

# Licensing Committee Minutes

Date: 14 March 2013

Time: 7.00 - 7.55 pm

**PRESENT:** Councillor A E Hill (in the Chair)

Councillors D H G Barnes, W J Bendyshe-Brown, S Graham, A R Green, C B Harriss, Ms R Knight, Ms P L Lee and I L McEnnis.

Standing Deputies present: Councillors: Z Ahmed, S P Lacey and A Slater.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: D J Carroll, S F Parker, J L Richards OBE, R J Scott, D A C Shakespeare OBE and A Turner

## 10 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 November 2012 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

## 11 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

## 12 HIGH STRENGTH ALCOHOL INITIATIVE - OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION PROCESS

The Committee received an update report on the consultation undertaken in respect of proposals first brought before the Committee in November 2012, to introduce a voluntary ban on sales of high strength beers and white ciders in the town centre.

Members were informed that, since that time, widespread consultations had taken place with all affected licence holders and other relevant bodies, stakeholders and individuals, including the police and HWBIDCo, formerly the Town Centre Partnership.

As a result of comments and feedback from the consultation, it was explained that the recommendation was now that the proposed voluntary ban would apply to sales of white cider only and would not include other high strength alcohols as previously envisaged. White cider was deemed to be the most harmful of the high strength products in view of its low unit cost and high alcoholic content, its potential to seriously harm health, its propensity to encourage crime and disorder and the preference for white ciders amongst the street drinking community.

Initially it had been the intent to apply the voluntary ban to all beers and ciders over 6.5% proof, but the consultation had highlighted the fact that many speciality beers

and ciders falling into this category at the higher end of the market were not consumed by street drinkers and were not implicated in problem drinking.

Plans to introduce the voluntary ban from 1 April 2013 were explained. From this date and subject to the support of the Committee, the licensed trade would be offered a variation to licences, at no cost, to include the condition that no white ciders would be offered for sale.

The Chairman said he had attended a meeting with licence holders and their reaction had been generally very positive. He said one trader had already stopped offering white ciders for sale and had found that his trade had been unaffected.

Members strongly supported the aims of the proposals and there was a full discussion of the issues. It was agreed that, for enforcement purposes, there would need to be a specific definition of white cider and it was explained that this would include reference to the use of culinary or dessert apples, as opposed to cider apples, as it was use of these apples which resulted in the lack of colour in the product.

There was concern that a voluntary ban in the town centre might displace problem drinkers to areas further out. Members heard that the situation would be monitored closely and it was the aim to roll out the scheme across a wider area if successful in the town centre.

During the course of the discussions it was emphasised that wherever Members became aware of alcohol related problems in their wards, these should be reported to the Licensing Team. All such problems would be fully investigated and licences would be brought for review or prosecutions would be initiated wherever appropriate.

Mention was made of the schemes already introduced in Westminster and Ipswich and there was discussion of the widespread focus across the country in tackling problem drinking and the harmful effects of white ciders. It was thought that quantities of white ciders were imported from the continent, including France, highlighting the international nature of the problem. There was support for the proposal that a letter be sent to the UK government Minister for Health urging nationwide action to help tackle the very harmful consequences stemming from the consumption of white ciders. There was a further proposal, which was fully supported by the Committee, that the Council should write to the local MEP to press for action at EU level.

In drawing the debate to a close, it was agreed that the Committee should review the impact of the voluntary ban in six months time and consider at that time the implications of extending the scheme across a wider area.

**RESOLVED:** That

- i) the Committee support a voluntary prohibition on the sale of specific and harmful high strength alcohol products (notably white cider)

within a specified area of High Wycombe town centre correlating with the current Designated Public Places Order, to be effective from 1 April 2013;

- ii) the Committee review a progress report on the roll out of the voluntary prohibition in 6 month's time, with a view to considering wider implementation of the scheme; and
- iii) in the interim, the Chairman write to the UK Minister for Health and the local Member of the European Parliament to urge both national and EU-wide action to tackle the harmful effects on health and behaviour stemming from the production and exploitation of high strength white ciders.

### **13 SCHEDULE OF LICENSING PANELS HELD SINCE THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The schedule of Licensing Panels held since the previous meeting was reviewed.

Several Members who had taken part in recent Panel Hearings commented that the previous licence history of an individual applying for a new licence was a relevant consideration but that this information was not always made available to them. This had been the case with 2 recently held Panels.

The Licensing Team Leader confirmed that all relevant information should be disclosed to the Panel, provided it was not data protected. It was agreed that Panel Hearing procedures, in particular in connection with the disclosure to Panel Members of previous licence history, would be placed on the agenda for the next meeting, to enable Members to discuss and clarify the position with the legal adviser. There was also agreement with the proposal that the Committee review experience in regard to the 2 licences in question in 6 months time.

**RESOLVED:** That the schedule of Licensing Panel Hearings held since the previous meeting be noted, and the Legal Adviser be asked to the next meeting of the Committee to discuss legal aspects relating to the disclosure of information at Panel Hearings.

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Chairman

#### **The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:**

- Caroline Steven - Licensing Team Leader
- Diana Davis - Democratic Services