

GENERAL PURPOSES LICENSING COMMITTEE

Tuesday 3rd February 2009

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: The Chair (Councillor Sareva), Councillors Cook (Vice Chair), Keen and Williams.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Lois Stock and Daniel Smith (Legal and Democratic Services), Jill Cramer (Taxi Licensing) and Tony Payne (Environmental Development)

25. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Received from Councillors Brundin, Goddard, Humberstone and Rundle.

26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

27. MINUTES

Resolved to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 28th October 2008.

28. LANGUAGE TESTING AND CCTV

The Head of Environmental Development submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended). Jill Cramer (Taxi Licensing) presented the report to the Committee.

Language Testing

Taxi licensing officers had investigated the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). This costs £105, and it would take the applicant several weeks to apply, sit the test and receive a result. It was felt that this was an overly complicated system for aspiring taxi and private hire drivers.

Councillor Williams commented that he had been concerned about any legal challenge to the Council by unsuccessful applicants, and that he had suggested the IELTS as a standard, recognised, test in English language proficiency. Jill Cramer explained the local authorities used a variety of methods to test applicant's use of English; some administered a test, some used local colleges, and some now asked for a BTEC qualification. Daniel Smith (Legal) indicated that key factors to take into account were whether or not any applicant had been given a fair hearing and

whether the test applied was a reasonable one. The existing language test was set by officers at a standard appropriate to applicants, and the Council's procedures allowed for any applicant to appeal; and so he did not believe there to be a major issue with defending any potential legal challenges, should they arise.

CCTV

Jill Cramer suggested that more research into this topic especially about the potential cost was needed. An officer would attend a trade exhibition in the spring to gather further information about CCTV in hackney carriages and private hire vehicles. The Chair suggested that it would be helpful for a Councillor to attend as well. Councillor Williams asked if funding for this could be obtained from Thames Valley Police, as he understood that they had ample funding available for CCTV.

Resolved to:-

- (1) Retain the English test in its present form while officers continue to investigate other methods of testing;
- (2) Agree that Councillors Sareva and Williams should attend the CCTV exhibition, along with officers;
- (3) Ask the Taxi Licensing officers to approach Thames Valley Police about funding for CCTV in hackney carriages and private hire vehicles;

29. LICENCE FEES 2009/10

The Head of Environmental Development submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended). Tony Payne (Environmental Health) presented this report to the Committee.

Resolved to:-

- (1) Note the licence fees set by statute;
- (2) Agree the licence fees for 2009/2010 as laid out in the report;
- (3) Receive a further report in 2009/10 reviewing hackney carriage and private hire licence fees.

30. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Councillor Sareva explained that there were presently 3 vacant street trading pitches, for which there were 5 applicants. Given that there was competition for these pitches, it was desirable to convene a meeting at which they could be filled, and she understood that the Licensing and Registration Sub Committee was the appropriate body for this purpose.

Daniel Smith (Legal) informed the Committee that there was no formal procedure laid down by statute, and therefore the Sub Committee could decide what method it wished to adopt. Councillor Williams suggested that the method used on the previous occasion was both workable and fair, and should be used again.

Resolved to:-

- (1) Note that the next meeting of the General Purposes Licensing Committee was scheduled for 14th May 2009;
- (2) Agree that a meeting of the Licensing and Registration Sub Committee should be convened for the purposes of filling the 3 vacant street trading pitches, membership to be Councillors Keen, Sareva and one other, preferably drawn from the Liberal Democratic political group;
- (3) Ask the Democratic Services Officer to write to Phil Pirouet, who had recently left the Council's employment, to thank him for all his hard work on licensing and taxi matters.

The meeting started at 5.20pm and ended at 5.50pm