

Taxi Licensing Sub-Committee – 27 July 2004

Minutes of the meeting of the **Taxi Licensing Sub-Committee** at a reconvened meeting held on **27 July 2004** when there were present:-

Cllr P F A Webster (Chairman)

Cllr R A Amner
Cllr P R Robinson

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs H L A Glynn

VISITING MEMBERS

Cllrs J E Grey and T Livings

OFFICERS PRESENT

J Crawford - Transportation Manager
J Read - Hackney Carriage Officer
J Bostock - Principal Committee Administrator

ALSO PRESENT

M Chaplin - Rochford Hackney Carriage Drivers' Association
M Street and D Willshire - Association of Circuit Company Owners in the Rochford District
C Marsh - Meter Agent

32 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

It was recognised that Members of the Sub-Committee had a personal interest to the extent that they used taxis.

33 TAXI TARIFF REVIEW

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue & Housing Management on the proposed changes to the existing authorised fare tariff submitted by the Rochford Hackney Carriage Drivers' Association.

In welcoming the representatives from the trade, the Chairman confirmed that the adjournment of the last meeting had provided additional time for Members to give detailed consideration to the report. It could be seen as important for the Council, the taxi trade and residents for there to have been a detailed assessment of report contents. Adjournment had also enabled Sub-Committee Members to consult other Members of the Council on the tariff review.

A Motion relating to the introduction of a 4% increase in fares over the whole of the current fare structure and the production of a detailed paper on the deregulation of an authorised fare tariff was moved by Councillor P F A Webster and seconded by Councillor P R Robinson.

Responding to questions from the trade, the Chairman re-iterated the importance which had been placed on adjourning the previous meeting to facilitate a detailed assessment of report contents, from which it had been concluded that an increase of 4% would be fair to all concerned. Reference was also made to the favourable nature of 4% when compared with the cost of living indicators set out in the report.

The representatives from the trade had concerns that last year's increase did not equate to 4% overall and that there had been an indication that any forthcoming increase would take account of that. The trade also felt that account should be taken of rates applicable in Southend, particularly given that the majority of cross-border working involved that Borough. Reference was made to increases in insurance and fuel costs faced by drivers. Reference was also made to the value of Members being able to make decisions based on information that will enable an understanding of the trade. The trade indicated that they considered that the removal of the 3 year probationary period for hackney carriage plates had been detrimental.

The Meter Agent provided a brief explanation of the operation of a meter and financial changes that could be associated with reprogramming. It was noted that a Member teach-in had been previously provided on this subject. The Agent indicated that, until approximately 10 years ago, the District had followed a tradition of following fares set by Southend.

Responding to Member questions, the Transportation Manager advised that:-

- Taking the period of 4 years from 2000, there had been a 3.57% increase in the fare associated with journeys up to one mile. High percentage increases could be associated with the charges for extras introduced last year.
- It would be particularly complicated to identify a precise percentage increase that could be associated with the overall package introduced last year. Some aspects would have seen an increase, others a decrease.
- The change whereby night rate charging commenced at 10.30pm and the surcharge of 20p was removed had been introduced in 2002, not last year.
- The information set out in the report before the Sub-Committee was factually correct for use by Members in reaching a decision.

Taxi Licensing Sub-Committee – 27 July 2004

During debate Members recognised that, depending on viewpoint, it was possible to introduce a number of different arguments on aspects of both the fare tariff and other matters, such as changes in the probationary period for hackney carriage plates and the weighting that could be given to charges set by Southend Borough. Notwithstanding that the trade may separate the formula used for distance and time travelled from the formula used for chargeable extras, it could be seen as appropriate for Members to be mindful of overall percentage impact. To take one aspect in isolation could lead to hypothetical conclusions.

The motion was agreed on a show of hands and it was:-

Recommended to Council:-

- (1) That for 2004/05 an increase of 4% (or the nearest possible percentage point) be applied over all aspects of the existing fare structure.
- (2) That there be no alterations to any of the specific features of the current fare structure (i.e. the extra charges to continue to be identified separately and the night rate to continue to start at 10.30pm).
- (3) That officers provide a detailed paper on the deregulation of an authorised fare tariff by the end of October 2004. The paper to include information on:-
 - The advantages and disadvantages of deregulation for drivers and circuit owners.
 - The implications for Rochford District Council staff (including financial).
 - The impact on the present Taxi Voucher Scheme.
 - Details on the approach of other Essex authorities to deregulation and the views of other Essex authorities on the advantages/disadvantages of deregulation, together with any other comments that they may wish to make.
 - The potential impact deregulation could have on District residents that use the taxi service (shoppers, commuters, week-end users and so on).

The meeting reconvened at 10.30 am and closed at 11.40 am.

Chairman

Date