

Licensing Committee – 26 June 2012

Present: Councillor Mrs Allgrove (Chairman)
Councillor Coles (Vice-Chairman)
Councillors Beaven, Miss Durdan, Mrs Hill, Hunt, Ms James, R Lees, Mrs Lees,
Meikle, Nottrodt, Mrs Reed, Swaine and Mrs Waymouth

Officers: Olivia Walton (Licensing Officer), Ian Carter (Licensing Manager), John
Rendell (Licensing Officer), Judith Jackson (Legal Services Manager) and
Emma Hill (Corporate Support Officer)

Also present: Councillor A Wedderkopp
Councillors Davies, Grierson, Hadley, Lillis, May, Saunders and Westcott
from West Somerset District Council
Mr. M. Davis from A1/Ace Taxis

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm)

1. Appointment of Chairman

Resolved that Councillor Mrs Allgrove be appointed Chairman of the Licensing Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

2. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

Resolved that Councillor Coles be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Licensing Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

3. Apology

Councillors Brooks

4. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 7 March 2012 were taken as read and were signed.

5. Public Question Time

Mr Mike Davis from A1/ACE stated that the trade was becoming increasingly frustrated with the failure of the Licensing Department to recognise the legitimate concerns of the Taxi trade. These were: -

- The decline in accepted standards of drivers;
- The profiteering by the Council through unsubstantiated charges; and
- The continuing limitation of competition with regard to MOT's

For two years, the trade had sought to meet and discuss these issues with the Licensing Manager. The frustrations as to the way the trade had been treated had been highlighted in writing and to this Committee.

The Licensing Manager would only discuss issues at the Taxi Forum, which was time limited and was not a minuted or accountable meeting.

It was with regret that action was now going to have to be pursued that would ultimately cost the Council time and money, as well as potentially adverse publicity.

The Chairman thanked Mr Davis for his comments which would be noted.

6. Declarations of Interest

The Chairman (Councillor Mrs Allgrove) declared a personal interest as the Vice-Chairman of the Somerset Association of Local Councils. Councillor Mrs Waymouth declared a personal interest as a Member of Somerset County Council. Councillor Mrs Hill declared a personal interest as an employee of Somerset County Council. Councillor R Lees declared a personal interest as a regular user of taxis. Councillor B Nottrodt declared a personal interest as a director of Southwest One.

7. Proposed Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Meter Testing Regime.

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the New Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Meter Testing Regime within Taunton Deane.

Discussions with the Taunton Taxi trade surrounding the need to carry out meter tests on licensed Hackney Carriages/Private Hire Vehicles had prompted a review of the current regime.

Currently before a new Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Vehicle Licence could be issued or renewed, a mutually convenient time between a Licensing Officer and the vehicle proprietor had to be found to allow for the testing of the taxi meter. At the moment there were two different methods of testing the calibration of taxi meters, details of which were reported.

It was the opinion of the Licensing Officers that when they pre-arranged meter tests the meters were more likely to be correct at this point. It was therefore proposed that a programme of random unannounced checks on the calibration of meters should be introduced instead.

Currently, there was no charge for a meter to be tested upon renewal of a Hackney Carriage/Private Hire Vehicle Licence. Charges were applied only for the testing of a meter on a grant application or if the owner changed the meter tariff during the period of the licence prior to renewal.

The cessation of the meter test would reduce the financial burden upon the taxi trade and reduce the time taken to issue a new licence.

It was recommended that if the proposed changes were approved, a fee for undertaking a meter test would only be charged if a meter was found to be incorrect through the proposed compliance checks.

Resolved that: -

- 1) The removal of the requirement for meter tests to be undertaken at renewal and/or on the grant of a vehicle licence as a matter of course be approved; and
- 2) The implementation of a new procedure where random meter tests were carried out through the year to ensure meters were correct be also approved.

8. Licensing Update Report

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the activities of the Licensing Service under the Licensing Act 2003, Gambling Act 2005 and Taxi Legislation together with other general licensing matters.

Although there had been an increase in Premises Licenses and Temporary Event Notices in recent months, there had been little change in the number of Club Premises Certificates within Taunton Deane. There has been a downward trend in the number of Personal Licenses.

It was further reported that there had been no significant change or increase in the number of Gambling Act 2005 permits. The number of Permits, Registrations and Licences held in Taunton Deane remained low.

The licensed Taxi fleet within Taunton Deane had shown a small increase in renewals in the early part of 2012, where as the number of Private Hire Operations had remained static.

The sixth Taxi Forum was held on 19 June 2012. Membership of the Forum was made up of representatives from licensed drivers and operators, Licensing Officers and Members of the Licensing Committee.

Enquiries into positions available in the High Street for Street Trading remained high but the number of new Consents had decreased in the early part of 2012.

Reported that the number of Animal Welfare licences held within Taunton Deane had remained the same. Details of the total number that had been issued were reported.

The total number of licences, consents, registrations and permits issued at the end of the last quarter showed an increase in the number of House to House Collections and Street Collections in Taunton Deane.

The Licensing Team, together with Councillor Miss Durdan, had carried out monitoring over the Jubilee Bank Holiday Weekend at Taunton Racecourse for the Cosmo Festival, Somerset County Cricket Club for Elton John and also included visits to Taunton Taxi Ranks, late night refreshment premises in Taunton and Wellington and street trading in Taunton.

During the discussion of this item, Members made comments and statements and asked questions which included: - (Responses are shown in italics)

- The Chairman thanked the Licensing Team and Councillor Miss Durdan for their work at the Cosmos Festival. Committee Members were pleased with how the event had gone.

Although the number of complaints had increased between the first and second years, the department had put in place a set of conditions as well as a de-brief after the festival, which had helped largely to improve the situation every year. The main concern of local residents was the level of the bass.

- What was the feedback in relation to the noise levels this year from the Cosmos Festival?

The feedback in relation to the noise levels was very positive. Also there were no reported problems relating to Taxis.

- What sort of notification system did we have regarding the owning of dangerous animals?

The notification surrounding dangerous animals was covered by the licence issued in connection with the trade of the animal not in relation to the ownership. The Council relied on the relationship it had with existing licensees for information surrounding any illegal trade in the breeding and sale of dangerous animals.

Resolved that the report be noted.

(The meeting ended at 7:05 pm)