

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

**REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE PLANNING,
REGULATORY & GENERAL LICENSING
COMMITTEE (GENERAL LICENSING MATTERS)**

**SUBJECT: PLANNING, REGULATORY & GENERAL LICENSING
COMMITTEE (GENERAL LICENSING MATTERS) -
10TH DECEMBER, 2019**

REPORT OF:

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR B. SUMMERS (CHAIR)

Councillors M. Moore (Vice-Chair)
G. L. Davies
D. Hancock
W. Hodgins
T. Smith
B. Thomas
G. Thomas
D. Wilkshire
B. Willis

WITH: D. Thompson, Service Manager – Public Protection
L. Griffin, Team Manager – Licensing & Commercial
M. Bennett, Licensing Officer
M. Woodland, Solicitor

ITEM	SUBJECT	ACTION
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	
No. 2	<u>APOLOGIES</u>	

	<p>The following apologies for absence were received from:-</p> <p>Councillor D. Bevan Councillor L. Winnett</p>	
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>PUBLIC PROTECTION SERVICES - DISCONTINUATION OF COLLABORATION WITH TORFAEN C.B.C.</u></p> <p>The Service Manager Public Protection advised that the report had been presented following a request made for information related to the end of the collaboration with Torfaen and the implications for the Licensing Service. The Service Manager provided an overview of the report which detailed the reason for the creation of collaboration along with current and future budget implications as well as temporary changes to the Licensing Team since the joint working arrangement ended for Licensing in the summer.</p> <p>The Service Manager referred Members to the current cost pressure as a result of the end of the collaboration which was approximately £35,000 and advised that this had been met by reduced hours in a Trading Standards post that became vacant and which worked across both teams in Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen.</p> <p>The Service Manager further referred to the cost pressure for 2020/2021 of £106,000 and advised that although the reduced hours post achieved £18,000 there was a need for the service area to find the remainder of the cost pressure. Before addressing the cost pressure, the Service Manager has been tasked with a review of Front Line Enforcement Services, which was ongoing. The outcome of this review would help to inform the necessary service change and staff restructure in Public Protection. If staff numbers were to be reduce, this would be dealt with in full consultation with staff, OD and trade unions. The Service Manager continued that although there are budget pressures, the Public Protection Service would still be asked for service growth.</p> <p>The Service Manager further confirmed that although interim changes had been made in the management of the Licensing Team there had been no changes in the number of operational</p>	

staff in the Licensing Service as a result of the termination of the collaboration with Torfaen.

A Member referred to the review of front line staff and raised concerns around the possibility of staff reductions in Public Protection. The Member felt that a reduction in staff would have a detrimental impact on the service provided. The Public Protection Team on the ground was critical and would not be as robust if staff were reduced. The Member referred to recent convictions for counterfeit goods and reiterated his concerns as staff had done an excellent job and he would not want to see financial pressure reduce the exceptional service provided by the Authority.

The Service Manager Public Protection concurred with the concerns raised and had hoped that the review would minimise the impact on the frontline service. However, the Service Manager stated that the joint working/shared management arrangements with Torfaen had served to protect the frontline services of the last 3-4 years. If the collaboration had not taken place, the front line services would have significantly reduced during that 3-4 year period.

Another Member stated that from an elected representative's point of view it was far more advantageous to have the expertise of a Licensing Team in house. The Service Manager Public Protection noted the concerns and advised that a number of aspects of Public Protection had been outsourced due to budgetary cost pressures over the last few years (e.g. Animal Health & Pest Control) and therefore if budgetary pressures continued then collaboration in relation to Licensing may have to be considered in the future.

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the information contained therein be noted.

No. 5

TAXI, OTHER NON PRESCRIBED LICENCE FEES 2020/2021

Consideration was given to the report of the Team Manager Commercial and Licensing.

The Team Manager Commercial and Licensing spoke to the report which outlined the proposed licence fees for the period 1st April, 2020 to 31st March, 2021. The Team Manager further explained the process for the review and calculation of the fees which related to scrap metal dealers, sex establishments, street trading and taxis

as detailed in the report and accompanying Appendices.

The Team Manager referred to proposed fees for taxis and explained that these were based on full cost recovery basis associated with costs for 2020/21 as well as a recovery element for the reduced charge in 2019/20. It was added that once feedback from the consultation with traders had been received a further report would be presented to Committee for consideration.

A Member raised concerns around the impact any increased charges would have on businesses and residents due to poor public transport links in some areas of Blaenau Gwent and therefore residents relied on taxis. The Licensing Service provided a good source of income for the Authority and the Member felt that increased charges could have a detrimental effect on this income.

The Team Manager Commercial and Licensing advised that the fee income was not supporting any other services across the Authority (other than direct support services as outlined in the report) and the report had proposed fees on full-cost recovery basis. The fee to be put forward for consultation was a decision for this Committee. The Service Manager Public Protection added that the cost recovery was the key element promoted in the new Corporate Commercial Strategy.

Another Member also advised that residents within his Ward relied on taxi due to poor public transport links in Blaenau Gwent and also stated that there was an issue with 'ghost' taxis who undercut licenced taxis.

In response to 'ghost' taxis operating in Blaenau Gwent, it was advised that no recent reports of such taxis had been received and if these were in operation they should be reported to the Licensing Team to investigate and take the appropriate action.

The Chair referred Members to the options for consideration and a discussion ensued around Option 1. A Member felt that although he supported Option 1 he would not support an increase in licence fee charges. The Solicitor reiterated that the options presented were only seeking approval to proceed to consultation and a further report would be presented to approval fees.

Upon a vote being taken it was thereupon

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the consultation exercise on the proposed fees as outlined in the report for 2020/21 be approved.

Councillor Tommy Smith requested that it be recorded that although he supported option 1 he would not support any increased charges in licensing fees. The Team Manager Commercial and Licensing reiterated that feedback from the consultation with traders would be presented to Committee for due consideration.
