



Agenda Item 3

Minutes of a meeting of the Licensing Committee held in the Council Chamber at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely on Wednesday, 27 July 2022 at 10.00am.

PRESENT

Cllr Jo Webber (Vice-Chairman in the Chair)
Cllr Christine Ambrose-Smith
Cllr David Ambrose-Smith
Cllr Sue Austen
Cllr Simon Harries
Cllr Mark Inskip
Cllr Alec Jones
Cllr Alan Sharp
Cllr Gareth Wilson

OFFICERS

Stewart Broome – Senior Licensing Officer
Maggie Camp – Director Legal & Monitoring Officer
Liz Knox – Environmental Services Manager
Tracy Couper – Democratic Services Manager
Adeel Younis - Legal Assistant

12. **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lavinia Edwards and Julia Huffer.

13. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Austen stated that she was a regular Taxi user but would be considering the item on review of Taxi fares with an open mind.

14. **MINUTES**

It was resolved:

That the Minutes of the Licensing Committee meeting held on 22 June 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chairman.

15. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman had no announcements to make.

16. **REVIEW OF TAXI FARES**

The Committee considered a report, X43 previously circulated, that detailed proposed increases in Taxi fares following a formal request for review from members of the Taxi trade.

Councillor Harries arrived at the meeting at 10.08am

The Senior Licensing Officer explained in detail the background to and rationale for the proposed fare increases as set out in the report. He highlighted the importance of balancing the ability of the trade to earn a viable living with the impact of any increases on customers in the current economic climate. The proposed increases meant that this Council's fares still compared favourably with neighbouring Councils. Any objection(s) to the fare increases from the consultation exercise would result in a further report being submitted to the September meeting of this Committee.

Members raised questions/comments as follows, which were responded to by the Senior Licensing Officer as detailed:

A Member referred to the fact that the percentage increases shown related to a two mile or five mile journey but journeys were likely to be longer in rural areas such as East Cambridgeshire, e.g. Littleport to Ely, so what was the percentage increase in these cases? The Senior Licensing Officer reported that DfT statistics were based on two mile or five mile journeys, on the basis that people tended to use Private Hire vehicles for longer journeys. In response, another Member commented that two mile or five mile statistics were suitable for urban city areas, but for rural Districts different criteria were required as, for example, people may take a Taxi from Ely Station to their homes in villages such as Sutton. The Senior Licensing Officer stated that the percentage increase did not significantly vary over five miles and this was the maximum that could be charged, so companies/drivers could charge less.

A Member referred to the proposed reduction in the time at which the higher tariff 2 rate for evenings would commence from 11pm to 9pm as part of the proposals, and queried the evidence for this. The Senior Licensing Officer stated that this was largely anecdotal and partly reflected representations from drivers unhappy at the previous change from 7pm onwards to 9pm onwards in 2013. The Member commented that the 21% increase for this tariff seemed high in an area with little or no buses operating from 7pm onwards. They stated that this was why proper evidence was required to justify the increases to local users.

A Member queried if there was spare capacity in the District due to the figures in the report showing that drivers were undertaking fewer miles per year. The Senior Licensing Officer stated that public habits had changed due to Covid and the current economic climate and this has resulted in an estimated fall of 10% in driver numbers. Therefore, it was hoped that the fares review would help improve viability and availability of service and safety, by lessening a trend for drivers to buy older vehicles due to rising costs.

In response to a question by a Member regarding the prevalence of 'Uber' style Taxis in the District, the Senior Licensing Officer reported that no Operator Licence of this nature had been granted within the District and this was not impacting on the service locally.

A Member queried if fares would be adjusted if fuel prices fell. The Senior Licensing Officer stated that fuel prices were only one impact for drivers/operators and fares could be reviewed again if the climate/circumstances changed.

In response to a question by a Member on use of electric vehicles, the Senior Licensing Officer reported that no operator had moved to electric vehicles, due to cost limited availability of charging points, but one was switching to hybrid vehicles.

In response to a question by a Member on the percentage of Taxis to Private Hire vehicles within the District, the Senior Licensing Officer reported that there were 122 Taxis to 30 Private Hire vehicles, representing 22% of the fleet.

A Member queried average Taxi Driver income levels and the Senior Licensing Officer stated that this was difficult to predict due to the large variation in working arrangements.

In the general discussions, Members stated that the rationale and methodology in the report was well-presented and sound, but some had concerns at the lack of evidence regarding the tariff 2 changes and the potential impact of this on the public. Members acknowledged that the increasing of fares was a difficult balancing act but that other options were available for the public, such as Private Hire, voluntary/community car schemes for the elderly/vulnerable, etc.

It was resolved:

That officers be instructed to vary the existing Table of Fares using the proposed Table of Fares contained in Table 7 of the submitted report, to take effect from 22 August 2022, subject to the statutory consultation process, as detailed in paragraphs 3.3 and 3.4 of the submitted report.

17. **SENIOR LICENSING OFFICER'S UPDATE**

The Committee considered a verbal report that updated Members on current and emerging issues relating to Licensing both locally and nationally.

The Senior Licensing Officer reported that the decision made at the June meeting of the Committee regarding the review of Street Trading Fees had come into effect.

18. **FORWARD AGENDA PLAN**

The Committee received its Forward Agenda Plan. The Senior Licensing Officer reported that forthcoming agenda items included CCTV in Taxis and the annual review of Fees and Charges.

It was resolved:

That the Forward Agenda Plan be noted and amendments made as follows:

- Inclusion of Review of Taxi Fares Consultation Outcome for September meeting of Committee, in the event of receipt of any objection(s)

The meeting concluded at 11.01am