

**LICENSING AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

15 July 2019

Minutes of the Licensing and General Purposes Committee meeting held at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea on Monday 15 July 2019 at 6.32pm.

Committee Members present: Councillors A.K. Jeeawon (Chairman), Mrs S. Hart (Vice-Chairman), S.J. Coleman, B.J. Drayson, K.M. Field, K.M. Harmer, A.S. Mier, R.B. Thomas and H.L. Timpe.

Other Members present: Councillor P.C. Courtel.

Advisory Officers in attendance: Executive Director, Assistant Director Resources, Head of Service Environmental Services, Licensing and Community Safety, Deputy Legal Services Manager - Wealden and Rother Shared Legal Services, Revenue and Benefits Manager and Democratic Services Officer

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LG19/4.       **MINUTES**

The Chairman was authorised to sign the Minutes of the meetings of the Licensing and General Purposes Committee held on 15 April and 22 May 2019 as correct records of the proceedings.

LG19/5.       **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R.K. Bird, G.S. Browne, T.J.C. Byrne (ex-officio) and Dr Anthony Leonard, Executive Director.

LG19/6.       **DISCRETIONARY RELIEF FOR NON-DOMESTIC RATES POLICY**

Members received the report of the Executive Director providing summary information of the awards of Discretionary Rate Relief (DRR) for 2018/19, together with an updated policy that reflected changes introduced by the Government.

National Non-Domestic Rates were payable on all non-domestic properties. The amount payable was calculated by multiplying the rateable value (set by the Valuation Office Agency) with a national multiplier (which was increased each year by the retail price index).

The Local Government Finance Act 1988 and subsequent legislation required councils to grant mandatory relief for premises occupied by charities and similar organisations. Likewise, certain premises situated within a rural settlement area were also eligible for mandatory relief. The Council also had powers to grant discretionary relief and reductions to ratepayers, subject to certain criteria being met. In the case of new reliefs introduced, some guidance had been issued by the Government outlining actions expected to be taken by local authorities.

During the financial year 2018/19, 285 accounts were awarded Mandatory Rate Relief with a total value of £2,588,514.30. In addition, 44 accounts were awarded DRR with a total financial value of £41,332.92. Rother had met 40% of this cost; Members noted that under the new 2019/20 East Sussex Business Rate Retention 75% pilot, the Council would meet 44% of the cost of DRR. This increase was reflected in the Revenue Budget for 2019/20.

The Council's DRR Policy had last been reviewed in 2014. Since then a number of schemes had been introduced by the Government without specific legislation changes, administered under S47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 (Discretionary Provision) and fully funded by Central Government. The proposed policy document considered by Members detailed the schemes, along with the traditional Discretionary Provision in one document.

The most significant new relief detailed in the policy was the Retail Discount, whereby retail properties with a rateable value of less than £51,000 received a discount of one third of the rates bill for 2019/20 and 2020/21. Recipients of DRR at the time would not be adversely affected by the proposed updated policy, which would be applied retrospectively to take effect from 1 April 2019.

Members had the opportunity to raise questions and the following points were noted:

- the liability for payment of non-domestic rates applied to the occupier and followed them if moving to a new premises;
- the Localism Act 2011 allowed for DRR to be awarded on any property;
- Hardship Relief took into account profitability and the previous two year's accounts had to be submitted with an application; and
- external ATMs, where the machine was the only one in the High Street, were subject to Business Rates. The Council would give serious consideration to granting Business Rate relief subject to the outcome of the Valuation Office Agency's current appeal to the Supreme Court (Council Minute C18/58 refers).

**RECOMMENDED:** That the new Discretionary Rate Relief Policy as set out in Appendix 2 to the report be approved and adopted.

LG19/7.

#### **ROLE AND FUNCTIONS**

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Directors on the Role and Functions of the Licensing and General Purposes Committee. The report set out the general work of the Committee, including the responsibilities delegated to the Committee's General Licensing and Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Panels.

The Deputy Legal Services Manager reminded Members that the two licensing panels dealt with matters independent of each other; the General Licensing Panel determined matters relating to personal and

premises licences in accordance with the Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Act 2005; the Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Panel determined matters relating to Hackney Carriage, Private Hire driver, operator and vehicle licences and reports on alleged breaches of conditions in regard to those licences.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

LG19/8.

### **SHORT-TERM HOLIDAY ACCOMMODATION**

Members received the report of the Executive Director which considered what resources would be required with the introduction of a statutory registration scheme for tourism accommodation, to be offset by registration charges, following a recommendation by the Tourism Task and Finish Group.

Short-term holiday accommodation, which was rented from one day to a few weeks through websites, had become increasingly popular, compared with traditional holidays in bed and breakfast type accommodation. The website <https://www.airdna.co/vacation-rental-data/app/gb/south-east/east-sussex/overview> showed that there were over 3,000 properties in East Sussex, with a working assumption that half were in Rother and Wealden.

Nationally there were concerns about the safety and quality of the accommodation, the impact on residents and the use of such unregistered accommodation for criminal activities.

Traditional bed and breakfast type accommodation had to be registered with the Council as a food business (food being supplied) and pay business rates, but a fee could not be charged for registration. The legal controls on safety did exist, the problem was one of enforcement, particularly identifying where properties were and then inspecting them and Government policy was currently not to make legislation requiring the registration of short-term holiday accommodation.

Members were advised that a Senior Environmental Health Officer could undertake a pilot project on short-term holiday accommodation, with the temporary support of a 0.5 full time equivalent (fte) Business Support Officer. The Council currently had a 0.8 fte Senior Environmental Health Officer post vacant, which it would have to recruit to. The cost of employing a temporary Business Support Officer was £15,000 per annum (p.a.), the cost of which would be shared with Wealden District Council (60%), as environmental health was a shared service.

Members had the opportunity to raise questions and the following points were noted:

- feedback from Cornwall Council who had recently introduced a voluntary Quality in Tourism scheme, whereby the authority and

fire authority approved short-term accommodation, was good and had encouraged tourism to the district;

- accommodation providers could be encouraged to join the scheme as a mark of quality;
- 1066 Country website was due to launch a Country of Origin quality stamp which could be given to accommodation providers as an alternative to using a registration scheme; and
- an endorsement of accommodation by the Council may be more likely to attract bookings from tourists from outside the area, who were not familiar with 1066 Country.

**RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) a voluntary registration scheme for short-term holiday accommodation be advertised and response rates collated; and
- 2) response rates to the scheme be reported back to the Licensing and General Purposes Committee in the new year.

**CHAIRMAN**

The meeting closed at 7.37pm.