



EAST
CAMBRIDGESHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

LICENSING COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Licensing Committee held in the Council Chamber, The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely on Wednesday, 20th June 2018 at 9.30am.

PRESENT

Councillor Elaine Griffin-Singh (Chairman)
Councillor Michael Allan
Councillor Mike Bradley
Councillor Paul Cox
Councillor Julia Huffer
Councillor Chris Morris

OFFICERS

Stewart Broome – Senior Licensing Officer
Maggie Camp – Legal Services Manager and Monitoring Officer
Liz Knox – Environmental Services Manager
Adrian Scaites-Stokes – Democratic Services Officer

4. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sue Austen, Neil Hitchin, Carol Sennitt, Alan Sharp and Stuart Smith.

5. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no interests declared.

6. **MINUTES**

It was resolved:

That the Minutes of the Licensing Committee meeting held on 10th January 2018 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman:

7. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman made no announcements.

8. **HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARES – CONSIDERATION OF REQUEST FROM TRADE TO INCREASE FARES**

The Committee considered a report, T33 previously circulated, that detailed increasing the fares payable by members of the public to use an East Cambridgeshire District Council taxi following a formal request from members of the taxi trade.

The Senior Licensing Officer advised the Committee that consideration of increasing taxi fares payable by the public had been requested by the taxi trade. The 1976 Act of Parliament gave local authorities the power to set fares for hackney carriages. The taxi drivers had the choice to charge less than the fares set but could not charge more. Within the district the fares were set as a meter rate but the public could use taxis from outside the district where they would not have to use those rates.

Councillor Michael Allan asked about customers who were picked up outside the district. The Senior Licensing Officer explained those people should have pre-booked taxis, though the vast majority of journeys were within the district.

By law, the Council had to advertise the charges made. Any objections or comments received would be brought back to a future Committee meeting. These had to be considered within two months of the commencement date, so 1st August 2018 was suggested as that date. If no comments were received by that date then the new fares would come into effect from that time.

Taxi fares were an emotive subject, therefore the Council had to take a balanced view of the taxi trade's viewpoint as well as the paying public. The last increase had been on 2013 and since then the trade had seen rises in fuel, maintenance costs, insurance and inflation over the last few years. Fuel prices had fluctuated over that time but overall were steadily rising. Although insurance figures for taxis were not readily available, the comparison of domestic vehicles showed a steady rise in costs. The charges made for testing vehicles at a number of authorised garages were still around the 2013 levels. This Council had increased licence fees, to help cover the current deficit. Medical expenses had not increased, as less were visiting their General Practitioners by using private suppliers instead. Inflation also showed an upward trend.

Overall it was difficult to judge how these issues affected the trade, due to multiple factors. This meant that estimate figures had been used in Table 4 in the report, to assess the potential impact on income. This showed an estimated reduction in annual income of over £2500 compared to 2013. The effect of fuel, licence and insurance prices, covered in Table 5, showed an overall increase in those costs. So this demonstrated that taxi drivers were worse off than in 2013.

It would not be appropriate to ignore this impact. Consideration also had to be taken into account of the public wanting a service that was reliable and affordable. So a balanced approach would be needed, to encourage continued public use. If using a taxi became too expensive the public could use operators from outside the district or look for other alternatives. Compared to

neighbouring local authority areas this Council was 4th out of 7 for the highest day fares, and 7th for the night fares. Currently the night fares were only an additional 50p per journey, with more chances of anti-social behaviour and extra risks being encountered. So some drivers did not see any benefit in night time working.

The time was right to change the fees and the recommended increases took account of the potential impact on the community. Evidence suggested that there was some confusion around the night fare rates, so the increased flag rate aimed to achieve a balance between the trade's needs and those of the public. Table 7 in the report showed how this would be achieved. It was also proposed that the charge for Christmas Day be merged with all the other Bank Holiday charges.

All meters should be calendar controlled, though this had not yet been checked. Information had been received to suggest that this would prevent any tampering with the meters.

Councillor Paul Cox queried whether the meters automatically updated or whether they had to be re-programmed. The Committee was informed that there would be a requirement to re-calibrate the meters to the new rates. This would cost the drivers a nominal fee and the suppliers usually visited the taxi ranks to provide that work. The Senior Licensing Officer agreed to research whether the meters were calendar controlled and report back to Committee.

The Senior Licensing Officer accepted that it would be difficult to analyse the impact on the drivers, as there were so many different parameters. Table 9 in the report attempted to estimate that impact and it was anticipated that the proposed increases would cover the current deficits. It was expected that the drivers would benefit and would be encouraged to increase the evening service.

This would go out to consultation. If no comments were received, then the new fares would come into operation on 1st August. If responses were received then these would be considered at the Committee meeting in September.

Councillor Elaine Griffin-Singh thought the proposals provided some give and take and hoped it would help provide a better night time service. It would be prudent if the recommendations were agreed and then wait to see if the taxi trade argued that the increases were insufficient. The recommendations were based on a balanced argument and the trade recognised its market and reasons for not charging too much.

Councillor Mike Bradley considered not increasing fares for 5 years a problem, with possibly not another rise for another 5 years. This could mean that a bigger increase could be introduced. This had to be balanced against what people were prepared to pay. Though it was hard to argue against the recommendations made, was the increase for the night rate enough? If the trade thought the increases were not substantive enough they could reply to the Council to get it debated.

Councillor Michael Allan asked whether fares were reviewed every 5 years or less. Perhaps raising fares should be done in gentle increments and not too

quickly. The Committee was reminded that the taxi trade had approached the Council to review fares. So reviews were only done on those occasions.

The Senior Licensing Officer stated that the consultation would run for 14 days and would be publicised in a local newspaper.

Councillor Michael Allan left the meeting at this point, 10:21am.

It was resolved:

That officers be authorised to run the necessary consultation process using the proposed table of fares contained in Table 7 of the report and implement the changes (subject to there being no comments received).

9. **CHARITY STREET COLLECTION POLICY**

The Committee considered a report, T34 previously circulated, that reviewed minor amendments to the Council's Charity Street Collection Policy.

The Senior Licensing Officer advised the Committee that, although there was no legal requirement to have such a policy, it was good practice to agree to one. The existing policy was good but had been found wanting in some places. It was quite hard to understand, so some words had been stripped out and the layout changed making the guidance clearer. A lot of applicants had not read the policy, so had submitted faulty applications. The new policy set out how to deal with those applications. The policy had also been amended to allow more time for applicants to organise their applications, to adjust collection times to shop opening hours, to increase the number of collections permitted and to clarify the meaning of 'at a meeting in the open air'. These amendments would make the policy more flexible and, as there would be no detrimental impact from the changes, there was no requirement to go out to consultation.

Councillor Mike Bradley asked if collectors would have identification. The Senior Licensing Officer confirmed that all the organisations would have a copy of the street collection policy and would have proper badges for identification.

It was resolved:

That the amended policy be adopted with immediate effect.

10. **LICENSING OFFICER'S UPDATE**

The Committee considered a report, T35 previously circulated, that provided an update on the work of Officers in the Licensing Department.

The Senior Licensing Officer advised the Committee that the department was preparing for the introduction of the new Animal Welfare Regulations, which were due to come into force on 1st October. A working group of neighbouring authorities would look at ways to implement the Regulations across the county with a degree of consistency. The guidance offered by the Secretary of State was appalling, as suggestions offered had not been listened to. This would lead

to more work being required and more hassle in implementing the Regulations, making it more difficult for home-boarders to comply. The Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs had invited comments on its draft guidance but its wording was poor and had not been scrutinised properly. One problem related to its 'star' rating system, where any new operator would not be permitted to obtain a 5 star rating as it would be automatically designated a high risk. This designation could be open to challenge, as it would be an unreasonable assumption. It also overlooked the boarding of cats, other parts of the guidance were unclear and this would not allow the Council to have a choice over its own policy.

Councillor Mike Bradley asked whether the Committee could back up the comments made by officers to give the arguments more weight. It was suggested that this suggestion could aid the comments made and the Chairman was happy to write a letter to the relevant Minister on behalf of the Committee.

The Senior Licensing Officer stated that the remaining work of the department was proceeding with no issues, although one taxi driver had their licence revoked due to some inappropriate behaviour.

The report was noted.

11. **FORWARD AGENDA PLAN**

The Committee considered its forward agenda plan.

The Environmental Services Manager revealed that there would be no business for the Committee to consider at its July meeting, so it was agreed that the July meeting be cancelled.

The meeting closed at 10.45am.