

Runnymede Borough Council

REGULATORY COMMITTEE

12 November 2019 at 7.44pm

Members of the

Committee Present: Councillors D Cotty (Chairman), E Gill (Vice-Chairman), T Burton, D Clarke, and J Furey.

Members of the

Committee absent: None

Councillors J Broadhead, R King and P Snow also attended the meeting.

323. FIRE PRECAUTIONS

The Committee noted the Fire Precautions.

324. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 24 September 2019 was signed as a correct record.

325. FEES AND CHARGES 2020/2021

The Committee's approval was sought for the fees and charges, some as set by statute, other set locally, for the services falling under the Committee's remit.

Members noted that when setting fees, the Council could take into account external factors such as inflation, market conditions, local competition and likely yield of any fee increase as well as internal policies such as on-going savings targets and revenue reduction programmes. However, fees under the Gambling Act 2005 were set by statute and had not been increased since their inception on 2005, with an estimated deficit of £8,000 in 2020/2021.

With regard to Taxi Licensing fees the Committee was disappointed to note that this part of the Licensing service was in deficit and had been for some years. The deficit was estimated to be approximately £45,000 for 2020/2021 and Members were furnished with the actual deficits for previous years. Officers confirmed that £10,000 of the current deficit was made up of non-rechargeable costs. Officers confirmed that the current fee setting process had been introduced in 2014 as a result of the Hemmings case which required transparency with regard to fees and for them to be reasonable and proportionate to the actual cost of providing the service.

Officers explained that in addition to fee setting requirements not to make a profit nor charge for enforcement activity, the deficit was rising owing to the decrease in the number of drivers and vehicles being licensed. This was largely due to competition from app based companies who charged less and had less rigorous standards for drivers and vehicles. Members wanted to support local drivers and asked Officers to consider the submission of a paper to the Transport for the South East Committee with regard to Uber and Transport for London. In particular concerns were raised about Uber's operation and its detrimental effect on the local taxi trade. It was also noted that a fair proportion of drivers were retiring and new younger drivers were not coming forward resulting in lost income to the service.

The Committee agreed that increasing fees and charges to a pure cost recovery basis would further impact negatively on the trade.

The Committee noted that the fees and charges for Mobile Home Site Licensing were Regulatory services falling within their remit, although the operational side of this function was shared with the Environment and Sustainability Committee. Members sought a breakdown of Mobile Home Site Licensing costs, once overheads and re-charges from other business centres had been quantified and removed, giving a base cost of the service and on what basis fees were set. Officers also agreed to provide details of the fees charged by neighbouring local authorities.

The Committee discussed some specific sites in the borough and issues arising as to whether fees to site owners were passed on to residents. It was confirmed that advice to residents about their leases could not be provided by the Council's Legal Services team and that advice would need to be sought from the Citizens Advice or a law centre. Members sought ways of improving site conditions and requested that the relevant Officers in Environmental Services undertook a review of the Council's Mobile Home Site Licensing policy with a view to greater protection for residents, many of whom were elderly and/or vulnerable.

RESOLVED that –

The proposed fees and charges for 2020/2021 be approved to be effective from the dates given or as soon as practical thereafter.

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 8.12pm)