

**LICENSING TASK GROUP held at 9.30 am at COUNCIL OFFICES  
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 6 JANUARY 2009**

Present:- Councillors J I Loughlin, D J Morson, D G Perry and A D Walters.

Officers in attendance:- J M Mitchell and M Cox.

**LTG1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED that Councillor D G Perry be appointed Chairman of the Task Group.

**LTG2 TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Task Group considered the resolution in Minute LC34 of the Licensing Committee on 19 November 2009 relating to the setting up of this Task Group

Members felt that the wording of resolution 3 should be amended to delete the word "agree" and replace with "seek to resolve" which would better reflect the purpose of the Task Group.

It was also noted that in resolution 4 the reference to progressing vehicle testing should be deleted as the principle of outsourcing this function had already been agreed.

The resolutions would now read as follows.

"that the purpose of the Group be to seek to resolve with the Council's accountants the relevant financing figures pertaining to license fees for presenting to the Committee at its meeting on 21 January".

"that its terms of reference be to bring to a conclusion the question of what license fees are just".

**LTG3 WAY FORWARD**

The Chief Executive said that he had asked for this initial meeting to be with members only so that he could be clear about the issues of concern. He then summarised the events that had led to the setting up of the Task Group.

It appeared that the main concern of the Trade was that the current license fee charges had no foundation in fact. The level of fees had been set some time ago by a process of bench marking against the charges levied by other local authorities. For subsequent years these charges had been increased in line with inflation but there had never been an examination as to the actual costs involved. It had been agreed that the Trade was justified in these concerns and some work to produce reliable figures had been undertaken by the Council's accountants. However, the Trade still had queries in a number of areas including staffing costs and business rates.

The Chief Executive said the role of the Task Group would be to firstly establish whether the charges had been unfair, and if so, how to this should be resolved. A list of the concerns of the Trade had been tabled at the last meeting of the Licensing Committee and could be used as the basis for the investigation.

Members were under the impression that the Trade was not seeking a refund of the fees but for the charges to be equitable in the future and any savings to be put back into the licensing function, particularly the enforcement area. The key to resolving this issue was to obtain accurate figures to prove the case either way.

Members were concerned that the issue of the fees had been raised at the Licensing Committee a year ago and had not yet been resolved. It had been raised at every meeting and had dominated proceedings. A number of issues were raised about how this process had been dealt with, particularly the inconsistency of the figures presented and the advice that had been given. Members asked for a clear picture of the facts and accurate figures, so that a consensus could be agreed and the matter finally concluded.

The Chief Executive noted Members' concerns about how this process had been conducted but advised this was not within the remit of this Task Group and would be investigated outside the meeting.

Members stressed the importance for officers, Members and the Trade to work more in partnership and welcomed the opportunity to attend future liaison meetings.

LTG4

#### **NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that a further meeting of the Task Group would be held at 10am on Friday 16 January 2009.

The purpose of the meeting would be to agree a method for calculating the license fees. Representatives from the Trade, the Council's Accountants, the Head of Street Services and the Licensing Officer would be invited to attend.

The meeting ended at 10.25am