

Taxi Licensing Committee

Thursday 2 March 2023

PRESENT:

Councillor Churchill, in the Chair.
Councillor Haydon, Vice Chair.
Councillors Rennie, Singh and Tuffin.

Apologies for absence: Councillor Tofan.

Also in attendance: Graham Hooper (Senior Officer – Intelligence and Licensing), Steve Forshaw (Senior Enforcement Officer), Andrea Gilbert (Lawyer) and 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.

1. **Declarations of Interest**

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

2. **Chair's Urgent Business**

There were no items of Chairs urgent business.

3. **Appeal Cases**

The Committee agreed to note that there had been no appeal cases since the last meeting.

4. **Number of Certificates of Good Conduct Exemptions Granted**

The Committee agreed to note that there had been no certificates of good conduct exemptions granted since the last meeting.

5. **Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licence Fees Report**

The Committee having considered –

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

- Plymouth City Council regulated the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire industry through the licensing framework set out in the Plymouth City Council Act 1975;
- fees for licences should be set at a figure which will recover the full cost of the licensing administration including enforcement, in so far as is consistent with the provisions which allow licence fees to be charged. The Council cannot make a profit from licence fees and any surplus must be carried forward to the following financial year;
- the budgets for licensing were operated as two trading accounts, one for Private Hire and the other for Hackney Carriage; as review of the current fees had been undertaken to balance the two trading accounts and to ensure that there was no cross-subsidy. Where generic expenditure is incurred this was allocated for the financial year 2022 to 2023 on a 32% (Hackney Carriage) and 68% Private Hire basis;
- this is the fifth year of a five-year process to ensure the Hackney Carriage Vehicle accounts are out of deficit and remain out of deficit by the end of the financial year 2023/24. This is on track to being achieved. The Private Hire Driver, Vehicle and Operator Accounts all remain in a surplus position as do the Hackney Carriage Accounts;
- the fees have not been increased since April 2020. Consideration had been given to whether the fees could be lowered, however it is not recommended to reduce the fees for 2023 to 2024 due to the remaining effects of the covid pandemic and the current economic uncertainty and resultant rise in costs to deliver the Taxi Licensing Service;
- additional savings had been made this year in Taxi accounts through staff posts which remain unfilled and a reduction of legal costs;
- the current licences split in 2021 (as at 31 March 2022) –
 - Hackney Carriage vehicles 306 (33%);
 - Private Hire vehicles 627 (67%);
 - Hackney Carriage drivers 314 (32%);
 - Private Hire drivers 673 (68%);
 - there were currently 39 Private Hire operators.

The Committee –

(c) heard from Mr Hamilton, representing the PLTA:

- Mr Hamilton stated that he and his taxi trade colleagues were perfectly happy with the report and were pleased with the proposal for no increase in fees for 2023/24;
- Discussed the issue of the reduction of Hackney Carriage Drivers (currently 261) and Private hire drivers (currently 610) by 17% and 19% respectively since 31 March 2022 and efforts to increase those numbers. However, the loss of drivers is understood to be a nationwide problem.

It was also noted that although some drivers retain a licence, not all of them drive as a full-time job so it is difficult to ascertain the true numbers of licenced drivers operating.

It was acknowledged by the Licensing Department that any increase in the numbers of drivers would naturally lead to an increased administrative burden and potentially affect future fees. While the Licensing Department endeavoured to improve and streamline their services where possible, they were unable to control the price of consumables such as vehicle plates;

- The continuing problem with some taxi drivers demanding excessive fares on arrival for out of area journeys which had not been pre-negotiated was discussed. Members asked if the trade could be controlled outside of the city boundaries but were told that this was regulated and restricted by current legislation.

It was suggested by the Licensing Officer that steps to educate the public regarding their rights when negotiating a fare out of the city boundaries and how to raise a complaint when an overcharge or refusal of fare has taken place so that action could be taken against an offending driver could be a positive way forward.

The possibility of estimate journey tariff prices being added to taxi posts was suggested by Mr Hamilton and will be considered. A recent Enforcement test purchase operation resulted in a successful prosecution for refusal to take a fare and officers will continue to investigate any complaints.

The Committee agreed that the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire fees would remain the same and not have any changes for the financial year 2023/24.

6. Exempt Information

The Committee agreed to pass a resolution 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 involved 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.

7. **Review Status of a Private Hire Vehicle Driver Licence**

The Committee having:

- (a) considered the report from the Director for Public Health;
- (b) heard from the driver;
- (c) taken the following into account: the law, policy and factual information contained in the report.

The Committee agreed to suspend the driver's licence for a total of four days (two days were awarded in respect of committed motoring offences and a further two days in respect of the driver's failure to notify the Licensing Department in the correct manner and within the required time.)

(Please note, there is a confidential part to this minute)

8. **Review Status of a Restricted Private Hire Vehicle Driver Licence**

The Committee having:

- (a) considered the report from the Director for Public Health;
- (b) heard from the driver;
- (c) taken the following into account: the law, policy and factual information contained in the report.

The Committee agreed to revoke the driver's licence as the driver was not considered a fit and proper person to hold a Restricted Private Hire Vehicle Driver Licence.

(Please note, there is a confidential part to this minute)