

Licensing Committee
Wednesday, 19 January 2022

Present:

Councillor Buston, Councillor Chuah, Councillor Cope, Councillor Hagon, Councillor Harris, Councillor Hogg, Councillor Leatherdale, Councillor Moore, Councillor B. Oxford, Councillor Tate, Councillor T. Young

Substitutes:

145. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of 10 November 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

146. Have Your Say!

Charles Isbill, chairman of the Hackney Carriage Association in Colchester attended the meeting to address the Committee in accordance with Colchester Borough Council (the Council)'s Have Your Say! procedure. Mr Isbill wished to offer his thanks to the Council's Licensing Team for carrying out the unmet demand survey, the results of which he was very happy to see. He was pleased that events in the town had been considered as part of the survey, together with engineering works and the changing layout of the town.

The Committee welcomed Mr Isbill's comments and offered its own commendation to Officers, noting that the Council wished to work together with the taxi trade to strive to improve standards in Colchester.

147. Boats and Boatperson procedure

Jon Ruder, Licensing and Food Safety Manager, attended the meeting to present the report and assist the Committee with its enquiries. The Committee heard that the Policy had been discussed at a previous meeting, and that as a result of this it had been amended in line with the recommendations which had been made, including an adjustment of the fees to be charged and a number of grammatical changes. If the Committee approved the document, it would be made available online to assist anyone wishing to apply for a licence.

The Committee noted the need to ensure public safety, and was pleased that this had been achieved in a manner which allowed boatpersons to continue to operate.

RESOLVED that: the Boats and Boatpersons Licensing Processes and Procedures document, be made publicly available to provide clear guidance to all parties.

148. Unmet demand survey results

Jon Ruder, Licensing and Food Safety Manager, attended the meeting to present the report and assist the Committee with its enquiries. The Committee heard that every three years there was a requirement for Colchester Borough Council (the Council) to carry out an unmet demand survey in order to determine whether or not there were enough licenced hackney carriage vehicles in Colchester to meet the demand for their services. The report showed that there were sufficient hackney carriage (taxi) vehicles, and that the average waiting time for a customer seeking a taxi was two minutes, which was not significant. The conclusion was that there was no significant unmet demand, and there was therefore no need to make additional taxi licences available.

The report had mentioned signage at the taxi ranks in the town, and Officers had been in consultation with Essex County Council and the North Essex Parking Partnership to improve the signage which was available in a variety of ways. The survey would be repeated in the autumn of 2024.

Councillor Harris supported additional signage to encourage the use of all available taxi ranks in the town, and noted that the Council currently had three un-allocated taxi plates; what was to happen to these? Councillor Buston confirmed that one of the plates would be allocated shortly, and supported the addition of signage to taxi ranks, to assist with their smooth function.

Jon Ruder confirmed to the committee that the cost of the survey was approximately £8,000, and the survey itself was a public document. The opportunity to apply for one taxi plate would be allocated at an upcoming Committee, and although the two additional plates referenced by Councillor Harris were not active in the borough, they were under holdship and were therefore not available for re-allocation at this time. The Council had issued licenses to 32 vehicles which had been adapted to accommodate disabled passengers. In response to a question from the Committee, it was confirmed that the requirement was to have a survey carried out every three years, and an interim survey before 2024 would not be carried out.

Referring to the forthcoming allocation of a taxi plate, Councillor Young considered that the allocation procedure could be improved, and noted that there were concerns in the taxi trade. He sought assurance that anyone who was allocated the opportunity to apply for the plate was confirmed to be a suitable individual to be afforded that opportunity. It was confirmed to the Committee that the Council followed a specified procedure for plate allocation, and this procedure specified who was eligible to enter the draw. It was not possible to preclude people from applying, but the successful applicant would have to pass the same rigorous checklist as any applicant for a licence. Once an application had been received, the Council would be able to carry out the necessary 'fit and proper person' checks before any licence was issued.

In response to an enquiry from Councillor Cope, it was confirmed to the Committee that the average two minute waiting time for a taxi which had been mentioned, was in

relation to the high street taxi rank, where people were waiting for a taxi home after a night out.

RESOLVED that:

- That the current number of hackney carriage vehicle licences be maintained at 131.
- That the provision of better signage for the Head Street rank be investigated.
- A further unmet demand survey be carried out in the autumn of 2024.

149. Work Programme 2021-2022

Matthew Evans, Democratic Services Officer, introduced the work programme 2021-2022.

The Committee considered the last item of business of the municipal year, which was the review of Colchester Borough Council (the Council)'s Licensing Act 2003 Policy. The review of the Policy was to be considered at the last remaining meeting of the Committee in March 2022.

Officers confirmed that the proposed review of the Policy had been made difficult due to the Coronavirus pandemic and the national lockdowns which had closed businesses over the preceding couple of years. In conducting a review of the Policy, an evidence base was required which had been gathered over the course of a year, to give a clear view of activities in night time and day time economies. At the current time, clear figures were not available, and the Committee was requested to consider postponing the review to allow more evidence to be gathered. Although there was a statutory requirement to review the Policy, this required the review to be carried out every five years. The latest review had been carried out two years ago, meaning that there were three years remaining before the Policy was required to be reviewed again.

The Committee considered that there was little point in considering incomplete or faulty data when carrying out a review, and was minded to remove the item from the forthcoming agenda, and cancel the meeting scheduled to be held in March 2022.

RESOLVED that: the review of the Council's Licensing Act 2003 Statement of Policy be removed from the work programme for the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 23 March 2022, and if there was no further business to be brought to this meeting, that it be cancelled.