

MINUTES OF LICENSING PANEL MEETING - MONDAY, 12 OCTOBER 2020

Present:

Councillor Hutton (in the Chair)

Councillors

Brookes D Scott

In Attendance:

Sharon Davies, Senior Licensing Solicitor

John Greenbank, Democratic Governance Senior Adviser (Scrutiny)

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

The Licensing Panel considered the appointment of a Chairman for the meeting.

Resolved:

That Councillor Hutton be appointed Chairman for the meeting.

2 DECLARATION OF INTEREST - LICENSING

There were no declarations of interest on this occasion.

3 PROCEDURE FOR THE MEETING

The Chairman explained the procedure for the meeting, including the order in which the applicant and objector would be heard and that the decision of the Panel would be communicated in writing within five-working days.

4 APPLICATION FOR A NEW BINGO PREMISES LICENCE - MERKUR SLOTS 40 ABINGDON STREET, BLACKPOOL, FY1 1DA

The Panel considered an application for a new Bingo Premises Licence at Merkur Slots, Abingdon Street, Blackpool, FY1 1DA.

The applicant, Cashino Gaming Ltd, was represented by Mr Philip Kolvin QC and accompanied Mr Richard Bradley, Poppleston-Allen Solicitors, Ms Amanda Kiernan, Head of Compliance, Mr Andrew Tipple, Head of Product, Ms Gill Clulow, Senior Auditor and Mr Darrell Butterworth, Licensing and Security Compliance Consultant.

Mr Kolvin outlined the case for the applicant, stating that since a previous application for a Bingo Premises Licence had been refused at a hearing on 26 June 2020 an amended application had been submitted to address the concerns raised at that meeting. In particular the application stated that the venue would close at 1.00am and a more detailed area risk assessment had been attached. The application also included a report from Mr Butterworth, an independent consultant, into security measures.

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The Panel was also informed that Lancashire Constabulary had been consulted on the application and had not raised any objections to the granting of a Licence. Mr Kolvin also highlighted that there had also been no concerns regarding the venue when it previously was a betting office. In addition to Lancashire Constabulary, it was also noted that no other statutory consultees had raised objections to the application.

Cashino Gaming Ltd was described as a large and experienced operator who were licensed by the Gambling Commission. Mr Kolvin reported that none of the eighty-nine sites operated by the company had been subject of a licensing review and no concerns had been raised that Cashino Gaming was not a responsible operator, adding that details of the operational systems and training for staff had been provided as part of the application. Through training and the procedure in place, Mr Kolvin informed Members that venue would offer a friendly and safe experience to a wide variety of customers. He also asked Members to note that although alcohol could be served at the venue, it would not be in line with the experience Cashino Gaming wished to offer and that non-alcoholic drink would be offered to customers instead.

Mr Kolvin also explained that the site would have staff and Close Circuit Television (CCTV) to monitor the site and allow them to react quickly to any issues that might arise. There would also be a strong staff presence in the venue, and it was confirmed that there would be no planned single manning of the venue after 8.00pm.

The significant legal obligation that the venue would be subject to were also highlighted by Mr Kolvin. He stated that in addition to the mandatory condition imposed as part of the Licence application, the applicant had also offered additional conditions for operations at the venue, such as restricted opening hours. There were also legal obligations outlined at Section 153 of the Licensing Act, such as the duty to protect vulnerable people.

Mr Kolvin also addressed the concerns raised by the objections raised by the Abington Barbeque and Bread Basket Bakery. These objections had expressed concern that granting the Licence would encourage people to gather in the street and lead to an increase in disorder and begging. The objectors had also expressed the view that granting the Licence would be contrary to the licensing objective of Protecting Vulnerable People. In response to these concerns Mr Kolvin stated that there was no evidence that granting the Licence would lead to an increase of people gathering near to the venue, instead explaining that the low customer numbers expected, well trained staff and only non-alcoholic drinks being served at the venue would mitigate against these concerns. He further added that Cashino Gaming had procedures in place to ensure vulnerable people were protected.

The Licensing Panel queried how the venue would deal with crime and disorder should it occur. Mr Kolvin replied that venues such as the one in the application rarely experienced crime and disorder issues, however should they occur, Cashino Gaming had procedures in place to de-escalate problems where possible and if this was not possible staff had Mobile Personal Alarms which could lead to the police being called, depending on the nature of the issue. Mr Butterworth added that venues similar to the one being applied for in other areas did not experience or create significant crime and disorder issues.

Members of the Panel also asked why a closing time of 1.00am had been requested,

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querying if other venues closed earlier. Mr Kolvin replied that although bingo was required to end at 12.00pm gambling in other forms could continue in an unlimited manner if an operator wished. However Cashino Gaming had specifically requested a condition which would require it to close fully at 1.00am.

The Panel also noted that the ratio of bingo tablets to gaming machines would be twenty bingo tablets to forty-six gaming machines. It was therefore queried if this was a normal ratio and if instead of primarily a bingo venue it was instead intended to be a gaming one. In response Mr Kolvin explained that most bingo customers preferred a smaller venue and it was unlikely that there would be more than nine customers at any one time. It was added that the higher number gaming machines was due to customers using the machines, preferring to browse from one machine to the next instead of remaining on one.

It was also queried by Members of the Panel what knowledge of Blackpool the applicant had and if they were aware that the venue was in an area where there were high levels of public drunkenness. Mr Kolvin explained that the application had been tailored to the intended venue, adding that staff were trained not to admit anyone who was drunk, being able to lock the entrance if necessary.

In conclusion Mr Kolvin stated that the application had addressed the concerns raised by objectors and the 26 June 2020 Licensing Hearing, had raised no concerns with statutory consultees and met the necessary licensing objectives. Therefore he asked that the Panel grant the application for Bingo Premises Licence.

Mr Paddy Whur, Woods Whur Solicitors, outlined objections to the application on behalf of Abingdon Barbeque, 44 Abingdon Street, and the Bread Basket, 55 Abingdon Street. Mr Whur stated that although the application had been amended and the area risk assessment had been updated, they still did not address the objectors concerns that granting the application would lead to an increase in crime and disorder in the area. He concluded that the application was not significantly different from the application refused at the 26 June 2020 Licensing Hearing and therefore did not address the issues surrounding crime and disorder or protect vulnerable people in the area, and should therefore be refused.

The Panel expressed concern that there was potential for an increase in crime and disorder if the application was granted but noted that there was no available evidence that this would be the case and recognised that the Council had licensing review processes in the event that any issues occurred. It was therefore agreed that the application should be granted.

Resolved: That the application for a new bingo premises licence at Merkur Slots, Abingdon Street, Blackpool, FY1 1DA be granted.

Chairman

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(The meeting ended 3.55 pm)

Any queries regarding these minutes, please contact:
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