

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
**GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday, 9 October 2024
Time: 6.00pm
Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Ellie Plater (Chair), Sandra Barr (Vice Chair), Myla Arceno, Robert Boyle, Peter Clark, Akin Elekolusi, Alistair Gordon, Coleen Houlihan, Lin Martin-Haugh, Claire Parris, Graham Snell, Anne Wells and Tom Wren

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 6.35pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were submitted by Councillor Mason Humberstone.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES - 14 DECEMBER 2023**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 14 December 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **HACKNEY CARRIAGE TARIFF REVIEW**

The Acting Licensing Manager presented a report advising the Committee that the fixing of fares for hackney carriages within the Borough was governed by the Council by virtue of section 65 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976. This must be published by means of a tariff table. The last change in fares took effect on 2 August 2023, and a copy of the current tariff table was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

The Licensing Officer reminded Members that the Committee, at its meeting held on 14 March 2022, had resolved that there should be an annual review of taxi tariffs.

The Acting Licensing Manager stated that the Licensing Authority had undertaken preliminary consultation with the trade (all hackney carriage and private hire drivers and operators) to ascertain options to include in the consultation. A summary of the results of the preliminary engagement survey was set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

The Acting Licensing Manager explained that the three options agreed for the final consultation had been publicised via a Public Notice that was advertised in the local

press on 05 and 12 September 2024, and a copy made available for inspection at the Council offices for the same period in accordance with the legislation. In addition, all licensed drivers and licensed private hire operators in the Council's area were contacted via e-mail or letter advising them of the review consultation.

The Acting Licensing Manager advised that the public notices required any comments or option preferences to be made in writing or through completion of a survey. Comments/option preferences had been received from 32 persons. 30 dual licensed drivers (16 as Hackney Carriage Drivers and 14 as Private Hire Drivers), and 2 Private Hire Operators. No responses were received from members of the public. A summary of the consultation survey response was attached as Appendix 6 to the report.

The Acting Licensing Manager commented that Option 1 was to increase the mileage only; Option 2 was to increase the start price and the mileage; and Option 3 was no change to the tariffs. The survey responses to each of these options was set out in the report.

The Acting Licensing Manager invited the Committee to review the proposed tariff change options and apply their preferred option effective from 21 October 2024, or from a nominated date not more than 2 months following the 21 October 2024.

The Committee asked a number of questions, which were answered as follows:

- There were currently 287 Dual Licensed Drivers licensed by Stevenage Borough Council.
- There were more responses, from the trade, to the Preliminary Engagement survey than the public consultation. A questionnaire was sent out to all private hire, Hackney drivers, and operators to get a feel of where they wanted things to go with regards to the fares. Those responses gave us the information to put forward the three options that went through to consultation for the review.
- The consultation was in two editions of the Comet, on the council website, and the Customer Service Centre (CSC) was given information to assist members of the public who wanted to respond. This time, the consultation lasted 14 days, which may have contributed to the lack of public responses, compared to previous, longer consultations.
- The legislation does not state a required minimum number of respondents for the Committee to consider changing the tariff.
- The next review for the Hackney Carriage Tariff would be in July 2025.

The Committee were concerned by the lack of responses from both the trade and the public. In response to comments made by Members, the Acting Licensing Manager agreed to investigate methods to widen the consultation process when consulting on future proposals for hackney carriage tariffs, to gather responses from a broader cross-section of the community.

The Committee discussed striking a delicate balance between ensuring that taxi drivers can earn a living amid rising costs and competition from services like Uber, and keeping taxi fares affordable for residents, especially those who rely on taxis for essential travel.

It was **RESOLVED**: that, Option 2 in the report be approved, thereby increasing the initial fare by 5p (£3.80 to £3.85) and Tariffs 1, 2 and 3 by less than 4%, so that with effect from 21 October 2024, the hackney carriage tariffs will be:

- a. hackney carriage tariff 1 - £3.85 for the first 528 yards, and 25p for each additional 194 yards (or part thereof), to be applied to hirings between 06:00 and 23:00 hours Monday to Sunday;
- b. hackney carriage tariff 2 - £5.78 for the first 528 yards, and 38p for each additional 194 yards (or part thereof), to be applied to hirings between 06:00 and 23:00 hours Monday to Sunday and on designated bank/public holidays and Easter Sunday; between 18:00 to 23:00 hours on New Year's Eve; and between 18:00 hours and 24:00 hours on Christmas Eve;
- c. hackney carriage tariff 3 - £7.70 for the first 528 yards, and 50p for each additional 194 yards (or part thereof), to be applied to hirings between 00:01 and 24:00 hours on Christmas Day and Boxing Day; and between 23:00 hours on New Year's Eve and 06:00 hours on New Year's Day; and
- d. the following additional charges be imposed:
 - up to two items of baggage or shopping – 20p *
 - three or more items of baggage or shopping – 40p (maximum) *
 - for each person in excess of one – 20p *

(* additional charges should total no more than £2.00, and must be added on the meter at the start of the journey)

- soiling charge (for whatever reason) - £50 (maximum)

4 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

There was none.

5 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Not required.

6 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was none.

CHAIR