

Appendix A

Beach Huts Review – Comments Received Relating to the Report and Findings Pack

A Comment

We are deeply concerned that your report does not address or even mention the most important issue raised at our meeting of 23 August and we therefore reject it.

“I was hopeful after meeting you and listening to what you had to say, that you would be ensuring that a full Scrutiny Review of the Beach Hut charges would take place.

Mike Bedford has worked very hard on presenting our case to prove to you that the current charges are way over-priced, far more than average, and we are getting far less in service.

We cannot accept a standstill in licence fees – THEY ARE RIDICULOUSLY HIGH!”

Response

The Panel has considered all the issues raised by the licensees. This review has included:

- (a) an analysis of the complaints received (see Section U of the Findings Pack);*
- (b) an analysis of the benchmarking exercise (see Section V of the Findings Pack);*
- (c) consultation with representatives of the beach hut licensees to understand their concerns (see Section Y of the Findings Pack);*
- (d) consultation with ward councillors (see Section Y of the Findings Pack); and*
- (d) consideration of all the options put forward to the Panel by the licensees and the Cabinet Lead including the financial implications of these options (see Sections C, S and T of the Findings Pack)*

B Comment

We expressly asked for an explanation of the 14.2% Licence Fee increase.

“We fully appreciate that the Council has a shortfall, and I was under the impression that most Councils were cutting costs to meet this. It sticks in your throat that you know Norse are taking a cut for their involvement and I personally, have no doubt that Norse are behind these hikes in beach hut charges.”

Response

At the suggestion of one of the Hayling Island ward members, the Panel agreed to “concentrate on ways to resolve the matter and not look back on past errors or decisions”.

The latest increase was part of a package of measures introduced to help the Council meet the predicted £1m deficit for this financial year (see page 151 of the Findings Pack)

C Comment

The Havant Borough Council justification was based on an untruth, namely, 'we are some way below the market rate for beach huts', when, in fact, we were 35% above the average for residents and 85% above for non-residents.

Response

The Panel has investigated and acknowledged that the “responses to complaints were found to be at best misleading and not based on evidence” (see pages 15 and 152 of the Findings Pack)

D Comment

There appears to have been no scrutiny at all, simply a wholesale adoption of suggestions made by Councillor Briggs at a previous meeting with you on 25 July.

Response

See the response to A above

The Panel considered in detail all the options available to the Council, including the licensees' request and the options put forward by the Cabinet Lead (see Sections C, S, and T of the Findings Pack)

E Comment

There has been much talk of the need to build trust and we feel this is still sadly lacking.

Response

See Recommendation 2.1.10 of the report

F Comment

Recommendation **2.1.7** – would it be possible to amend to read as follows to reflect the current practice

“Payment by instalments to be made in equal monthly instalments by direct debit, to be paid in full by end of September.”

Response

The recommendation needs to clarify the period in which the instalments need to be paid and how they are paid. However, the suggested amendment will not permit new licensees taking up a plot mid municipal year to be able to pay by instalments. It is therefore recommended that recommendation 2.1.7 be amended to read:

“agree that the facility to pay by equal instalments by direct debit over a six month period specified by Norse South East be offered to new and existing licensees with no administrative charge included or added”

G Comment

In the event of dissatisfaction with the outcome of the review, to which Councillor, officer or office should a formal complaint be addressed?

Response

There are a number of remedies available:

- (a) submission of a complaint under the Council’s complaints policy to the Head of Strategic Commissioning;*
- (b) if unhappy with outcome of the Council’s investigation into the complaint and the complainant feels there is evidence of maladministration, he or she may make a complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman. This is the independent organisation that looks into complaints against councils; and*
- (c) If the complainant wishes to challenge the validity of the decision, he or she may seek judicial review of the decision.*

H Comment

What do we get for £600 apart from ninety six square feet of single?

Response

The licence fee enables that licensee to erect a beach hut with views of the IOW and the Solent on Council land, which he or she would not be able to do without a licence.

I Comment

A point was raised, saying that the main grievance for hut owners, was the transfer of licence fee. This is not quite true. The real grievance has been the 14.2% increase in site fees. Very few huts appear to have changed hands this year. There are seven on the market at present.

Response

The analysis of complaints reveals that the two main issues for plot licence fees were:

- (i) the plot for hire licence fee (57%) and*
- (ii) the transfer for licence fee (54%)*

(see Section U of the Findings Pack)

With regard to the transfer of beach huts, it is estimated that up to 10 beach huts are transferred each year (see page 159 of the Findings Pack)

J Comment

The £1200 Transfer of licence fee introduced in April and now reduced to £100, in my opinion was an absurd concept. Norse South East appeared to be setting up as estate agents buying and selling beach huts. It is possible that the new fee discouraged buyer and sellers from doing business, especially in the summer season.

Response

The justification and rationale for the Transfer of Licence fee is set out on page 159 of the Findings Pack.

K Comment

The charges and conditions introduced in April are not fair or reasonable

Response

The terms and conditions of the licence have not been changed.

The Panel has fully considered that plot licence fees and its considerations are set out in the Findings Pack

L Comment

Those owners from outside the Borough find it difficult to understand the requirement to raise their site fees by £150 to £1200 (plus parking). They do

not have to pay double for their ice cream at the kiosk. The camper vans do not pay extra if from outside the Borough.

“50% of the income comes from non-residents who are paying twice as much, having suffered 375% in the last 10 years!!!

Can you explain why your non-resident hut owners are funding the shortfall in HBC services provided to their own residents? How on earth is that fair? We are being RIPPED OFF.”

Response

This issue is addressed in Section C of the Findings Pack. Charging a higher fee for non residents is in line with fee structures adopted by other Councils.

M Comment

Beach Hut owners should not be required to subsidise a shortfall in income from the Council recycling business

Response

The reference to recyclables on page 39 of the Findings Pack is in a paragraph which sets out the general case put forward at the initial review that income could be generated from the beach hut service by a number of options such as new beach huts, different letting arrangements, fees etc.

The increase in charges this year was not as a result of the initial review as explained in page 31 of the Findings Pack.

N Comment

Two conclusions to be drawn from the review

- (a) The provision of more beach huts for sale or hire is too complicated or difficult in the short term
- (b) Default position. Screw the beach hut community

Response

- (a) *The Council is currently in the process of identifying a site for new beach huts*
- (b) *See the response to comment A above*

0 Comment

“I applaud the idea of HBC putting up more huts, they cost around £1500 for a strongly built one – do come and see mine at B21 and I can show you – Renting it out weekly, the Council will have their money back in one year – you should have done it years ago. i.e. getting in more income from new sources NOT seeing how much you can squeeze out of your existing owners, who have paid fees, car park fees, supported local businesses, and brought in thousands more visitors to the beach who are visiting their friends and families beach huts.”

Response

The Council is currently in the process of identifying a site for new beach huts. Unfortunately the ecological survey and consultation with natural England has delayed the project.

The latest increase in fees was part of a package of measures introduced to help the Council meet the predicted £1m deficit for this financial year (see page 151 of the Findings Pack)

P Comment

“We at ‘B’ section have been surrounded in RV’s who stay overnight for most of the summer. We would suggest that they are not being charged enough, they seem to pay less than us and they get to sleep there! We of course are not allowed to sleep in our huts (unlike Mundeford Beach Huts which the Council chose to include in their calculations of an average beach hut rate!!)

We think you should be exploring NEW ways of increasing Council income such as these.”

Response

Car parking fees are not within the remit of this Panel’s review but is being included in a review by the Budget Scrutiny Panel’s review of other charges and fees set by the Council.

The Council is committed to “.. develop new income streams and efficiencies.....” in its Corporate Strategy.

Q Comment

“I have a letter to me personally from Councillor Briggs on 26th June promising a re-examination of the previous assessments of the hut charges, when he said he asked the Committee to carry out the review.”

Mike Bedford did this for you, and you have ignored it, despite promising you were listening in the meeting.

There is no mention of reassessment

Only a 'freeze' for three years."

Response

The Panel may consider requests from the Leader of the Council to undertake reviews but the content and structure of the review is decided by the scrutiny panels. In this case the Panel considered the request of the Leader of the Council and discussed the project plan of the review with the Cabinet Lead and the Hayling Island Ward Councillors. At the suggestion of one of the Hayling Island ward members, the Panel agreed to "concentrate on ways to resolve the matter and not look back on past errors or decisions".

The Panel has considered the issues raised by Mr Bedford undertaken a thorough review ((see Sections C, S, and T of the Findings Pack)