



Licensing Committee

Monday, 21 March 2022

MINUTES

Present:

Councillor Salman Akbar (Chair), Councillor Lucy Harrison (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Karen Ashley, Tom Baker-Price, Joanne Beecham, Michael Chalk, Andrew Fry, Julian Grubb, Ann Isherwood and David Thain

Also Present:

Officers:

Vanessa Brown and Dave Etheridge

Committee Services Officer:

Jess Bayley-Hill

15. APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor Aled Evans.

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

17. MINUTES

RESOLVED that

the minutes of the meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 8th November 2021 be approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

18. PUBLIC SPEAKING

Mr A. Nazir attended the Licensing Committee meeting to speak on behalf of the Redditch Taxi Association, under the Council's public

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Chair

speaking rules, and commented on the draft hackney carriage and private hire licensing policy and the request of variation to the hackney carriage table of fares, at Minute Item No.s 19 and 20 on the agenda.

19. DRAFT HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING POLICY

The Senior Practitioner (Licensing) (SPL) Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) presented the draft hackney carriage and private hire licensing policy for the Committee's consideration.

The Committee was advised that consultation in respect of the content of the draft policy had been undertaken and Members were required to have regard to the responses that had been received. The final approved version of the policy was scheduled to come into effect from 1st September 2022 onwards.

The Department for Transport (DfT) had issued new statutory standards and licensing authorities were expected to update their hackney carriage and private hire licensing policies in response to this. In reviewing the local policy for Redditch, Officers noted that many of the statutory standards were already being met. However, there were some standards that had not previously been addressed and these had been incorporated into the updated policy. Amendments to the policy included proposed changes in respect of age criteria for vehicles. In addition, changes had been proposed in respect of medical checks for drivers.

The consultation exercise in respect of this policy had taken place over a period of 12 weeks, starting in May 2021. There had been options available for interested parties to respond in writing both online and in paper form. Officers had also engaged with representatives of relevant organisations, interest groups and local businesses. The feedback that had been provided during the consultation process had been analysed by Officers. None of the responses that had been received had persuaded Officers of the need for changes to be made to the policy.

The SPL responded to Members' questions regarding proposed changes to the age criteria for vehicles and the number of vehicle tests that would be required once a vehicle was 10 years old. Officers clarified that the current requirements were for drivers to arrange for their vehicle to be subject to two safety checks per year until the vehicle was nine years old and was subject to three safety checks thereafter. Under the proposed changes, the age limit would be extended to 10 years, whereby two safety checks could be undertaken per year and then three checks would be undertaken thereafter.

Members subsequently debated the proposed policy changes in detail and in doing so commented that it would be helpful for the changes to the age criteria to be approved with immediate effect, rather than to wait until September 2022. A number of changes were subsequently suggested and agreed to the draft policy:

- Changes were suggested to Section 3 of the policy, in regard to the shift to electric vehicles, to replace references to 31st December 2025 to instead bring these requirements into place from 1st January 2030. This proposal was made on the basis that this would bring the arrangements into line with national guidelines, was based on the feedback received through consultation and would provide clarity.
- The following updates were proposed to the vehicle age criteria:
 - New hackney carriages (replacement vehicles) / private hire vehicles
 - Be a category D or DX under 6 years
 - Be a category C or CX under 7 years
 - Be a category B or BX under 8 years
 - Be a category A or AX under 8 years
 - The maximum age for hackney carriages / private hire vehicles:
 - A category D vehicle must be under 10 years of age
 - A category C vehicle must be under 11 years of age
 - A category B vehicle must be under 13 years of age
 - A category A vehicle must be under 15 years of age
- For wheelchair accessible vehicles, an additional two years to be added to facilitate provision for people with disabilities.

RESOLVED that

the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy be approved, to take effect on 1st September 2022 with the exception of changes in respect of vehicle age criteria, which should be implemented with immediate effect.

20. HACKNEY CARRIAGE TABLE OF FARES - REQUEST FOR VARIATION

The SPL WRS presented a report detailing a request that had been received for variation to the hackney carriage table of fares.

The Committee was informed that one of the responsibilities of the licensing authority was to set the maximum fare that could be charged by hackney carriage vehicles. This maximum fare was set out in the hackney carriage table of fares.

Private hire operators could negotiate a fare with a customer in advance of the journey. Many private hire operators had been increasing fares in order to cover increasing costs. However, hackney carriage drivers did not have the same flexibility.

In 2018 the Licensing Committee had agreed increases to the hackney carriage table of fares. Prior to this date, increases had not been made to the maximum fares that could be charged by hackney carriage drivers for many years and Members had requested that this should be reviewed more regularly in future.

The Redditch Taxi Association had reported in November 2021 that their members did not want to vary fares for hackney carriages. However, since then, fuel costs had increased considerably and in January 2022, the Redditch Taxi Association had approached Officers to request that consideration be given to increasing the fares. The changes proposed by the Redditch Taxi Association at that time would have resulted in an increase to the maximum fares of 12.3 per cent.

Fuel costs had subsequently increased further and in March 2022 the Redditch Taxi Association had approached the Council to request further increases for all of the tariffs. This would mean that the tariffs in the table of fares for the first 880 yards would be:

£4 for tariff 1
£5.25 for tariff 2
£7.20 for tariff 3

In considering the request that had been received from the Redditch Taxi Association Members were asked to note that fuel costs had increased even in the time since the agenda for the meeting of the Licensing Committee had been published. For this reason, updated information about fuel costs had been issued in a supplementary pack for Members' consideration. The figures provided in this supplementary pack contained information obtained from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy's (BEIS) weekly list of fuel pump prices. Members were advised that petrol prices were 22.9 per cent more expensive and diesel prices were 23.7 per cent more expensive than they had been when the Council's hackney carriage table of fares had previously been set.

The Committee was also asked to note that the request had been made by the Redditch Taxi Association in a context in which there

had been increases in the cost of living nationally. Inflation was approximately 6 per cent although it was anticipated that it would increase to 7 per cent by April 2022.

In order to change the hackney carriage table of fares, the licensing authority was required to publish proposed variations in a public notice. Should no objections be received to these proposed increases, the new fares would come into effect. However, if any objections were received, they would need to be considered by Members and an extra meeting of the Licensing Committee would need to be convened by 21st June 2022.

Comparative figures for a journey of two miles had been provided for other local authorities in the report. Under the terms of the existing table of fares, the fares charged in Redditch were at the bottom of the table in terms of the scale of the charge. Should the proposed increases be approved, the fees charged in Redditch would increase to a mid-table average. However, other Councils were also in the process of reviewing their table of fares for hackney carriages, including Bromsgrove District Council and Wychavon District Council.

In the report on this subject, the SPL WRS had suggested that the changes to the table of fares could come into effect from 23rd May 2022 onwards. However, it was possible that the Council could act on this by the end of April 2022, subject to receiving no objections.

Following the presentation of the report, Officers responded to Members' questions in respect of the proposed changes to the hackney carriage table of fares. Clarification was requested about the potential for a mechanism to be introduced by the Council to vary the table of fares in accordance with the mean costs of living. Officers explained that some Councils used a formula to assist them in setting their table of fares and WRS could investigate the potential to adopt a similar approach in Redditch. However, in the meantime, given the increasing costs of living, Members were being asked to consider increasing the table of fares as proposed.

Reference was also made to the approach adopted by the Council in terms of the tariffs charged for the first 880 yards and for each subsequent 176 yards and the reasons why additional increases to charges had not been requested for the latter category. Officers explained that there were many different ways of varying the table of fares. The figures presented related to the changes that had been requested by the Redditch Taxi Association. The changes represented an 80 pence increase per tariff for the first 880 yards and then increments up through the tariffs for subsequent distances.

Questions were raised about the responses that might be received once the public notice had been published and the types of feedback that might be classified as objections. Officers explained that comments would need to be reasonable and relevant. Any comments raising concerns regarding proposed changes to the fares would be considered objections. When the table of fares had previously been considered there had been one objection received relating to the use of imperial measurements only in the table of fares and on the taxi metres. This arrangement had subsequently been addressed and the Council now used both metric and imperial measurements in the table of fares and for the taxi metre.

Clarification was requested regarding the timescales in which the changes to the table of fares could be implemented. Officers explained that there would be time to advertise the proposed new table of fares and to undertake consultation and, subject to receiving no objections, implement the new table of fares by 22nd April 2022. However, an agreement to implement the changes as soon as possible would grant the Council greater flexibility to act as soon as possible.

The Committee discussed the proposed changes to the table of fares and there was general consensus that they should increase in line with the proposals made by the Redditch Taxi Association. This was considered important to enable drivers to make a living and to support the sustainability of the local taxi trade.

RESOLVED that

- 1) the proposed table of taxi fares, as set out in Appendix 1 to the minutes, be advertised as a public notice and objections from the public invited in accordance with the requirements of section 65, Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1976;**
- 2) if no objections are received from the public within 14 days of publication of the notice that the proposed tariff will come into effect as soon as possible; and**
- 3) if objections are received in the stated time, that the matter will be considered further at the next meeting of the Licensing Committee, and a decision made as to whether the variations to the table of fares should be made.**

21. UPDATE ON ENGAGEMENT WITH STAKEHOLDERS IN RELATION TO PROPOSALS FOR THE CREATION/AMENDMENT OF STANDS FOR HACKNEY CARRIAGES

The SPL WRS provided an update on engagement with stakeholders in relation to proposals for the creation and amendment of stands for hackney carriages in Redditch.

Members were advised that three options had been considered as part of this process:

- To introduce a new hackney carriage stand at the railway station.
- To introduce a new hackney carriage stand at the Alexandra Hospital.
- To move the existing hackney carriage stand from Unicorn Hill to Bates Hill.

In respect of the options for a hackney carriage stand at the railway station, officers had met with representatives of West Midlands Trains to discuss the suggestion further. The representatives from West Midlands Trains had indicated that they would be willing to offer some of the space in the car park at the railway station to be used for a hackney carriage stand. However, in line with arrangements in place in other parts of the region, drivers using the stand would need to be prepared to pay a fee for a permit equivalent to £11 per week or £565 per year.

Officers had subsequently undertaken consultation with the hackney carriage trade regarding the level of interest amongst drivers in the potential to introduce a hackney carriage rank at the railway station and the extent to which they would be willing to pay for a permit to utilise this rank. In total, 54 answers had been received and 87 per cent of the respondents had been keen for a dedicated taxi space to be introduced at the station. However, only 13 per cent of the respondents had been prepared to pay a fee for the permit at the level proposed by West Midlands Trains. Furthermore, the majority of drivers were not prepared to pay a fee at all. Only seven of the respondents had been prepared to pay the proposed fee.

In respect of the proposed introduction of a hackney carriage stand at the Alexandra Hospital, Officers had attempted to make contact with the hospital regarding this matter. However, to date, Officers had not been able to engage with representatives of the hospital in relation to this subject. Attempts would continue to be made to enter into dialogue with the hospital regarding this matter.

In terms of the potential move of the existing taxi rank on Unicorn Hill to Bates Hill, the Committee was informed that there was a requirement to liaise with Worcestershire County Council in relation

to the relevant Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) as well as West Mercia Police. A number of stakeholder meetings had been held which had been attended by representatives of the Council and the police. The options that had been considered included:

- Not making changes to the existing taxi rank on Unicorn Hill.
- Maintaining the current size of the hackney carriage rank but only operating the rank in the evening.
- Retaining some of the existing hackney carriage rank for taxis and converting other sections into short-term parking spaces.
- Removing the rank altogether and converting all the space for parking.

Members were asked to note that the police had been clear that they would not be supportive of removing the rank altogether.

A meeting had subsequently been held in January 2022 involving representatives of the Council, Worcestershire County Council, West Mercia Police and the North Worcestershire Economic Development Unit (NWEDR). At this meeting, information had been shared about work on public realm improvements, as part of the town's fund initiative, which was at an early stage. Should this work be approved, it would be completed by 2024.

Worcestershire County Council's Highways Department had clarified that there was no realistic prospect of Bates Hill being opened up from the current block in place between that road and Hewell Road. It had also become clear that there would be a lot of work involved in changing the relevant TROs. In this context, it had been agreed that it would be sensible for any changes to coincide with work on public realm improvements.

The Committee discussed the update and it was acknowledged that it could take time to alter TROs. Some Members expressed disappointment with the progress that had been achieved in respect of this matter and the time that it was taking to investigate the various options available. However, it was also acknowledged that it was sensible for the review of the hackney carriage stands to take into account the timing of the public realm improvement works.

RESOLVED that

the report be noted.

22. WORK PROGRAMME

Members considered the content of the Licensing Committee's work programme. There was general agreement that the following items

should be added to the Committee's work programme for further consideration:

- The hackney carriage table of fares.
- Different mechanisms available to the Council for setting the hackney carriage table of fares, taking into account the approach adopted by other Councils.

The Committee was informed that at the start of the 2022/23 municipal year, officers would meet with the Chair of the Licensing Committee and the relevant lead Portfolio Holder to discuss the issues that Members might wish to take forward for the Committee's consideration during the year.

RESOLVED that

subject to the amendments detailed in the preamble above, the Committee's work programme be noted.

The Meeting commenced at 7.04 pm
and closed at 8.21 pm

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APPENDIX 1: REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL
TABLE OF FARES FOR HACKNEY CARRIAGES
PROPOSED



www.redditchbc.gov.uk

	Tariff One	Tariff Two	Tariff Three
For the first 880 yards (804.7 metres approx.) or part thereof	£4.00	£5.25	£7.20
For each subsequent 176 yards (160.9 metres approx.)	£0.15	£0.15	£0.30
Equivalent to:	£1.50 per mile (1609.3 metres approx.)	£1.50 per mile (1609.3 metres approx.)	£3.00 per mile (1609.3 metres approx.)
Waiting time – for each 30 seconds	£0.10	£0.10	£0.20
Extra Charges			
For each dog (except guide dogs)		£1.50	
For each passenger in excess of 6		£0.50	
Explanation of Tariffs Applicable			
Tariff One	6am – Midnight		
Tariff Two	Midnight – 6am and on Designated Public Holidays		
Tariff Three	Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Years Day		
<p><u>Note</u> if the vehicle or seating is so soiled by any passenger or animal as to require cleaning, the proprietor may make a charge. This must be made clear to the passenger at the end of the journey there will be a maximum charge of £75.00.</p>			

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