

CHILTERN DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the **LICENSING COMMITTEE** held on **24 FEBRUARY 2020**

PRESENT: Councillor C Jackson - Chairman
" N Southworth - Vice Chairman

Councillors: M Harker
P Jones
C Jones
J Rush
H Wallace
J Waters

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from Councillors M Flys, R J Jones, C Rouse, N Varley and F Wilson

9 MINUTES

The minutes of the Licensing Committees held on 4 April 2019 and 15 May 2019 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

11 REVIEW OF HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARES

The Committee received a report which asked Members to consider making amendments to the current table of Hackney Carriage fares, following a request from the Trade.

The Chairman welcomed members of the Trade and their representatives and explained the procedure regarding public speaking at this Committee which was with the agreement of the Chairman.

In presenting his report, the Licensing Manager corrected a typographical error in paragraph 3.5 which should refer to paragraph 3.3 and not 2.3 and also referred Members to the supplementary Agenda pack and Appendix 5 being representations from the Trade Association. The Licensing Manager explained the background to the report, and clarified that the Committee was being asked to make a recommendation to the Head of Healthy Communities, who had delegated authority to make a final decision following a consultation period, should any changes be recommended.

Members were informed that the request from the Trade would result in an increase to the "flag" rate of 50p, and a reduction in the distance and time before each incremental increase to the fare. Full details of the request and the two proposals submitted could be seen at Appendix 2 to the report.

Mr Umar Hayat and Councillor Qaser Chaudhry were then invited to address the Committee on behalf of the Trade. Mr Hayat gave a brief introduction, which summarised the reasons for the request to increase fares. Mr Hayat explained that there had not been a substantial increase in fares since 2008, with only a minor uplift being applied in 2012. In that time, the running costs for vehicles and the overall cost of living had increased substantially. It was therefore requested that the fares be increased to reflect this. Mr Hayat also stated that the Trade wished to request that a scheduled review of fares be included in the Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire policy, so that fares could be reviewed every 2 years rather than on an ad hoc basis as at present.

Following the introductions, Members of the Committee were invited to ask questions of the Trade representatives.

In response to a question regarding the average journey distance, Mr Hayat informed Members that although journeys varied, and included journeys to Heathrow or more local trips, the average was around two miles. The proposals would mean an increase of around £1 on the cost of an average journey of two miles. The proposed reduction in yardage for the "flag" rate would mean that there was a smaller increase in the fare for shorter journeys which were often taken by elderly customers who may have to pay 20p to 30p more on average.

A Member raised concerns that a large increase in fares could dissuade customers from using taxis, which would in turn affect the financial wellbeing of drivers and therefore how would the Trade be able to balance this. Mr Hayat stated that this issue had been acknowledged and discussed by the Trade, however the proposed increase had taken this into consideration and was necessary as it would not be sustainable to keep fares at their current levels. It was also stated that during the recession no increase had been requested and the Trade was happy with the proposed increase.

Councillor Chaudhry added that fares in Chiltern District had not increased for a number of years and that the Trade had refused to request an increase during the recession, therefore an uplift should be considered given the increases in costs. It was also noted that other areas, including London, had seen a number of fare increases in the years since the last increase in Chiltern District.

A Member questioned how any fare increases would be advertised to the public. The Licensing Manager advised that the Council had a statutory duty to publish two notices in the local newspaper to make the public aware of any changes to fares. The Council could also use social media and other channels to raise awareness including on the Council's website. Drivers would also be issued with a new fare card for passengers with the date any increase had been adopted.

It was queried whether the proposed increase in fares would provide a sustainable income for drivers, or whether further increases in future would be needed to bring the fares to an acceptable level. In response, Mr Hayat stated that this was why the Trade had also requested the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire policy be reviewed every two years, so that fares could be assessed against inflation in future. The Licensing Manager advised the Committee that there were various approaches taken by Councils across the County but a regular review could be included in the policy if Members desired.

A question was raised concerning the new Buckinghamshire Council, and whether a harmonisation of fares would be required across the county. Members were advised that each of the current District areas would remain as separate charging zones with their own fares.

Several Members expressed their support for the proposed increase in fares, due to the rising costs for operating Hackney Carriage vehicles and the increased cost of living since the last review and the increased number of taxis. Members were also pleased that the effect of an increase on some customers including pensioners had been taken into consideration. Members also supported the request to review fares on a more regular basis.

After having asked questions of the Trade representatives, the Committee went on to discuss the proposals set out in the report. The Licensing Manager explained that the two proposals were similar although option 2 would make the "flag" rate longer than option 1 which would make shorter journeys cheaper. When asked by the Chairman, the Representatives of the Trade indicated that option 1 was their preferred option. The Committee agreed that the fares needed to be increased and supported option 1 which had been put forward by the Trade.

In relation to changing the policy to include provision for a regular review of fares, Members expressed their support for a bi-annual review to be included in the policy. Members felt that the inclusion of a bi-annual review in the Council's policy would make a stronger case for the inclusion of a review in Buckinghamshire Council's policy when the existing Policies were harmonised. Officers advised that the policy may be able to be changed as a minor amendment by the Head of Healthy Communities in consultation with the

Chairman of the Licensing Committee, without the need for a formal review of the Policy and a report to the Committee. However, this needed to be further explored and it was agreed that Members of the Committee would be kept informed by email.

The Chairman reminded Members of the two Options which Members then discussed in more detail including the differences between them including the flag rate, yardage and increases over different distances.

Having agreed that an increase in Fares was appropriate, Members RESOLVED:

- 1. To recommend to the Head of Healthy Communities that the proposed increase in the table of fares as set out in option 1 at Appendix 2 be accepted and to consult with the taxi meter companies and advertise the rate accordingly.**
- 2. That if no objections are received, the agreed increase to the table of fares set out in option 1 in Appendix 2 is to become effective at the conclusion of the consultation period.**
- 3. That any objections received be considered by the Head of Healthy Communities in consultation with the Chairman of the Licensing Committee and the table of fares be approved with or without modification, and the approved table of fares to come into effect on 27th March 2020.**
- 4. That there be a bi-annual review of Fares and consideration be given to reflecting this in the Councils adopted Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy by way of a minor amendment.**

As this was likely to be the final meeting of the Councils Licensing Committee, the Committee Members thanked the officers for their support.

The meeting ended at 7.18 pm