

Taxi Licensing Committee

Thursday 7 July 2022

PRESENT:

Councillor Churchill, in the Chair.
Councillor Salmon, Vice Chair.
Councillors Finn, Haydon, Partridge and Tuffin.

Apologies for absence: Councillor Rennie

Also in attendance: Graham Hooper (Senior Officer Intelligence and Licensing), Rachael Hind (Licensing Service Manager, Intelligence and Licensing), Ann Gillbanks (Senior Lawyer) & Helen Rickman (Democratic Advisor).

The meeting started at 10.00 am and finished at 12.00 pm.

Note: At a future meeting, the committee will consider the accuracy of these draft minutes, so they may be subject to change. Please check the minutes of that meeting to confirm whether these minutes have been amended.

10. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest in accordance with the code of conduct.

11. Minutes

The committee agreed that the minutes of the meeting held on 09 June 2022 were confirmed as a correct record.

12. Chair's Urgent Business

There were no items of Chair's urgent business.

13. Appeal Cases

There committee noted that there had been no appeal cases submitted since the last meeting.

14. Review of Hackney Carriage Taxi Table of Fares (Taxi Tariff) - To Follow

The Committee having –

- a) considered the report from the Director of Public Health;
- b) heard Graham Hooper's (Senior Officer Intelligence and Licensing) presentation of the report which highlighted the following key areas –

Background:

- Section 1, page 4 of the report sets out the legislative background and reason for setting fees for taxis in Plymouth.
- Section 1.6, page 4, details the statutory procedure and timeline for this process. For further information, should members resolve to advertise the tariff as shown in Appendix 5 or an amended version, then the timeline is as follows:
 - The 14 day consultation commences on Tuesday 26 July and ends on 9 August.
 - Should objections be received these will be heard at Committee on 1 September with proposed or amended tariff commencing the day after.

Reason for Review:

- After a 5 year period since the tariff was previously reviewed in 2017, which was largely delayed due to the advent of Covid, members resolved to approve the new tariff at Committee on 13 January 2022.
- The tariff has been reviewed again at this time due to the impact of Covid and the onset of the cost of living crisis the details of which are set out in Section 2, page 5 of the report

Fare Setting Methodology:

- In accepting the last Tariff, Taxi Licensing Committee also resolved to implement a fair and robust methodology for determining future Tariffs.
- Licensing Officers have subsequently reviewed a number of different policies from around the country and a method has been devised, set out in Appendix 2, page 11 of the report, that can be used to determine whether any fare increase is necessary and balanced.
- If agreed this methodology will need to be kept under review and updated as the sources of information change.

Proposed Changes:

- Section 3 page 6 of the report sets out the proposed changes and discussions that took place with representatives of the taxi trade over them.
- The tables in this section 3.5 page 7 of the report show the proposed changes to the tariff and the table in section 3.6, page 7, shows the existing costs to the travelling public and the costs should the proposed tariff be implemented.
- There are no proposed changes to the extra charges other than the fuel escalation surcharge. All extra charges were challenged and considered in the last review and are considered still valid and appropriate.

- Due to the modest proposed increases across the tariff it was agreed with trade representatives to raise the fuel surcharge threshold to £1.80 per litre with further 10p for each subsequent increase of 10p per litre and that this is reviewed again during the next tariff review.
- A balance needs to be struck between the legitimate right of the trade to a viable livelihood and the needs of the travelling public. The cost of living crisis has hit the taxi trade hard most notably through the escalating fuel costs. These costs are no longer absorbed through the existing tariff which was considered an interim tariff when set.
- The proposed Tariff increase is modest with an overall rise of 17% for the running mile and an average 14% increase across the tariffs 1 and 3 and 18% for tariff 2, dependent on the time of the day and length of journey made.
- It is considered that the proposed uplift will assist those taxi drivers licensed through the Council to face the significant cost of living rises and support Plymouth's taxi trade to make a viable living, therefore reducing the number of drivers leaving the trade for better remunerated work and encouraging consideration of investment in newer environmentally friendly vehicles

The Committee –

- c) heard representations from interested parties from the taxi trade and the PLTA which included the following main points –
 - That the proposal put forward by licensing officers was commended to all the members of the committee
 - Presented a spreadsheet to the Committee detailing one proposal to increase the proposed figure for tariff 1 from £3.60 to £3.80 with each subsequent 1/7th of a mile rather than the 1/6th mile proposed
 - Presented a spreadsheet for a second proposal to increase tariff 2 from £4.20 to £4.40 with each subsequent 1/8th of a mile rather than the 1/7th mile proposed
 - Commented that the compulsory requirement for every driver to have a card reader would incur a cost to the driver ranging from 1.5% to 3% of every transaction.
 - Presented a third spreadsheet with figures for a proposed fourth tariff
 - Presented the figures for the fourth tariff as a means of encouraging drivers to work of an evening, particularly Friday or Saturday night; and providing additional income to compensate for working in the evening when drivers could experience extra abuse and the potential for damage to vehicles.

The Committee raised the following key areas which included:

- The 2% increase on fares for card reader is expensive for public to bear; officer response was that this cost has been incorporated in methodology of setting fees and is a one off charge this year to help with the initial outlay. With regard to the question about card readers not working, officers had been inspecting on the

ranks and the drivers questioned confirmed they had no problems with the reader working.

- Discussed the calculation of the running cost per mile of £1.73 and it was confirmed that this calculation is as accurate as can be achieved as set out in the report
- Acknowledged that the Council have to consider the affordability of any increase in addition to the additional income it would provide to the drivers and need to work with the trade on this to encourage more drivers into the trade to be available in the Evening and Night Time Economy and to support the Council's pledge for women
- Discussed the number of drivers in Plymouth and whether a 50p increase on one of the tariffs would make a difference to their income; discussed that we need to work to encourage drivers to enter the trade; were advised that there is a national shortage of taxi drivers.
- Heard from officers of the work being done with the Council's communications team/job centre/veterans groups to encourage people to become drivers
- Have a large fleet of taxis compared with other authorities, but the problem is not the number of vehicles, but the number of drivers willing to work of a night time; the Council do not employ drivers, they are self-employed so the Council cannot stipulate working hours.
- Commented that the consultation on the fee should seek views from the members of the public in addition to the trade
- Heard that this was a request to consult on the fixing of the taxi tariff and that perhaps a wider consultation could be considered on the wider issues on attracting drivers to the trade

The Committee rejected the proposal to:

1. To consider and resolve to adopt the Taxi Table of Fares (Taxi Tariff) fee setting policy for setting future taxi fares in Plymouth as set out in Appendix 2 of the report.

The Committee agreed the proposals to:

2. Approve the proposed Tariff set out in Appendix 5 of the report, as proposed by Officers
3. Resolved to authorise the advertising of the Tariff set out in Appendix 5 of the report, as required by the Plymouth City Council Act 1975, and to allow the Tariff to come into effect four weeks after the period allowed for objections should no objections be received.

15. **Request for Delegated Authority to Deal with Initial Driver Applications with no Certificate of Good Conduct**

The Committee having –

- a) considered the report from the Director of Public Health;

- b) heard Rachael Hind's (Licensing Service Manager, Intelligence and Licensing) submission to the Committee to consider the report and the two options presented

The Committee raised the following key areas which included:

- legal advice that if the delegation was granted and the Officers and nominated members of the Committee could not reach agreement, then the decision would be returned to the Committee for consideration and final decision.
- the methodology of considering such applications was set out in the report and would be considered in detail for every case
- the criteria would cover the largest part of the applicant's adult life
- A report of the number of exemptions dealt with would be noted at each Committee meeting.

The Committee agreed to adopt Option I in the report as amended as follows:

- Delegate to the Strategic Director of Public Health, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Taxi Licensing Committee and lead Taxi Licensing Committee opposition member, the authority to exempt an applicant from the requirement to produce a Certificate of Good Conduct, which would be a departure from the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy 2022, where there are exceptional, clear and compelling cases to do so, as set out in the report at paragraph 11.
- This delegation would only be for the remainder of this municipal year.

16. **Exempt Information**

The committee agreed that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 to exclude the press and the public from the meeting for the following items of business, on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information, as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

17. **Confidential Minutes**

The committee agreed that the confidential minutes from the meeting on 9 June 2022 were a correct record.