

Licensing Committee – 21 July 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the **Licensing & Appeals Committee** held on **21 July 2022** when there were present:-

Chairman: Cllr M G Wilkinson
Vice-Chairman: Cllr A L Williams

Cllr Mrs D L Belton
Cllr A G Cross

Cllr G W Myers
Cllr Mrs D P Squires-Coleman
Cllr M J Webb

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs D S Efde, Mrs E P Gadsdon, M Hoy, T D Knight, Mrs J E McPherson, Mrs L Shaw and D W Sharp.

SUBSTITUTES

Cllr D J Sperring - for Cllr Mrs L Shaw
Cllr V A Wilson - for Cllr Mrs T L Carter
Cllr Mrs C M Mason - for Cllr T D Knight

OFFICERS PRESENT

S Greener - Principal Licensing Officer
S Worthington - Principal Democratic & Corporate Services Officer
C Brook - Licensing Officer
W Szyszka - Democratic Services Officer

142 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

143 PROPOSAL FOR AN INCREASE TO THE HACKNEY CARRIAGE TARIFF BY REDUCING YARDAGE

Members considered the report of the Assistant Director, People and Communities seeking to change the current Hackney Carriage Tariff following a consultation with the trade and the public.

In response to a Member query relating to the number of licenses issued and how these compared to the number of licenses in January 2019 pre-pandemic, officers advised that the district saw a 30% reduction in drivers equating to a loss of 90 drivers out of 320. In the earlier part of 2022, the Committee had identified this loss in drivers as a significant issue, particularly in light of the fact that there was a clear lack of drivers on Friday and Saturday nights that had also inflicted problems on safeguarding matters. Consequently, the Committee had resolved to introduce an "Earn As You Learn" scheme which allowed to reduce the period it took for potential taxi drivers to become fully qualified,

having completed the same checks as regular learners; however, they would undergo an additional knowledge test that would take 3 to 6 months to complete. The Committee also resolved that the scheme would ensure the same requirements as for private hire drivers and a badge would be issued for a period of 9 months during which learners under the scheme can learn and work simultaneously having to undertake an exam at the end of the 9-month period. Upon successful completion of the exam, the learner would be awarded a Hackney Carriage badge; however, should they fail the exam, there would be a requirement to re-apply for a new badge after a 12-month period. Officers further advised that the scheme had been working exceptionally well, with two drivers already awarded the Hackney Carriage badge since the scheme implementation date. Currently, there were 26 drivers who were undergoing the learning phase with 19 new applications being processed. The district was therefore seeing an increase in the trend compared to the rest of the county.

A Member queried whether the increase and the yardage figures were being supplied on a monthly basis and whether the figures were available for public inspection. Officers responded that the figures were supplied to the magazine and were publicly available.

In response to a Member query seeking clarification on what the late night surcharge was, officers clarified that hiring between 10.30pm and 6am the following morning on weekends, including Sundays and Bank Holidays saw £2.00 added to the starting fare, thus the journey would start at £5.00 as opposed to £3.00. Officers further advised that the rate per yard would not change with the exception of 24 December from 9pm until 6am 27 December as well as 9pm on 31 December until 6pm on 2 January in the new year which would see a double fare.

A Member expressed that the comparisons within the report had been taken at 2 miles; however, would welcome to see comparisons at 4 miles, 6 miles and 10 miles to obtain a clearer overview. Officers advised that the information was not available in this moment in time; however, it would be published by the magazine.

A Member spoke in favour of the report and welcomed the proposed increase highlighting that it was crucial for the wages of taxi drivers to be increased in light of the nationwide increase in living costs.

A Member expressed concerns bringing to attention the decrease in bus routes across Rochford, particularly the reduction in the number 7 bus services to 3 buses per hour and a complete suspension to the number 8 bus service on Sundays. As a result, local residents would rely on taxis which could pose significant issues to retired persons or pensioners who were on a fixed budget. It was also queried whether the increase could be index linked, i.e., when the price of fuel decreases, so do the costs of fares.

In response, officers advised that this could be index linked which would mean that as opposed to seeing a general increase, an extra sur charge of 40p would be added on top of the fare in an area where petrol price reached a certain

stage. This was adopted by other authorities such as Southend City Council or Castle Point Borough Council.

Another Member spoke in favour of the report having also considered the concerns raised by other Members highlighting that should the recommendations not be approved, the district was in danger of failing to return to pre-Covid time, not having an adequate number of taxi drivers operating across the district.

Another Member expressed concerns regarding the price of fuel and commented that according to two reputable sources, the price of fuel was expected to decrease by a maximum of 60p within the next 6 months.

A Member queried who was responsible for applying spoilage charges and how the decision was made. Officers clarified that this was at the discretion of the taxi driver, i.e., if a client fell ill within a vehicle the driver would be unable to perform work duties due to the need to clean the vehicle in order to continue operating. This would therefore give the taxi driver the authority to implement a spoilage charge of up to £100.00. Officers also advised that in the instance of drink spillage within a taxi, it would not automatically reserve the right for the driver to charge a spoilage fee and instances where spoilage fees are charged for spilled drinks would be investigated.

A Member expressed that the concerns raised by Members with regard to the adversely affected bus routes were not for the Committee to consider and spoke in favour of the report that the increase should be awarded. The Member further commented that there was a pattern in young women and girls hesitating to go out due to the uncertainty of being able to secure a taxi late at night which also had a knock-on effect on night-time economy.

Cllr Mrs C M Mason moved a Motion, seconded by Cllr Mrs D P Squires-Coleman that a further recommendation be added, "that this Committee implements a bi-annual review of the Hackney Carriage Tariff taking into account increases and decreases in fuel prices and inflation rates and other criteria as deemed appropriate. To consider the effectiveness of any increase or decrease in maintaining the level of service in relation to demand with reviews taking effect from the 2023 Municipal Year."

Speaking to the Motion, a Member spoke favourably and expressed that a bi-annual review was a sufficient timescale for regular reviews.

The Chairman spoke in favour of this Motion and directed the Committee to paragraph 5.3 on page 6.4 of the report where a steep increase was reflected in the charts leading to distorted figures in light of the European war crisis.

A Member also commented that the increase in fuel was apparent prior to the current European conflict and was more directly linked with the value of the pound against the dollar which fell after Brexit.

The Motion was unanimously agreed and declared carried.

Resolved

- (1) That the application by the Trade be determined for a fare increase as outlined within Appendix A to this report taking into account the representations received and the contents of this report.
- (2) That it be agreed that the implementation date of the increased fares be delegated to the Assistant Director, People and Communities in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Licensing, and that this be no later than the end of August 2022.
- (3) That this Committee implements a bi-annual review of the Hackney Carriage Tariff taking into account increases and decreases in fuel prices and inflation rates and other criteria as deemed appropriate. To consider the effectiveness of any increase or decrease in maintaining the level of service in relation to demand with reviews taking effect from the 2023 Municipal Year. (ADPC)

(This was unanimously agreed.)

The meeting commenced at 7.30pm and closed at 8.07pm

Chairman

Date

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