

Notes of Meeting with John Furze, Locum Town Clerk, Yeovil Town Council re: Delegation of Taxi Licensing to Town Councils

Wednesday 23rd September 2015 – 12.00 p.m.

Present: John Furze – Town Clerk
 Nigel Marston – Licensing Manager, SSDC
 Emily McGuinness – Scrutiny Manager SSDC

- Emily McGuinness explained the purpose of the meeting – in 2014 South West Audit Partnership conducted an audit of Town Council Licensing – one of the recommendations from this report was that the current delegation arrangements with Yeovil and Wincanton Town Councils be reviewed by SSDC to ensure the arrangements remain fit for purpose for all parties involved. Consequently, Officers of Wincanton Town Council had been asked for an informal meeting to provide factual information to support such a review.
- A Scrutiny Task and Finish Group looking at the wider issue of Licensing Fees would be looking at this matter and would make recommendations to the appropriate member level decision making body in due course. It was stressed that at this stage, SSDC were on a 'fact finding' exercise – looking to ensure that members are in possession of all relevant facts before taking any decisions about future service delivery options.
- It was stressed that no complaints had been received about current service provision but that the arrangements were last reviewed in 2005 and we had to be sure that arrangements represent the best value for taxpayers' money.
- In advance of the meeting, Yeovil Town Council had been asked to provide some additional information relating to income and expenditure figures – this information was tabled at the meeting as is as follows:
 - o In the last financial year Yeovil Town Council Renewed 13 Taxi Driver Licences, 18 Taxi Vehicle Licenses, 1 Private Hire Vehicle Licence, 95 Street Trading Licenses, 53 Charitable Collections (Street Collections) and 8 Charitable Collections (door to door)
 - o Income from Driver licensing was £1,300
 - o Income from vehicle licensing was £400
 - o Staff time administering the Licensing function at YTC is estimated to be 500 hours p.a. which equates to about 50-60% of an officer's time.
- The office opening hours at Yeovil Town Council are Monday – Thursday 8.30 a.m. – 4.30 p.m. and Friday 8.40 a.m. – 4.00 p.m.
- Taxi Drivers are able to apply on-line for all Licenses.

- The Clerk was of the opinion that if Taxi Licensing was centralised and the current delegation arrangements ended there would be little or no impact – the staff currently working on Licensing duties could easily be redeployed – due to physical office spaces, it's difficult to expand team numbers but there were plenty of other tasks to do. He went on to say that it seemed sensible to him to centralise Taxi Licensing as it was a generic service that was applied in the same way across the whole district with no scope for local flavour – he could see no logical reason for the Town Council retaining the function.
- However, he did feel there was a strong case for the Town Council to retain responsibility for Licensing of Street Trading as this was a service particular to Yeovil and could have a very visible impact on the Town Centre (as well as generating income) delegating this function to the Town Council could be seen as 'localism in action'.

At the end of the meeting, an undertaking was given to keep the Clerk updated on the progress of the review and that as the Delegation agreement stated that 6 months notice was required by either party to end the agreement, every effort would be made to have concluded this work in time for the 2016/17 budget setting process.

It was explained that any final decision on future arrangements would be made by SSDC elected members in line with the Constitution (clarification was sought on whether any final decision would be taken by Council or District Executive).

Notes of Meeting with Wincanton Town Council re: Delegation of Taxi Licensing to Town Councils

Wednesday 23rd September 2015 – 9.30 a.m. to 10.00 a.m.

Present: Sam Atherton – Town Clerk
Muriel Cairns - Deputy Town Clerk
Councillor Colin Winder – Town Councillor
Councillor Howard Ellard – Town Councillor
Nigel Marston – Licensing Manager, SSDC
Emily McGuinness – Scrutiny Manager SSDC

- Emily McGuinness explained the purpose of the meeting – in 2014 South West Audit Partnership conducted an audit of Town Council Licensing – one of the recommendations from this report was that the current delegation arrangements with Yeovil and Wincanton Town Councils be reviewed by SSDC to ensure the arrangements remain fit for purpose for all parties involved. Consequently, Officers of Wincanton Town Council had been asked for an informal meeting to provide factual information to support such a review.
- A Scrutiny Task and Finish Group looking at the wider issue of Licensing Fees would be looking at this matter and would make recommendations to the appropriate member level decision making body in due course. It was stressed that at this stage, SSDC were on a 'fact finding' exercise – looking to ensure that members are in possession of all relevant facts before taking any decisions about future service delivery options.
- It was stressed that no complaints had been received about current service provision but that the arrangements were last reviewed in 2005 and we had to be sure that arrangements represent the best value for taxpayers' money.
- In advance of the meeting, Wincanton Town Council had been asked to provide some additional information relating to income and expenditure figures – this information was tabled at the meeting as is attached to these notes.
- Clarification was sought as to how Wincanton Town Council could demonstrate that the Licensing Income they report was used to fund Licensing activities. It was noted that the legislation was very clear that Licensing income cannot be used to cross-subsidise other services or activities. Muriel and Sam stated that no additional staff had been appointed to carry out Licensing work but that Muriel worked additional hours. The amount of her time spent on Licensing work varied from week to week and at present, her time is not accurately recorded. It was agreed that in order to show how Licensing Income was used and to demonstrate the impact should the current delegation arrangements cease, it would be beneficial for this information to be available.

- The officers and members of Wincanton Town Council felt that they offer a good face to face service for local taxi drivers who would otherwise have to face a 35 mile trip to Yeovil. Muriel offered an 'above and beyond' personal service that was appreciated by service users – to the extent that apparently drivers visit Muriel at home to collect plates outside of office hours.
- Wincanton Town Council do not have a dedicated Licensing back office system for handling Licensing administration, but they do have separate spreadsheets and databases with all information securely stored.
- When asked what the impact on Wincanton Town Council would be if the delegation arrangements were ended, Colin Winder said it would represent a loss of £8,000 pa in income for the Town Council. Due to the issues of recording the Deputy Clerk's licensing duties, it was not clear what the impact on staffing would be.
- There was currently no facility for the on-line completion of the Licensing applications at Wincanton Town Council – but this was not a service which has been requested by Taxi Drivers. There was a link to the SSDC website and on-line forms on the Wincanton Town Council Website. The Clerk did say this was something they could look into if there was a demand.
- Cllr Ellard asked what the view of SSDC would be if proposals to delegate additional licensing functions to the Town Council came forward. It was explained that SSDC were operating in a very different financial climate to 10 years ago when the current delegation arrangements were introduced, and that whilst SSDC remained committed to empowering local communities where possible, the onus is now very much more on sound business cases and the best use of public money. Reassurance was given though that any full costed proposal would be given due consideration.

At the end of the meeting, an undertaking was given to keep the Clerk updated on the progress of the review. It was explained that any final decision on future arrangements would be made by SSDC elected members in line with the Constitution (clarification was sought on whether any final decision would be taken by Council or District Executive).

Representatives of Wincanton Town Council were thanked for their time.
