

**STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

**Date: Thursday, 24 March 2022**

**Time: 6.00pm**

**Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete**

**Present:** Councillors: Maureen McKay (Chair), Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Adrian Brown, Graham Lawrence CC, Lin Martin-Haugh, Margaret Notley, Claire Parris, Graham Snell and Sharon Taylor OBE CC.

**Start / End**      Start Time:    6.00pm  
**Time:**            End Time:       7.03pm

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

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Teresa Callaghan and Loraine Rossati. Notification had been received that Councillor Sharon Taylor was replacing Councillor Callaghan on the Committee, and that Councillor Lloyd Briscoe was replacing Councillor Rossati.

There were no declarations of interest.

**2      MINUTES - 13 JANUARY 2022**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 13 January 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

**3      HACKNEY CARRIAGE TARIFF REVIEW**

The Committee considered a report in respect of a request from hackney carriage drivers to revise the level of fares/tariffs.

The Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager advised 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 3 July 2017, and a copy of the current tariff table was attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

The Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager stated that, at a Taxi Forum held on 14 December 2021, members of the trade requested that the current tariffs should be revised. They were advised by the Licensing Officer to submit this request in writing, explaining why an increase was considered necessary. A written request to consider an increase was received by the Licensing Team on 5 January 2022 from 8 drivers of ABC Taxis Limited, co-ordinated by Mr Paul Barrett. A copy

of the written request and the list of supporting drivers was attached as Appendix 2 to the report.

The Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager explained that, following clarification of the detail of the proposal with Mr Barrett, the proposed tariff table was consulted upon. Drivers and operators were consulted via email and letter for the period of 24 January to 11 February 2022. Due to an administration error, this notice was not placed in the local paper for the required 14 days. Hence a further, updated Notice was advertised in the local press from 17 February to 24 February and 3 March to 10 March 2022 and a copy made available for inspection at the Council offices for the same period, in accordance with the legislation. Copies of the newspaper notices were attached as Appendix 3 to the report and a copy of the public notice was attached as Appendix 4. In addition, a letter was sent to all licensed drivers and licensed private hire operators in the Council's area advising them of the review proposal. A copy of this letter was attached as Appendix 5 to the report.

The Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager advised that the public notices required any objections to the proposal to be made in writing. Objections had been received from four persons, all dual licensed drivers. Copies of the four individual objections were attached as Appendices 6 to 9 to the report.

The Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager informed the Committee that the proposed Tariff 1 charge for a 2 mile journey represented an increase of 9.3% on the current Tariff 1 charge. The new proposal was to reduce the length of the first charge from 0.5 mile to 0.3 of a mile and for each subsequent 0.1 of a mile travelled, twenty pence will be added for the length of the journey for Tariff 1. Tariffs 2 and 3 had also been updated and demonstrated a 9.3% increase for Tariff 2 and an 11.1% increase for Tariff 3, with a thirty pence and forty pence increase for every 0.1 mile respectively for Tariffs 2 and 3.

The Committee noted that the proposed tariff would place Stevenage at 35<sup>th</sup> equal in the national ranking compared with the current ranking of 111<sup>th</sup> out of 365 licensing authorities in the country. The applicants considered the proposed increase to be warranted due to costs resulting from Covid (masks, cleaning equipment), the common use of card payment facilities that incurred a transaction fee, and the rising costs of living, incorporating fuel, maintenance, replacing vehicles and station permits.

The Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager commented that the four objections had cited very similar reasons as to why a tariff increase is not warranted. Two of them saw taxis as a luxury and all were concerned that the general rising cost of living would affect taxi usage. All were concerned that this would enable Uber to undercut fares charged by drivers within Stevenage. However, it was worthy of note that the proposed hackney carriage tariff was designed to limit maximum fares and it was within the gift of a hackney carriage drivers to charge less than the tariff fare.

The Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager explained that in Stevenage hackney carriages were required by licence conditions to be fitted with taximeters. Private hire vehicles may also fit taximeters, and in practice many did,

but the tariff only applied by law to hackney carriages. The extant tariff must be programmed into hackney carriage taximeters, which were then bound by the fare displayed on the meter at the end of the journey. Private hire drivers and operators had an interest in the hackney carriage tariff, since it may be programmed into their taximeters, but in practice they were entitled to charge any fare they desired, provided it had been agreed with the passenger or passengers before a journey began.

The Committee noted that a number of the larger operators in Stevenage charged in accordance with fixed price promotions on a permanent basis; £8 maximum fee for one pick up and drop off in the Stevenage area from 9am to 9pm. In certain instances this could result in fares for longer journeys within the town made with private hire vehicles and drivers operated by these companies undercutting the cost of equivalent journeys in a Hackney Carriage. However, journeys in a private hire vehicle could only be made following advanced booking.

The Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager advised that the following three options were open to the Committee:

- (a) To accept the proposal as submitted and apply the new tariff effective from a date not more than two months after the operational date specified in the public notice (2 April 2022); or
- (b) To modify the submitted proposal and apply the new tariff effective from a date not more than two months after the operational date specified in the public notice (2 April 2022); or
- (c) To leave the current tariff in place unaltered. There was no specific facility in the legislation to enable this and so, in effect, the current tariff would have to be re-implemented following the process set out at (b) above.

Mr Paul Barrett (ABC Taxis Limited) addressed the Committee in support of the application to revise the tariffs. He expanded upon the points made in his application letter, including increasing costs resulting from Covid (masks, cleaning equipment), the common use of card payment facilities that incurred a transaction fee, and the rising costs of living, incorporating fuel, vehicle maintenance/replacement and station permits. He asked if consideration could be given to a possible index-linked annual increase in tariffs in line with inflation.

In relation to a series of Member questions, officers and Mr Barrett responded as follows:

- the Taxi Forum (although curtailed during the Covid pandemic) was a useful sounding board and was on offer to all drivers, but it was not as well-supported by them as it could be. The only drivers present at the 14 December 2021 meeting were representatives of ABC Taxis Limited;
- there were approximately 100 licensed hackney carriage drivers in the Borough, out of a total of over 200 (the remainder being Private Hire vehicle drivers);
- there were 4 major companies operating in the Borough, and 5 or 6 smaller

operators;

- the 4 objections were from an airport transfer operator and Private Hire drivers;
- it was always possible for the hackney carriage trade to submit further reviews for tariff increases, but the statutory process for advertising and considering any objections would need to be followed before any decision was made; and
- it was confirmed that there was no right of appeal against the Council's decision, but if a person felt that the decision was unlawful then the only legal remedy available was to seek a Judicial Review in the High Court.

The Committee noted the sparse attendance at the Taxi Forum meeting on 14 December 2021, and asked officers to endeavour to ensure that drivers were actively encouraged to attend future Forum meetings to enable a wider breadth of discussion to take place on taxi licensing matters.

After some debate, and following a brief adjournment, the Committee voted to approve the requested revision to the hackney carriage tariffs. In so doing, a further resolution was passed that the Committee would henceforth receive a standing item to review the tariffs on an annual basis.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That, with effect from 2 April 2022,
  - (a) the proposed increase of the current hackney carriage tariff 1 from £3.40 to £3.60 be approved for the first 528 yards, and 20p for each additional 176 yards (or part thereof), to be applied to hirings between 06:00 and 23:00 hours Monday to Sunday;
  - (b) the proposed increase of the current hackney carriage tariff 2 from £5.10 to £5.40 be approved for the first 528 yards, and 30p for each additional 176 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) the proposed increase of the current hackney carriage tariff 3 from £6.80 to £7.20 be approved for the first 528 yards, and 40p for each additional 176 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)

2. That henceforth the Committee's work programme includes a standing item to review the hackney carriage tariffs on an annual basis.

**4 URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None.

**5 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Not required.

**6 URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

**CHAIR**