

Minutes of a meeting of the Licensing and Appeals Committee (Special)

Held at 6.00 pm on Tuesday 9th August, 2022 in the Council Chamber, Corby Cube, George Street, Corby

Present:-

Members

Councillor Jonathan Ekins (Chair)
Councillor John Currall
Councillor Clive Hallam
Councillor Barbara Jenney
Councillor Anne Lee

Councillor Jennie Bone
Councillor Dorothy Maxwell
Councillor Dr Anup Pandey
Councillor Geoff Shacklock
Councillor Lee Wilkes

Officers

Iain Smith, Assistant Director – Regulatory Services
Amanda Wilcox, Interim Head of Environmental Services
Russell Howell, Health Service Manager
Louise Delavaloire, Team Leader – Litigation
Carol Mundy, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Emma Robinson, Democratic Services Assistant

1 Apologies

Resolved to note that apologies for absence were received from Councillors L Lawman and McEwan

2 Members' Declarations of Interest

The chair invited those present to make a declaration if they so wished.

Resolved to note that no declarations were made.

3 Hackney Carriage Fares Tariff

The circulated report of the Assistant Director – Regulatory Services was received to provide information in relation to requests received from Hackney Carriage proprietor to implement fare increases for hackney carriage journeys.

The report summarised the discretionary power of the licensing authority to fix the rate of Hackney Carriage fares within its area and to publish a table of fares for display in every hackney carriage. Once set, the tariff would be the maximum amount that could be charged for journeys starting and ending in the prescribed geographical area. If a proprietor wished, they could charge a lower fare if they wished to do so, but it would be an offence to charge a higher fare.

A previous report, presented to committee in May, had resulted in members of the taxi trade objecting to the proposed harmonisation rate. To allow for further consideration and consultation with the trade the proposal for the Executive to decide the matter had been delayed. Further options for an aligned tariff of fares had been identified and the trade had been consulted.

The Interim Environmental Health Lead, Amanda Wilcox, presented the report to committee and explained that there were currently four separate Hackney Carriage Zones which had been aligned to the previous sovereign council districts, with each having different fares.

A report to committee on 9 May 2022 had been proposed to recommend to the Executive that fares be aligned and harmonised. This had resulted in several concerns being raised by the trade.

Details of the fares for Corby Zone, East Northamptonshire Zone, Kettering Zone and Wellingborough Zone were provided within the report.

A request had also been received from Wellingborough Hackney Carriage Association for consideration to be given to an automatic increase of 10 pence per mile to the fare every second year; and to an automatic increase of 20 pence to the standard minimum charge in every fourth year.

Officers advised that it was not legally permissible, to allow for the automatic increase in fares, due to the need to follow a prescribed statutory procedure, which included consultation, for every potential fare change.

Committee was asked to consider whether to harmonise the fares, to achieve parity for a wider section of the travelling public and provide consistent fare rates across the whole of the new council area by aligning the fare calculation methodology in each zone.

A consultation letter had been sent to 184 licensed Hackney Carriage proprietors setting out five different options for consideration, details of which were contained in Appendix F of the report with the responses detailed in Appendix G.

In summary the following preferences were indicated, with the most favoured by Hackney Carriage Proprietors being option 1:

- Rank one: Option 1 – favoured by 60;
- Rank two: Option 2 and option 4 – both favoured by two;
- Rank four: Option 3 – favoured by one.

In addition to the above 52 drivers, 48 from the Corby zone, four from Wellingborough zone and one from East Northamptonshire zone, had indicated that their preference would be to agree the original requests for fare increases and retention of individual zones with no harmonised tariff.

Detailed in the report was a table showing the current fares, along with the percentage increase, if the proposed fare structure detailed within option one was to be replaced.

The chair thanked Mrs Wilcox for her report and opened it up for debate.

The committee discussed the options before them, with some members considering that fares needed to be harmonised as soon as possible, whilst others felt that each zone needed to be considered separately as there were different circumstances and needs in each area.

Reference was made to the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and the need to complete the action plan, with a member asking if this would be carried out prior to a decision being made by the Executive.

The Assistant Director clarified that the decision would need to be made prior to the EIA being concluded.

Reference was made to the different way in which taxis were generally used in North Northamptonshire. The culture in Corby was such that users were often the elderly, disabled making short journeys for shopping and appointments, and those of working age, many of whom worked shifts. There was less car ownership and more reliance on the use of taxis generally.

There was a need to balance the interests of Operators and the public and it was also noted that the tariffs for three of the zones were already very similar.

The Corby zone had a cut off start time of 5am rather than 6am and it was considered that it would be advantageous to use this time for all zones.

Often those living in rural areas were reliant on the use of taxis due to the lack of a bus service.

Clarity was also sought from officers that the tariff would stipulate the maximum price that could be charged but that an operator could choose to charge less if it so wished. Officers confirmed that was correct and that they could do so as an individual or as a group of operators.

A lengthy debate ensued with members commenting that there would be winners and losers and that the aim would be to find a fair and equitable rate for both operators and the public.

The debate concluded and the chair put each of the options listed in Appendix F to the committee to vote, with the following results:

Option 1	One in favour;
Option 2	Five in favour;
Option 3	Zero;
Option 4	One in favour;
Option 5	Two in favour

It was therefore concluded that **Option 2** be approved to base a new harmonised tariff on.

The chair then put to the vote, the options for each zone, as detailed at item 5 of the report, as follows:

Corby Zone:

Agreed to recommend approval of an increase in fares based upon the proposed harmonised fare tariff, with seven votes in favour of this option.

East Zone:

Agreed to recommend approval of an increase in fares based upon a harmonised fare tariff, with nine votes in favour of this option.

Kettering Zone:

Agreed to recommend the approval of an increase in fares based upon a harmonised fare tariff, with nine votes in favour of this option.

Wellingborough Zone:

Agreed to recommend the approval of an increase in fares based upon a harmonised fare tariff, with seven votes in favour of this option.

The chair then asked committee to consider the automatic increased requested by the Wellingborough Hackney Carriage Association.

It was unanimously agreed that this request be refused.

Resolved to refuse the request for an automatic increase by Wellingborough Hackney Carriage Association.

Resolved to recommend to Executive to adopt an increase in fares, for each of the hackney carriage zones in North Northamptonshire, based upon a harmonised fare tariff.

4 Close of Meeting

The meeting closed at 7.35pm.

Chair

Date