

**Minutes of the Licensing and Safety Committee
Monday 5th February, 2024 at 6.00 pm,
In Committee Room 2 at the
Council House, Priory Road, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor A Taylor (Vice-Chair in the Chair)
Councillors J Clinton, J Cowell, T Creed, K Denning, P Drake, M Evans, A Goddard, M Howard and E Taylor.

Officers:

N Slym (Assistant Team Manager (Waste, Fleet and Licensing)), I Grosvenor (Finance Manager), R Millard (Senior Principal Accountant) and H Mills (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

7. **Apology for absence**

An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor K Razzaq.

8. **Appointment of Substitute Members**

There were no substitute Members appointed for this meeting of the Committee.

9. **Declarations of interest**

No Member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

10. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 31st May, 2023, be approved as a correct record and signed.

11. **Revision of Licence Fees**

A report of the Interim Service Director of Environment Directorate was submitted to consider the revision of fees for licences and consents, other than those where the fees were imposed by statute in respect of liquor licensing, gambling machine permits and lotteries and amusement.

The Assistant Team Manager (Waste, Fleet and Licensing) presented the report in detail, followed by the Senior Principal Accountant providing a breakdown as to how the cost of licensing administration was formulated. The reasons as to why this had increased by £38,200 from the previous financial year were outlined, which was reportedly due to an increase in pay awards, salary regrades and the creation of an additional part-time full time equivalent (FTE) post.

The Committee were advised that the predominate cost of licensing attributed to the administration of hackney carriage licences and that the projected budget had been calculated with the assumption that there would be no increase to fees and charges for 2024/25 as budget income received from liquor licensing, gambling, street trading and all other licensable activities relevant to this Committee, were largely set at statutory prices. Therefore, an increase of 1 or 2% would have minimal impact to the prices in which the Authority could influence.

Arising from the presentation of the report, Members asked questions, made comments and responses were provided as follows:-

- a) In responding to questions raised by Members with regards to the additional income that would be achieved should the fees be increased, it was reiterated that an assumption of no increase to fees and charges for 2024/25 had been projected in the budget, as the number of new licence applications, street traders and scrap metal licenses were minimal and would likely generate an additional £135.

- b) Whilst it was acknowledged that Dudley Town Market did not fall within the remit of this Committee, Members expressed concern with regard to the lack of footfall and traders in comparison with neighbouring market towns and requested that comparative performance information be circulated to Members for information after the meeting.
- c) In responding to a question raised by Councillor K Denning regarding clarification as to the reason Dudley's fee for Scrap Metal licences were much lower in comparison with neighbouring authorities, the Assistant Team Manager (Waste, Fleet and Licensing) stated that this was a decision of fees set by previous Committees. It was considered that the competitive price may attract more applicants, although the income generated would still be minimal.
- d) Councillor J Clinton requested clarification as to whether there was an issue in Dudley with Scrap Collectors not having a licence, and questioned how this was monitored and enforced. In responding the Assistant Team Manager (Waste, Fleet and Licensing) stated that the enforcement team worked closely with West Midlands Police and were proactive in monitoring the situation, with planned spot checks undertaken at local scrap metal sites throughout the year. It was reported that anyone without a licence may be prosecuted. The Committee were however reminded that the Enforcement Team consisted of 4 full-time equivalent posts and was responsible for all licensing enforcement.

Councillor J Clinton suggested that a report on Scrap Metal licences be submitted to a future meeting, to include the cost of licences in comparison with neighbouring authorities; the number of licences issued by Dudley and the number of new applications received for collectors and sites; what enforcement action activity was undertaken to prevent unlicensed collectors and information in relation to successful prosecutions, together with the percentage of collectors accessing local scrap metal sites without a licence.

- e) In considering whether the Committee should apply an increase to the fees for 2024/25, Councillor A Taylor, although recognised that an increase would have minimal impact to the amount of income generated, was of the view that the fees should be increased year on year to keep pace with the cost of living.

- f) Councillor J Cowell commented that due to the limited amount that would be generated from an increase in fees and the additional administrative work that would be required as a result, she was of the view an increase would be of no benefit to the Council or applicants.
- g) In referring to the proposed increase in fees, Councillor P Drake was of the view that as residents were required to pay an increase in Council Tax, the same should be applied to businesses and traders, and therefore supported an increase in the fees.

Following deliberations, it was

Resolved

- (1) That, an increase of 2%, with effect from 1st April, 2024, in respect of fees for licences and consents, other than those where the fees were imposed by statute in respect of liquor licensing, gambling machine permits and lotteries and amusements, be approved.
- (2) That the Assistant Team Manager (Waste, Fleet and Licensing) provide a report to the next meeting of the Committee on Scrap Metal licences, to include comparative information with neighbouring authorities on the cost of licences; how many licences had been issued by the Local Authority; the number of new applications for collectors and sites; what enforcement action activity was undertaken to prevent unlicensed collectors and information in relation to successful prosecutions; data on the percentage of collectors accessing local scrap metal sites without a licence.

12. **Questions Under Council Procure Rule 11.8**

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

The meeting ended at 6.40pm.

CHAIR