J A G Hutchins
- p Mrs P Jackman
- p Mrs M McLean
- p J Penwarden
- p W S Rippon-Swaine

Councillors:

- p A E J Shotter
- p R F Scrivens
- p Mrs B Smith
- p M S Wade
- p S S Wade
- p Mrs P A Wyeth

In Attendance:

Councillor:

C A Wise (Finance and Efficiency Portfolio Holder)

Officers Attending:

Mrs R Rutins, Ms M Stephens, S Stone, P Weston, and for part of the meeting, R Jackson, Mrs M Sandhu and K Smith.

4. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 13 March, 3 April and 18 May 2009, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as correct records.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

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

6. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

7. HEALTH AND SAFETY INTERVENTION PLAN 2009/10 (REPORT A).

The Committee considered the Health and Safety Intervention Plan for 2009/10 and a review of the Health and Safety Initial Intervention Plan for 2008/09.

The Intervention Plan for 2009/10 was largely based on the standard issued by the Health and Safety Commission and included a statement of commitment from the Council to improve standards and partnership working.

Some members expressed the view that the element of the plan to mail shot premises with UV tanning equipment with guidance should be extended to include likely users. It was suggested that as part of its health and well-being role the Council could send out press releases to inform of the associated risks of sun bed usage.

The Council worked in close partnership with the Health and Safety Executive and relied on their advice when issuing guidance to local businesses.

The Council equally worked closely with local businesses to ensure that information from inspections were properly filtered down to employees. The Council advised on various communication methods that businesses could use to make staff aware of health and safety issues such as presenting information in pay slips, posters and notice boards.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Intervention Plan for 2009/2010 be approved;
- (b) That in accordance with the Health and Safety Commission guidance, the Chairman signs the Intervention Plan as approval on behalf of the Committee; and
- (c) That the review of the Service Plan for 2008/09, set out in Appendix 2 to Report B, be approved.

8. ADVERTISEMENTS ON HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES (REPORT B).

The Committee considered a request from the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Owners' Association to review the Council's policy regarding external advertisements on both hackney carriage and private hire vehicles.

The Council currently limited the form of advertising on hackney carriage and private hire vehicles. Self advertisement only was permitted for private hire vehicles on one door of each side of the vehicle. In contrast the policy relating to the advertising on hackney carriage vehicles allowed for either self or third party advertising but not a combination of both, restricted to the display on the two front doors only. The name and telephone number of the company could also be displayed on the rear of the vehicle.

The Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Association supported a request that private hire operators be allowed to display third party advertisements akin to those permitted for hackney carriages.

Mr Prout, a Private Hire Operator, was in attendance and addressed the Committee. He explained that he had recently been approached by a sponsor to use his vehicle for advertising. Mr Prout stressed that other Local Authorities allowed this practice. Mr Prout felt that both private hire and hackney carriages should be subject to the same policies, and not allowing advertising put private hire operators at a disadvantage. Mr Prout therefore asked the Committee to support the proposals that both Hackney Carriages and Private Hire operators be allowed to advertise on their vehicles.

Mr Shearing, Secretary to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Owners' Association, was also in attendance and said that all members of the Association were in favour of the proposals as this was a good way to provide operators with additional revenue. They commended Option C to the Committee.

Members were in support of the proposals from the taxi trade so long the driver's views were not obstructed by the advertisements. The maintenance of passenger safety was of paramount importance to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That hackney carriage and private hire vehicles be allowed to display both self and third party advertising, subject to approval by the Licensing Officer; and
- (b) That there be no restrictions on the positioning of advertisements providing that the Licensing Officers is satisfied that safety is not compromised.

9. ALTERNATIVE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE COUNCIL'S CATERING AT APPLETREE COURT (REPORT C).

The Committee considered proposals to change the catering arrangements at Appletree Court.

Over the last few years the usage of the Café Revitalise had steadily decreased, despite efforts to encourage greater patronage. On average, only 15 hot meals per day were purchased by staff. The daily income was now in the region of £80. Café Revitalise currently employed one full time and two part-time employees. The shortage of income and cost of overheads meant that the Café had become economically unviable.

As an alternative to the Cafe, it was proposed that the use of a visiting van selling sandwiches etc at lunchtimes would be more feasible.

Member meetings would continue to be serviced and it was suggested that an external provider could be used to cater for these. In relation to the serving of teas and coffees at member and officer meetings, the kitchen next to the Members' Lounge at Appletree Court would be used for storage and preparation of drinks.

Furthermore it had been suggested that a post be created to prepare hot drinks for member and external meetings when required. Currently 90 such meetings per year took place. The required hours for the postholder would be approximately 4 hours per meeting.

The revised arrangements would save an estimated £36,000 per annum.

Edward Vandyck was in attendance to represent the employee side. He said that employees had raised concerns regarding the removal of the facility, not only the provision of hot food, where they considered a visiting van would not be suitable, but the loss of a designated eating area. Currently employees had the benefit of using the Cafe to take time away from their desks and it was felt that the removal of this facility gave the message that the Council did not value the wellbeing of its staff. He further pointed out that once the facility was removed it would be hard to reinstate in the future.

Some members commented that whilst there were a large number of signatures on the petition which had been handed to the Leader of the Council, few employees out of the 300 based at Appletree Court still used the service. Members also recognised 200 employees based at Lymington Town Hall did not have a canteen, and that there should be consistency of provision being offered to staff.

The Committee expressed the view that seeking discounts from retailers in Lyndhurst village was inappropriate as villagers and regular customers would feel at a disadvantage. It was therefore agreed that this be not pursued.

Some members expressed the view that the limited usage by staff and members of Revitalise meant that it was no longer a sensible option to maintain the current service in its current form. Members were of the view that the change in working practices and lifestyle meant that staff were using alternative means in their lunchtimes such as making their own food, which meant that the service provided by Revitalise was redundant.

On the other hand, some members felt that the Council had a duty of care to its employees and that provision of food and a suitable room to eat was essential for the well-being of staff. They felt that a visiting van was a poor option, especially in bad weather where staff might have to queue in the rain for meals.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency was in attendance and said that the service at Revitalise was not being used as staff catered for themselves, largely because this was a cheaper option for employees. The proposal to change the current catering arrangements was in response to this change in usage. The Council was merely tailoring the service to meet the present demand. He said that the service would continue but in an alternative format.

Members expressed the view that whilst they were sympathetic to the current users of Revitalise, these were few, and that the Council could not afford during this economic downturn, to maintain current arrangements when these could be met via alternative means and would be far more economically viable. Members were in the main happy with the proposals as they dealt adequately with the change in the demand for the current service.

In summarising the debate Officers said that the Council should offer a consistent service to all staff not just those based at Appletree Court. However, space for breakout rooms for staff would be investigated.

RECOMMENDED:

That with effect from January 2010, employee catering at Appletree Court be provided in the manner set out in paragraph 3 of Report C to the Committee.

10. INCREASE IN MEMBERS ON EAST BOLDRE PARISH COUNCIL – COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEWS (REPORT D).

The Committee considered a request from East Boldre Parish Council to increase the number of members on the parish council. The process for undertaking a Community Governance Review in response to the request was noted.

The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 placed a duty on District Councils to undertake a “community governance review” (CGR) every 10 - 15 years. A CGR review allowed Councils to consider electoral arrangements in their area, including the number of councillors on parish councils.

Aside from dealing with the request put forward by East Boldre Parish Council, Officers were not aware of any issues which might require a comprehensive review across the District. That felt, however that all town and parish councils should be asked if they had any issues relating to their parish areas or electoral arrangements that they wished to address.

Members discussed the difficulties faced by many parishes in managing their increasing workloads and were therefore supportive of East Boldre’s request to increase their membership.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That a Community Governance Review be undertaken in the East Boldre Parish area with a view to increasing the number of parish councillors from 5 to 7, with the terms of reference set out in Appendix 1 to Report D to the Committee; and
- (b) That all parish and town councils be asked for their views on whether a Community Governance Review is needed within their area.

11. PROMOTING PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS (REPORT E).

The Electoral Administration Act 2006 introduced a duty on electoral registration and returning officers to “promote participation” in the electoral process. The MoJ provided funding to electoral registration authorities to assist in fulfilling this duty.

Members discussed the various ways in which the Council could fulfil its statutory duty in promoting electoral participation including ensuring that university students were aware of their right to a postal vote. The Electoral Commission had, for many years, worked closely with University student unions to ensure that students were aware of the different mechanisms to vote, in an effort to increase voting for this age group.

Members recognised that there was increased apathy about voting and this was very difficult to address.

The Committee expressed the view that the options put forward by officers in the report were sensible and supported these suggestions.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Committee notes the result of the registration initiative undertaken at Totton College on 18 February 2009;

- (b) That an approach be made to the Youth Forum to develop an initiative to promote greater participation in the electoral process; and
- (c) That the LSP be advised that the Committee supports the inclusion of the democratic process in the emerging Engagement Framework and that officers explore whether there potential for this aspect to be included in any future bid to the Ministry of Justice.

CHAIRMAN

(GPLC110909)