

REGULATORY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Thursday, 23 November 2023

Present: Councillor A Hodson (Chair)

Councillors S Bennett R Pitt
C Cooke M Redfern
G Davies J Stewart Laing
M Jordan K Stuart
L Luxon-Kewley M Sullivan
C McDonald E Tomeny
K Murphy J McManus (In
place of B Hall)

21 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and those watching the webcast.

22 APOLOGIES

The Chair confirmed apologies had been received from Councillor B Hall who was deputised by Councillor J McManus.

23 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of the Committee were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests in connection with any item on the agenda and state the nature of the interest.

No such declarations were made.

24 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

The Chair reported that there had been no questions submitted from any members of the public or from any Members.

25 STATEMENTS AND PETITIONS

The Chair reported that there had been no statements or petitions received.

26 MINUTES

Resolved – That the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 7 September 2023 be approved.

27 **MINUTES OF THE LICENSING PANEL**

Resolved – That the accuracy of the minutes of the meetings of the Licensing Panel held on 16 August, 8 September, 15 September, 21 September, 13 October and 20 October 2023 be approved.

28 **HONORARY FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH SUE HIGGINSON, OBE**

The Director of Law and Governance submitted a report requesting that Members of the Committee recommend to Council that Sue Higginson be admitted as Honorary Freewoman of this Borough at an Extraordinary meeting of the Council to be held on 4 December 2023.

The Civic and Electoral Services Manager reported that this was a very significant step for the Council to take. Very few people had been awarded this status and it should only be awarded to someone who had made an exceptional contribution to the Borough. It is considered that Sue Higginson falls within this category.

The Civic and Electoral Services Manager advised Members of the Committee that all Political Group Leaders had been consulted and supported the proposals.

Councillor Cooke suggested whether a workshop could be arranged to discuss the Freedom of the Borough Protocol. The legal advisor to the Committee advised that this could be referred to the Governance Working Group and Councillor Cooke responded by stating he would discuss this further with Group Leaders.

On a motion by Councillor S Bennett and seconded by Councillor M Redfern, it was –

Resolved –

- (1) That in pursuance of the provisions of Section 249(5) of the Local Government Act 1972 and in recognition of her dedicated service to the Borough, that Sue Higginson be admitted as an Honorary Freewoman of this Borough at an Extraordinary meeting of the Council to be held on 4 December 2023; and**
- (2) That officers be requested to take the necessary actions associated with (1) above and arrange a small civic reception for Sue Higginson and invited guests on a mutually agreeable date**

following the Extraordinary meeting of the Council on 4 December 2023.

29 **POLLING PLACES REVIEW**

The Director of Law and Governance submitted a report advising Members of the consultation outcome following the statutory polling place and polling district review which had been undertaken in September/October 2023 following approval to undertake a consultation by this Committee on 7 September 2023.

The Civic and Electoral Services Manager reported that the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) must conduct a statutory review of polling places and polling districts every five years which can start no earlier than 1 October 2023 and must be completed within 16 months. Therefore, this must be completed by no later than 31 January 2025.

Members were informed that the statutory responsibility for reviewing UK Parliamentary polling districts and places rests with each relevant local authority in Great Britain for so much of any constituency as is situated in its area.

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to undertake a full review of their Parliamentary polling places and polling districts within the Borough and make such changes as would be considered necessary to ensure they remain accessible to all electors.

Members were informed that the review formally commenced on 2 October 2023 with the publication of a formal notice at Birkenhead Town Hall and a publication on the Council's website. Notices had also been published on the Council's social media and online channels.

The Civic and Electoral Services Manager referred to the outcome of the consultation outlined within the report and advised that Electoral Services had received representations from electors and Ward Councillors and that representations had been received in the form of 39 'Have your say' responses and one email from a Ward Councillor.

The Chair, with the support of Councillor Sullivan thanked the Electoral team for their ongoing hard work.

In response to questions from Members, the Civic and Electoral Services Manager advised that the Acting Returning Officer had published notice of the review and had consulted with interested groups, including those with expertise in relation to access to premises or facilities for disabled people, or bodies including electors, political parties, MPs and Members of the Council.

Members were further advised that of the 103 polling places, 45 schools had been used in 2019 however this had now been reduced to 34 and that the use of schools was constantly under review.

On a motion by Councillor S Bennett and seconded by Councillor J Stewart Laing, it was –

Resolved – That, in light of the consultation, it was not necessary to change any of the current polling places as a result of the review.

30 **HACKNEY CARRIAGE VEHICLE LICENCES**

The Director of Law and Governance submitted a report seeking approval to remove the limit on the number of Hackney Carriage Vehicles that may be licensed in Wirral.

The Licensing Manager reported that on 23 January 2012 this Committee had resolved to impose a limit of 289 on the number of Hackney Carriage Vehicle Licences that could be issued by the Council and that further to a review of the limit by this Committee on 1 February 2018, it was resolved that the limit should be maintained. Members were informed that since that date there had been a significant reduction in the number of Hackney Carriage Vehicles that are licensed in Wirral from 285 at the time the limit was initially imposed to the current number which was 164. It was therefore considered that it was no longer necessary to limit the number of vehicles that may be licensed as Hackney Carriage Vehicles as it was highly unlikely that the Council would find itself in the position that it would have to refuse to grant a Hackney Carriage Vehicle Licence due to the limit on the number of licences that the Council would issue.

On a motion by Councillor S Bennett and seconded by Councillor J Stewart Laing, it was -

Resolved – That the limit on the number of licences that may be granted in respect of Hackney Carriage Vehicles be removed.

31 **REVIEW OF HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARES**

The Director of Law and Governance submitted a report for Members of this Committee to consider whether to amend the current Hackney Carriage Fares.

The Licensing Manager reported that the current Hackney Carriage fares came into effect on 1 September 2022 and that a proposal to amend the current Hackney Carriage Fares had been received from Unite the Union on behalf of their members who are Hackney Carriage Drivers licensed by Wirral

Council. The current fares and the proposal to amend the fares were outlined in the appendices to the report.

The Licensing Manager informed Members that should the amendments to the current Hackney Carriage Fares be approved, the proposal must be advertised for a period of at least fourteen days. If no objections to the proposals are received, the revised fares could become effective in December 2023, however, should any objections be received they would be reported back to this Committee for further consideration in January 2024.

A representative of Unite the Union, Mr G Gregory addressed the Committee and informed Members that he represented 75 to 85 members of the Union. Mr Gregory advised that the proposal had been made due to an increase in the cost of running Hackney Carriage Vehicles. He also confirmed that Bank Holiday rates would be one set fare for the day and night.

A Hackney Carriage Vehicle Driver, Mr McCourt addressed the Committee who supported the proposals to amend the fares.

On a motion by Councillor J McManus and seconded by Councillor C McDonald, it was -

Resolved – That the proposal to amend the Hackney Carriage Fares be approved subject to any objections being received as part of the consultation process.