

10 JANUARY 2025

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee held on Friday, 10 January 2025

* Cllr Neil Tungate (Chairman)

* Cllr Richard Young (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

* Steve Clarke
* Jack Davies
* Philip Dowd
* Allan Glass
* David Harrison
* David Hawkins

Councillors:

* Nigel Linford
* Colm McCarthy
* Dave Penny
* Alvin Reid
* Janet Richards

*Present

Officers Attending:

Peter Donelan, Christa Ferguson, Richard Knott, Joanne McClay, Ben Stockley and Karen Wardle

Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

10 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 April and 1 November 2024 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Davies declared a pecuniary interest in agenda item 4 as he was employed by a taxi company, he therefore reported that he would not comment or vote on this item.

12 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

13 TAXI POLICY REVIEW

Cllr Davies declared a pecuniary interest as he was employed by a taxi company, he therefore reported that he would not comment or vote on this item.

The Service Manager Environmental and Regulation introduced the report highlighting that the proposed Taxi Policy had been revised and updated following an extensive consultation exercise. 73 responses had been received from the

consultation and a number of key issues were raised for the Council to consider. The primary aim of the proposed policy was to protect the public, to ensure vehicles were safe, and that the public had confidence in using taxis in the area through the desire to improve standards, DBS checks and Code of Conduct.

The consultation responses which did not support proposed changes to the draft policy related to the age of vehicles (new and existing), the age of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAV), mid-term vehicle checks and the display of signage. The comments received had been reviewed by officers and a number of changes had been made to the policy presented to the committee as a result of this feedback. The policy would continue to be kept under regular review.

Members spoke in support to the updated policy recognising that officers had listened to the feedback received from the taxi industry and had amended the policy to address some of the concerns raised. This was particularly felt with the change to the age of WAVs, placing no restriction on the upper age of these vehicles. It was therefore hoped that the number of these vehicles on the road would not reduce.

The issue of CCTV in vehicles was raised and whilst it was not proposed at the current time to introduce CCTV, it was felt this should be reviewed for any future policy, recognising that the cost had decreased and that there were benefits to both the public and to the taxi drivers of CCTV. It was highlighted that other authorities, including the neighbouring authority of Southampton had a mandatory requirement for taxis to have CCTV installed and that this would give greater confidence to taxi users.

One member of the Committee suggested that the policy wording in relation to door stickers be reviewed to provide greater clarity and consistency of wording in relation to the door stickers, in particular the words attached / affixed. This would make it easier for taxi drivers to understand their responsibilities. The point was also made that signage must be attached as specified, and at all times whilst vehicles were licensed, and not by use of velcro or magnets. The Service Manager for Environmental and Regulation responded to these points and undertook to review the wording and amend as necessary. In addition, the taxi trade would be provided with more detail on their responsibilities in addition to the policy, as well as information being available on the Council's website.

It was also suggested that consideration be given in relation to specific training courses which could be recommended by the District Council for taxi drivers to take in order to improve standards.

RESOLVED:

That following review of responses received during the consultation, and subsequent amendments, that the draft Taxi Policy be recommended for approval by Council in February 2025.

14 LICENSING FEES AND CHARGES 2025-2026

The Committee considered the proposed licensing fees and charges for 2025/26.

The Service Manager for Environmental and Regulation reported that an annual review of charges had been carried out of non-statutory services and new charges for 2025/26 were proposed. All charges were to recover costs of providing the

service and were not to generate a profit. The services with revised charges included animal welfare, skin piercing, caravan licensing and pavement licensing.

A number of new charges were proposed to be introduced for new licenses which would have a higher initial charge, than that of renewal, which was to recognise that any new service required more officer time in order to assess the new business and therefore this would reflect the actual cost. A new area of charging was proposed for pavement licenses. It was explained that during the covid pandemic local authorities had been given authority to issue temporary pavement licenses to encourage a pavement culture supporting local businesses. The District Council had made a decision not to charge for temporary licenses but as they were now permanent, it was proposed that fees be introduced to recover the costs of delivering the service.

The report did not propose any increase to taxi licences, but officers would undertake a review of these charges and carry out a consultation exercise prior to seeking approval for any changes. The recommendation in the report was highlighted, which sought Full Council approval for a delegation to the General Purposes and Licensing Committee to approve the taxi licence charges following a public consultation.

Cllr Harrison addressed the Committee questioning the need to charge for pavement licenses recognising that business were struggling to survive following the covid pandemic and that there were benefits of outside seating for both the business and its customers. Cllr Harrison put forward a motion to remove the proposed charge in order to support local businesses. The cost of providing this service at no charge to the business would therefore be taken from reserves. Cllr J Davies seconded this motion.

The Licensing Manager provided some background and context to the licensing regime for pavements, recognising that temporary arrangements had been arranged during the pandemic. No charge had been made to businesses for these temporary pavement licenses, to help businesses operate at a difficult time. There was, however, a cost to the District Council for the administration of licensing of pavements which included, site visits, checks to ensure that the area was designated highway, that the tables and chairs did not cause an obstruction to pedestrians, etc.

The motion from Cllr Harrison was clarified in that the proposal was to provide pavement licenses at no charge to businesses but that they would continue to be regulated.

During the debate some members spoke in support of the motion expressing the view that local businesses should be supported in the current economic climate, particularly as the hospitality industry was still experiencing the negative impact of the covid pandemic. An opposing view was expressed by some members of the Committee that this would support one type of business over other businesses and would set a precedent. It was felt that this would be unfair, as well as inconsistent with the fees and charges approach for cost recovery. It was further highlighted that the charges were not profit generating. Members recognised that ultimately the cost of the charges would be paid for by the customer, and that the alternative of not charging, would be met by the taxpayer.

The Chairman clarified that there were currently six pavement licenses across the District and therefore the number of businesses affected was low.

The proposal from Cllr Harrison to remove the charges from the report for pavement licences was put to the vote and lost.

The issue of skin piercing was raised and the qualifications of the practitioner. The Food and Safety Manager reported that there were no recognised qualifications for the industry. Officers, when determining any application, would make a professional balanced judgement on the skills of the practitioner and their working practices.

RECOMMENDED:

That the General Purposes and Licensing Committee recommend to Council the following:

1. Approval of the proposed fees and charges for the financial year 2025-25, as set out in Appendix 1; and
2. That power to set the scale of fees and charges for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licences, including to consider any objections made in respect of the proposed fees, be delegated to the General Purposes and Licensing Committee

CHAIRMAN