

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

LICENSING & REGULATORY COMMITTEE

At the meeting of the **Licensing & Regulatory Committee** held at Council Chamber - County Hall on Tuesday, 20 December 2022 at 2:00 pm.

PRESENT

Jl Hutchinson (Chair) (in the Chair)

MEMBERS

J Beynon
E Chicken
B Gallacher
C Humphrey
C Seymour
M Swinbank

T Cessford
J Foster
C Hardy
K Parry
A Sharp
A Wallace

OFFICERS

H Bowers
M Bulman
T Hardy
P Soderquest
D Wilson

Democratic Services Officer
Solicitor
Licensing Manager
Head of Housing & Public Protection
Business Compliance and Public Safety
Manager

12 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee held on Wednesday 26 October 2022, as circulated be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

13 SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Licensing and Regulatory Subcommittees held on 5 October and 17 November respectively, be received for information.

14 REPORTS OF THE HEAD OF HOUSING AND PUBLIC PROTECTION

14.1 Licensing Fees

Information was provided in relation to fees and charges for licences under the following legislation:

- The Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities involving Animals) (England)

Ch.'s Initials.....

Regulations 2018

- Zoo Licensing Act 181
- Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013
- Dangerous Wild Animal Act 1976
- Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1982) in relation to Tattooing and Piercing

Phil Soderquest, Director of Housing and Public Protection explained that fees were usually reviewed on an annual basis, but due to the onset of Covid and the impact on businesses, this had not happened since 2019, as a result, fees were lower than expected.

Significant pressures had also been experienced within the Local Authority and whilst pressures on businesses had been recognised, it had felt appropriate to increase fees by 9% to reflect the cost of delivery of the service.

Appendix A contained the list of current fees and charges and the proposed new fees.

Discussion and debate took place on the classification and distinction of wild animals.

Councillor Parry put forward that the proposed fees be agreed en-masse. This was seconded by Councillor Humphries and unanimously agreed.

Councillor Chicken proposed that the new fees come into effect on 1 January 2023, this was seconded by Councillor Cessford. 11 members voted in favour, with 1 abstention

RESOLVED that:

1. The content of the report and the revised fees as set out in Appendix 1 be noted.
2. The proposed fees be agreed, all of which would come into effect on 1 January 2023.

14.2 Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Fees

Members were provided with information in relation to consultation responses for hackney carriage and private hire licensing fees.

A short adjournment took place to consider the consultation responses document.

Mr Soderquest explained the rationale behind the increase and informed members of the three recommendations.

At its meeting on 26 October, the Committee had agreed to a review of taxi hire and private hire licensing fees and requested that officers began the formal consultation.

Statutory consultation had been undertaken, including the placing of public

Ch.'s Initials.....

notices in several local newspapers with over 1000 licence holders emailed of the proposed increase with an invitation to comment on the process.

License fees had not been increased since 2018, and a decision had been taken not to increase fees in 2020/21 due to the onset of Covid.

It had been acknowledged that whilst businesses had restarted, they would be subject to additional costs arising from the cost of living crisis. However, the Council had been equally impacted by the same pressures and to maintain service delivery, it was necessary to increase current fees and charges to reflect those increased costs associated with service delivery, including staffing.

Mr Soderquest referred to the level of responses to the consultation which had been slightly disappointing.

In response to a comment, Mr Soderquest, explained that the increase was directly contributed to inflationary pressures.

Discussion took place on the lack of responses and the perception of residents; discount to encourage greener fuels; the cost of electricity for charging vehicles and other fees.

In response to a question regarding MOT fees, Mr Soderquest stated that it was important members were aware of other costs, but what was being considered were the processes that the Licensing Authority was responsible for. The fees did not include testing fees and there would be a re-test charge should the vehicle fail the test.

In response to re-examining the costs, members were informed that as part of the Council Budget in February, all Service Directors were tasked to look at the cost of delivering their service. The increase in fees was not about the increase in income but an increase to cover costs of the service.

Councillor Foster proposed the motion to approve the proposed fees as in Appendix A, save that the proposed fees for the greener fuels, should be reduced to £219. This was seconded by Councillor Swinbank.

Darin Wilson, Business Compliance and Public Safety Manager explained that the report in June had reflected that out of a total of 372 private hire and 454 hackney carriage vehicles, only 52 electric vehicles had been registered.

On being put to the vote, 3 members voted in favour of the proposal and 10 voted against and therefore the motion fell.

Councillor Foster stated her disappointment that the fees for greener fuels had not been agreed.

Councillor Hardy proposed to accept the proposed fees in accordance with Appendix A in the report and this was seconded by Councillor Beynon.

Upon being put to the vote, 10 members voted in favour to accept the proposal and 3 voted against.

Ch.'s Initials.....

In respect of the date upon which the new fees would come into force, Councillor Beynon suggested the date of 1 February 2023, which was seconded by Councillor Hardy.

Upon being put to the vote, 12 members voted in favour with 1 abstention.

RESOLVED that:

1. The proposed fees be agreed without modification.
2. The new fees to come into effect on 1 February 2023.

15 **NEXT MEETING**

RESOLVED that the next meeting of the Licensing and Regulatory on Wednesday 15 February, be noted.

CHAIR.....

DATE.....

Ch.'s Initials.....