

Information Paper

Council - 18 July 2016

Licensing Committee rescheduling

This note contains supplementary information for Members to consider when debating the motion proposed by Councillor Coleman on the timing of Licensing Committee meetings from September 2016.

1. Background

- 1.1 The process of setting the Council diary starts in January each year and culminates in
- 1.2 the diary going to Council for agreement in March/April. A considerable amount of effort goes into setting the diary and includes a consultation with officers and all Councillors. That is the time when Councillors have an opportunity to put their thoughts on any issues relating to the diary including start time of meetings. This year there was a very limited response to the consultation and there were no comments on this particular issue during the consultation. The current diary was agreed by Council in April and following that decision, officer resources from Democratic Services and Licensing were allocated accordingly and all the necessary admin to support room bookings etc. was completed.
- 1.3 Following the appointment of the Licensing Committee at Selection Council on 16 May, the new committee met for the first time on Friday 3 June at the scheduled time of 2.15 pm. Under AOB, the start time of the meeting was discussed. The minutes record that :
“Discussion followed on the timings of Licensing meetings and the proposal to consider evening meetings. It was pointed out that meetings were held at this time to accommodate taxi drivers and premises license holders whose trade was busiest in the evenings. The timing of 2.15pm also allowed those of Muslim faith to attend after prayers. It was also mentioned that the Council diary for 2016-17 had already been agreed and that members had been consulted before it was approved at Council. Upon a show of hands, the majority preferred it to remain as it was or were impartial. Two present, plus one absentee, wanted it moved to an evening meeting.”
- 1.4 Subsequently, Democratic Services were advised by the chair of Licensing that a motion to Council was being considered and they supported an additional briefing note for Members supporting the motion. Therefore officers did some exploratory work to see what the options were and the implications and these are set out in this note.

2. Impact on applicants

- 2.1 Many authorities do hold their Licensing Committees in the evening but historically Cheltenham have always held them in the day. The current start time could make it difficult for some applicants who run their businesses during traditional office hours.
- 2.2 Licensing Officers advise that it is very plausible that some applicants will not be able to attend evening meetings. This will depend on the actual time but some applicants come before the committee with work related issues, some applicants work at night

(i.e. bars, taxis etc.) and later evening meetings will make it very difficult for applicants/lawyers etc. that have to travel. This will be particularly problematic if meetings go on very late.

2.3 The motion was discussed briefly in the Mayor's briefing for Council and it was suggested that due to the nature of the committee being public facing there should be some consultation with key stakeholders before making a final decision. This would include some consultation with representatives of taxi drivers and licensees.

2.4 Members may like to reflect on the experiences of moving Planning Committee from an afternoon slot to an evening slot which happened several years ago. There were warnings that professionals and applicants would not be able to make evening meetings but that does not seem to have been the case in practice.

3. Officer resources

3.1 Wherever possible, we try to provide continuity of officer support for all our committees particularly where evening meetings are concerned. The working days of our Democracy Assistant in Democratic Services who currently supports Licensing Committee facilitates getting agendas out on Wednesday's and servicing the meeting on Fridays. The rest of the team have a full schedule of meetings already allocated and do not have capacity to take on another committee.

3.2 One solicitor from One Legal supports the Licensing Committee. Again One Legal would try to ensure continuity of officer support for any evening meeting but this may not always be possible due to their existing commitments.

3.3 Similarly Licensing Officers would need to replan their resources if there was a change to an evening slot. Monday and Wednesday meetings would be a particular issue for their team but would accommodate these in their workplan if those days were the only option.

3.4 There are no budgetary implications but officers attending team meetings will take time off in lieu which will reduce their availability in the office during the normal working day.

4. Availability in the council diary of scheduled meetings

4.1 When planning the diary we aim to have each committee on a specific day so Members of that committee and officers supporting it can plan their diaries accordingly. Licensing Committee has always taken place on the 1st Friday of every month.

4.2 If Licensing Committee is required to move to an evening slot from September 2016 as the motion suggests, it would not be possible to schedule the same day across the year without rearranging existing dates already fixed.

4.3 The diary is already taken up with meetings on a Tuesday (Cabinet/Informal Cabinet/Group Leaders) and Thursday (Planning, regular working groups) and Friday evening meetings have not been considered as an option.

4.4 On that basis the potential new dates for Licensing with a 6.00 pm start could be as follows:
2016
Wed 7 September

Wed 12 October
Wed 9 November
Wed 7 December
2017
Thur 12 January
Wed 8 February
Wed 8 March
Wed 12 April
Wed 10 May
Wed 7 June
Mon 10 July
Wed 2 August

4.5 When we plan the diary for 2017/18 we would aim to have all the Licensing Committees on the same day.

4.6 Members should also note that there is also a requirement for Licensing sub-committees which are arranged on ad hoc basis by canvassing availability of Members at the time.

5. Next Steps

5.1 If Council approve the motion today, officers would take the necessary steps to reschedule the meetings in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair but subject to the limitation sets out above.

Background Papers

None

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