

Proposal to establish a Task and Finish Group to consider fees within the Licensing Service

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Action Required

Members of the Scrutiny Committee are asked to agree to establish a Task and Finish Group looking at the current levels of Licensing fees applied by South Somerset District Council and to investigate the viability of adopting a total cost recovery approach where legislatively permissible.

Background

Licensing fees are currently the subject of much debate and litigation. It is therefore vital that the Council has a robust method for the determination of licensing fees. The primary aim of this Task and Finish Group, if established, will be to work with officers and the Portfolio Holder where necessary, to recommend a fee structure which is robust and based on a sound evidential base. As part of this process, members of the Task and Finish Group will consider the principle of adopting a full cost recovery approach when setting Licensing fees.

The request to establish this Task and Finish Group has come forward from the Service Manager as he would welcome member involvement at an early stage in this process. Any recommendations from this Task and Finish Group will need to be considered by the Licensing Committee before final adoption by Full Council as part of the budget setting process for 2016/17. Therefore, the Task and Finish Group needs to have finalised its recommendations by early December 2015.

If established, the members of this Task and Finish Group will be supported by both the Licensing Manager and the Scrutiny Manager.

Further clarity on the proposed aims and objectives of this review can be found in the attached 'One Page Strategy'.

THE ONE PAGE STRATEGY ASKS US TO STATE:

- **What is the broad topic area**

Licensing fees and charges.

- **The specific topic**

To look into the principle of establishing a total cost recovery principle in respect of the Licensing Service and propose amendments to the current fee structure to reflect this principle.

- **What are our ambitions for the review/outcomes**

- To fully understand the proposals of the Licensing Service operating on a Total Cost recovery principle, to include the legislative framework and ethical implications.
- If the principle of full cost recovery is accepted, then this Task and Finish Group will aim to make evidenced based recommendations to the relevant decision making bodies, outlining a schedule of fees for the Licensing Service that allows for full cost recovery. Members must ensure that the authority has robust evidence to show the exact service costs and the correlation between service costs and the fees charged.
- To better understand the national picture in relation to setting fees for Licensing Services, such as government guidance and legislation, and to address any issues that may improve the experience of local authorities through bodies such as the LGA.

- **How we perform at the moment**

To look at our current fees and charges and consider how these compare to actual service costs.

- **Who (and how we) should consult**

Other local authorities in Somerset have recently done a significant amount of work on this topic and their data will be a valuable part of this review - not reinventing the wheel!

Members will also need to be clear about the legislative constraints.

- **Who we need to help us (experts/partners)**

Licensing Service
Finance support
Legal Services advice

- **How long it will take**

Any recommendations will need to be ready to be included in budget setting for 2016/17 so will need to be agreed via Licensing and District Executive by the end of December 2015.