

LICENSING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 28 SEPTEMBER 2023

Present: Councillors Edwards (Vice-Chair in the Chair), Asare, Davies, G Dennis, Keane, Kitchingham, Mitchell, Page, Rowland, Tarar and Woodward (present for item 8 only)

Apologies: Councillors Robinson

6. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Licensing Applications Committee meetings held on 13 July 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

7. HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARE INCREASE

Further to Minute 3 of the meeting held on 13 July 2023, the Committee considered a report on the proposed increase in hackney carriage fares after an objection had been received during the statutory consultation period. The following documents were appended to the report:

- Appendix I - RTA Option 1 Fare Increase October 2023
- Appendix II - Email from objector
- Appendix III - Email to objector
- Appendix IV - Second email to objector

At the meeting held on 13 July 2023, the Committee had considered four different options for increasing Hackney Carriage fares in Reading. Two options had been put forward by the Reading Taxi Association (RTA) and another two options had been put forward by a separate group of Hackney Carriage drivers. Having considered all four of the options put forward by the trade, the Committee had made a recommendation to proceed with Option 1, which had been put forward by the RTA. This option decreased the yardage across all tariffs and included an increase in the Additional Passengers surcharge from 20p to 40p per each additional person up to a maximum of £2. A copy of this option was attached to the report at Appendix I.

The report explained that an objection had been received to the statutory consultation on the proposed fare increase. The Licensing Team had invited the objector to present their objection to the Licensing Applications Committee but no response had been received to the correspondence. Copies of the Licensing Team's emails to the objector were attached to the report at Appendix III and Appendix IV. As no other objections had been received the Committee was asked to consider the objection, as set out in Appendix II, and to make a decision on whether to proceed with or to modify the recommendation made by the Committee on 13 July 2023.

Mr Asif Rashid, Chairman of the RTA, and Mr Imran Ali, a local hackney carriage driver, were present at the meeting and spoke against the objection and in favour of the proposed hackney carriage fare increase.

Resolved:

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- (1) That, in accordance with Section 65 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, and having considered the single objection received during the statutory consultation period, along with the representations made by members the hackney carriage trade who addressed the Committee, the Assistant Director of Transport, Planning and Public Protection, be recommended to approve and implement the hackney carriage fare rise, as set out in the table of fares attached at Appendix I, as recommended by the Committee on 13 July 2023 (Minute 3 refers).
- (2) That the revised table of fares, as attached at Appendix I, be implemented by 3 October 2023, in accordance with Section 65 (4) of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

8. RENEWAL OF STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY

The Committee considered a report on the renewal of the Council's Statement of Licensing Policy. The following documents were appended to the report:

- Appendix RS-1 - Draft Licensing Policy 2023-2028
- Appendix RS-2 - Summary of Changes to Existing Policy
- Appendix RS-3 - Climate Impact Assessment
- Appendix RS-4 - Responses to Consultation

The report explained that, under the provisions of the Licensing Act 2003, the Council, as the named Licensing Authority for Reading, was required to review its Licensing Policy every five years. The current policy was due to expire in October 2023 and so was due for renewal. The report explained that, subject to approval by Council on 17 October 2023, the new Statement of Licensing Policy would come into effect on 22 October 2023. A copy of the draft Statement of Licensing Policy was attached to the report at Appendix RS-1.

The Licensing Policy was a key document concerning the regulation of licenced premises (pub and clubs), late night refreshment, and regulated entertainment venues within Reading. The Licencing Policy set out the Council's aims, objectives and policies for applicants and licence holders and clearly outlined what the Council expected of them. The key aim of the Licensing Policy was to ensure that the four licensing objectives, as prescribed in the Licensing Act 2003, were actively promoted at all times. The four licensing objectives were of equal importance and the Council, along with other named Responsible Authorities, stakeholders, residents and licence holders, would work together in order to promote them. The four licensing objectives were:

- The prevention of crime and disorder
- The prevention of public nuisance
- The protection of children from harm
- Public Safety

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The report explained that it had also been intended to agree a Cumulative Impact Policy (CIP) alongside the Statement of Licensing Policy. However, this proposal would not now be pursued at this point as more time was needed to collate pertinent evidence and statistics in relation to the need for such a policy.

The updated Licensing Policy remained largely unchanged from the previous version, but the opportunity had been taken to update the Policy and add in some additional information where legislation and guidelines had changed. A summary of the changes made to the existing Policy was attached to the report at Appendix RS-2. The changes included updates being made to the following sections:

- Vulnerability & Violence Against Women and Girls;
- Protect Duty/Martyn's Law;
- Coronavirus Legislation;
- Large indoor and outdoor events & Safety Advisory Groups;
- Online Ordering and Delivery Services;
- Certification of films by the Licensing Authority;
- Early Morning Restriction Orders;
- Late Night Levy.

The report explained that a 6-week consultation process had been undertaken between 1 August 2023 and 12 September 2023. In addition to consulting on the Statement of Licensing Policy, the Council had also initially sought views relating to the Cumulative Impact Policy. Consultations letters had been sent to all licence holders as well as to bodies that represent licence holders. Letters were also sent to organisations that had a statutory role within the Licensing Act such as the police and fire service, known as Responsible Bodies, as well as any other bodies or persons that were likely to have an interest in the Policy. The consultation had also been available to view on the Council's website and contact details had been provided to allow any person to submit their comments.

Two responses had been received during the consultation period. Copies of the responses, along with the officer replies, were attached to the report at Appendix RS-4. Both of the consultation responses had included comments that related specifically to the Cumulative Impact Policy and would be dealt with at a later stage, if and when the Council proposed implementing a Cumulative Impact Policy.

One of the consultation responses had called for the section under the 'Reducing the Strength Initiative' heading, relating to the prohibition of the sale of single cans of high percentage alcohol drinks, to be removed from the final version of the Statement of Licensing Policy. However, after considering the representation, the Committee decided that that the section of the Policy should be retained.

During discussions it was suggested section 2.24 of the Licensing Policy should be adjusted to make it clearer that the issue of drink spiking was part of the wider national picture and not unique to Reading.

Resolved –

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- (1) That the second paragraph of section 2.24 of the Statement of Licensing Policy be amended by deleting the first three words of the paragraph (“The increase in”) and replacing them with: “The national focus on”;**
- (2) That the section concerning the sale of high percentage alcohol drinks and single cans be retained within the Statement of Licensing Policy;**
- (3) That the consultation responses received in relation to the Cumulative Impact Policy be considered at a later point, if and when the Council proposed implementing a Cumulative Impact Policy;**
- (4) That, subject to the above, the Statement of Licensing Policy, as amended, be recommended to Council for adoption.**

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.10 pm)