

LICENSING COMMITTEE



TUESDAY, 17 MAY 2022 - 10.00 AM

PRESENT: Councillor M Humphrey (Chairman), Councillor D Connor, Councillor Miss S Hoy, Councillor A Maul, Councillor Mrs K Mayor and Councillor N Meekins

APOLOGIES: Councillor R Skoulding (Vice-Chairman), Councillor A Lynn and Councillor W Rackley

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Michelle Bishop (Licensing Manager) and Linda Albon (Member Services & Governance Officer)

LIC1/22 PREVIOUS MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of 20 April 2022 were approved and signed.

LIC2/22 SETTING OF TAXI FEES FOR VEHICLES & OPERATORS FOR 2022/23

Members considered the Setting of Taxi Fees for Vehicles and Operators for 2022/23 report presented by Michelle Bishop.

Members made comments, asked questions, and received responses as follows:

- Councillor Mrs Mayor said that although she agrees that the Council cannot keep prices back, residents are already concerned about a lack of taxi provision with Fenland, therefore she wonders whether it will create a bigger problem by putting prices up.
- Councillor Hoy said it was agreed at Full Council that there would be a wider review into taxi services within Fenland. She could understand Councillor Mrs Mayor's concern, but drivers do have ongoing costs to consider. We need to investigate the issues and concerns of those in the trade.
- Councillor Humphrey said that most drivers are self-employed, they can work as and when they choose. If they have been working late over Friday and Saturday, perhaps they do not want to work on Sundays. He does not know what the answer is, but he welcomes the review.
- Councillor Hoy said that Covid-19 affected the night-time economy as people did not go out so much. There are some causes affecting taxi provision that the Council has no ability to impact upon and she had not been aware until the previous meeting that the Council does not have to set a maximum fare. It would be interesting to see, as part of the review, what the outcome would be if we did that.
- Councillor Connor stated that he welcomed the review, people need taxis, and the Council should do all it can to help the trade as well as alleviate problems for the public. However, the Committee are here today to discuss the setting of fees for the trade.
- Councillor Maul stated that he does not think an increase in the taxi fees charged for vehicles and operators will help at this time, so he is not looking to recommend that and will not support an increase, but he is looking forward to the outcome of the review.
- Councillor Mrs Mayor asked if any objections had been raised by drivers in Whittlesey. She expressed her concern that Council notices, which are all published in the Fenland Citizen, are not seen in Whittlesey, therefore are private hire drivers notified by other means so they can comment?

- Michelle Bishop responded that all drivers and operators are notified of any notifications or proposed increases via email as the main method of communication, so yes, they will all be aware of the proposals. She added that it would not be right to comment on individual responses within this meeting, but should any company or driver feel that they are not being consulted in the right way, please let her know and she will look into this.
- Councillor Humphrey referred to Appendix B of the report and noted that some of these fees are not about making money but involve cost recovery. It is his view that the proposed fee increase for hackney carriage and private hire licences should be implemented today in line with the budget, but there is the option to defer. Officers are being asked to conduct a review into taxi provision only; that will bring out the underlying reason why availability is not there, but it is his view that the proposed fee increases should be approved to keep in line with other council services.
- Councillor Meekins asked how many taxi drivers there are within Fenland. Michelle Bishop stated that this increase affects the operators, not the drivers. However, Fenland currently has 134 taxi vehicles and 19 operators.
- Councillor Meekins responded that in this case, if only six objections have been received, does that mean the other 95% find the proposed increase acceptable or is it apathy? In his view, the increase is not much over a year.
- Councillor Hoy commented that Cabinet and Council set the budget before Licensing Committee had the chance to look at these fees, which puts members in a difficult situation. If the Committee chooses today not to accept the fee increases, this upsets the budget that has already been set. Councillor Hoy then asked how long the review will take because if there are recommendations that need to be implemented, they will need to be undertaken swiftly.
- Councillor Humphrey said it was his understanding that the need to consult on the fee increase was because there had been no increase since 2018.
- Michelle Bishop said that was correct, but Councillor Hoy was right in that going forward the process should be streamlined, and she will work with Member Services and Finance so that any future consultation on increases sits in line with Cabinet and Council budget setting. In terms of the review, she will now commence work on that although she cannot currently say how long it will take.

Proposed by Councillor Connor, seconded by Councillor Meekins, Members considered the consultation responses in relation to the proposed increase in hackney carriage and private hire licence fees from those set out in Appendix A to those in Appendix B of the report and AGREED that they should be implemented.

10.22 am

Chairman