

LICENSING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 13 JULY 2023

Present: Councillor Woodward (Chair);
Councillors Edwards (Vice-Chair), Asare, Davies, G Dennis, Keane, Kitchingham, Mitchell, Robinson, Rowland and Tarar

Apologies: Councillors Page

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Licensing Applications Committee meetings held on 21 February 2023 and 24 May 2023 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chair.

3. HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARE INCREASE

The Committee received a report on whether to recommend and approve an increase in hackney carriage fares. The following documents were appended to the report:

- Appendix I - Current fare chart 1
- Appendix II(a) - RTA - Option 1 Fare Increase June 23
- Appendix II(b) - RTA - Option 2 Fare Increase June 23
- Appendix III(a) - Mr Ali Fare Increase June 2023- Option 1
- Appendix III(b) - Mr Ali Fare Increase June 2023 - Option 2
- Appendix III(c) - RE-WORKED VERSION BY MR FENNESSEY
- Appendix IV(a) - RTA FARE INCREASE - OPTION 1
- Appendix IV(b) - RTA FARE INCREASE - OPTION 2
- Appendix IV(c) - Mr ALI FARE INCREASE - OPTION 1
- Appendix IV(d) - Mr ALI FARE INCREASE - OPTION 2
- Appendix IV(e) - RE-WORKED VERSION BY MR FENNESSEY

The report explained that, from time to time, the hackney carriage trade requested that the Council increase the amount they could charge their customers for transportation to their desired destinations. The last increase had been approved by the Licensing Applications Committee at the meeting held on 4 October 2022 (Minute 7 refers) at which the Committee had approved an increase of £1 on the flag drop for both the day and night-time tariffs from £2.60 to £3.60 and £3.60 to £4.60 respectively. The current table of fares was attached to the report at Appendix I.

The report explained that on 4 June 2023 the Chair of the Reading Taxi Association (RTA) had written to the Licensing section requesting that a report be put before the Committee to consider a fare rise and had supplied two options for the Committee to consider. The two options were attached to the report at Appendix II(a) and Appendix II(b). On 23 June 2023 hackney carriage drivers who were not affiliated with the RTA had also requested a fare increase and had supplied the Licensing section with two further options for consideration by the Committee. The further two options were attached to the report at Appendix III(a) and Appendix III(b). Each of the four options put forward sought to increase fares by means of decreasing the yardage after the initial flag drop

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had been applied for either all or for some of the tariffs. Three of the four proposals also sought to increase the Additional Passengers surcharge from 20p to 40p per each additional person up to a maximum of £2.

To assist the Committee, and to enable the comparison of the four proposals against the existing fares, a reworked version of the current table of fares had been provided by Mr CJ and JT Fennessey who had also authored each of the four proposals. The reworked version of the current table of fares had been attached to the report at Appendix III(c).

Tables showing the cost of fares over certain set distances for each of the four options and for the current fare rate had been attached to the report at Appendices IV(a) to IV(e). The report also included a table setting out petrol and diesel costs since October 2022 and provided a link to the National Hackney Fare Table that had been published in the June 2023 edition of Private Hire Taxi Monthly.

Mr Amir Riaz, Vice-Chair of the RTA, was present at the meeting, addressed the Sub Committee on the RTA's proposals and responded to questions. Mr Imran Ali was also present at the meeting, addressed the Sub Committee on his proposals and responded to questions.

Resolved -

- (1) That, in accordance with Section 65 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, and having taken into account the representations of the Reading Taxi Association (RTA) and the Hackney Carriage Drivers not affiliated to the RTA, a new taxi fares scheme, as set out in Appendix II(a), with the inclusion of an extra proposal to increase the Additional Passengers surcharge from 20p to 40p per each additional person up to a maximum of £2, be approved for consultation via an advert in a local paper and on the Council's website.**
- (2) That the Assistant Director for Planning, Transport & Public Protection Services be authorised to implement the new taxi fares scheme, unless there were objections to the scheme received during the consultation period, in which case a further report would be submitted to the Committee for consideration.**

4. STATUTORY TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE STANDARDS AND THE TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES (SAFEGUARDING AND ROAD SAFETY) ACT 2022

The Committee received a report following a review of the implications of statutory guidance published by the Department for Transport in July 2020 on Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards for hackney carriages (taxis) and private hire vehicles (PHVs). As part of the review the Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Convictions Policy had been assessed and updated against the standards.

The report set out a proposal for the way by which the requirements of the statutory standards would be implemented by the Council and asked the Committee to approve an

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updated version of the Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Convictions Policy to go out to consultation with the hackney carriage and private hire vehicle trade.

The report explained that Licensing Officers had conducted a full assessment of the current position compared with the requirements of the statutory standards. A table summarising the results had been included within the report and a copy of the full results had been attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Convictions Policy had been assessed and updated to align the Council's policy with the DfT's recommendations relating to the assessment of previous convictions. A copy of the updated Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Convictions Policy 2023 was attached to the report at Appendix 2. The policy had been strengthened and placed an emphasis on passenger safety as the priority while also enabling past offenders to sufficiently evidence that they had been successfully rehabilitated so that they might obtain a licence. A comparison showing the changes that had been made to the existing Convictions Policy had also been attached to the report at Appendix 3.

The report also set out the implications of the Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Act 2022 which placed a further duty on licensing authorities to share, consider and act upon relevant information relating to safeguarding and road safety concerns about taxi and private hire drivers. The report explained that the Council must have regard to the Act and the accompanying statutory guidance that had been issued on 27 April 2023. The report explained that the Act had set out timescales for dealing with matters and had added a requirement for licensing authorities to input information on to the National Register for Revocations, Refusals and Suspensions (NR3S), to inform other licensing authorities regarding any decisions made in relation to revocations, refusals, and suspensions of licenses. The report explained that the requirements of The Act had been implemented and that officers had been checking every license application that had been received against the NR3S database and had also been updating the database with the details of any new taxi and private hire vehicle license revocation and refusal decisions and with details of previous revocations and refusals.

Resolved -

- (1) That the requirements of the Statutory Taxi and Vehicle Standards and the Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Act 2022 and the ongoing work to implement the measures and align current policies to the standards be noted.**
- (2) That the updated Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Convictions Policy, as attached to the report at Appendix 2, be published for consultation with the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle trade, and that a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee to adopt the final policy, having taken the results of the consultation into account.**

5. HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE STRATEGY 2023-2028 - DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

The Committee considered a report that introduced the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy 2023-2028 (the draft Strategy). The report sought approval from the Committee to undertake a public consultation on the draft Strategy, a copy of which had been attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that the Council was committed to ensuring that the hackney carriage and private hire sector remained integrated within the town's sustainable transport network so that it could continue to move passengers to destinations safely, whilst contributing to the town's economy with minimal environmental impact.

The draft Strategy outlined the Council's overarching vision and objectives for the hackney carriage and private hire trade in the town and set out how the Council would achieve meeting the vision and make improvements to the system over the next 5 years. The report explained that the Council had set four key objectives that underpinned the basis of the draft Strategy. The four objectives were:

- **Customer focused:** high levels of customer service, accountable operators and drivers and a service which provides value for money.
- **Safe:** the sector is trusted; passengers are confident in using the services and vehicles are modern and accessible for all.
- **Clean:** the fleet is greener and cleaner helping to deliver services with a low environmental impact.
- **Well regulated:** the Council has an effective regulatory framework to administer and enforce statutory and local requirements, to benefit both the trade and customers.

The draft Strategy took account of the Local Transport Plan, the Electric Vehicle Strategy and environmental factors resulting from the declaration of a Climate Emergency. The draft Strategy also detailed the Council's commitment to ensure full compliance with statutory guidance issued by the Department for Transport on Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards (see Minute 4 above) and set out the Council's position in relation to taxi ranks, wheelchair accessible vehicles, app-based taxi operations and highways use benefits. The draft Strategy included an Action Plan that detailed how and when the key objectives would be achieved.

Resolved -

- (1) That the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy 2023-2028, as attached to the report at Appendix 1, be approved for public consultation as set out in section 6 to the report;
- (2) That a further report be submitted to a future meeting to adopt the final Strategy, having taken the results of the public consultation into account.

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(The meeting closed at 8.31 pm)