

Licensing and Regulatory Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Licensing and Regulatory Committee** held on **Monday 29 January 2024 at 6.00 pm** in the **Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House**, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds IP33 3YU

Present **Councillors**

Chair Roger Dicker

Vice Chair Pat Hanlon

Michael Anderson

Carol Bull

Patrick Chung

Ian Houlder

Charlie Lynch

Marilyn Sayer

Liz Smith

Don Waldron

17. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rachel Hood, Beccy Hopfensperger, Aaron Luccarini and Richard O'Driscoll.

Councillor Rowena Lindberg was also unable to attend the meeting.

18. **Substitutes**

No substitutions were declared.

19. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

20. **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.

21. **Public participation**

The following members of the public spoke under this item in relation to Agenda Item 6: Report No LIC/WS/24/001 Review into West Suffolk Council's Hackney Carriage Fares for 2024:

Jason Crooks (Licensed Driver)

Mr Crooks advised the Committee that he understood there to be approximately 240 Hackney Carriage licenced drivers in the West Suffolk District and therefore asked Members to be mindful of these 240 livelihoods when considering the report in question.

He had objected to the report's original proposal to remove tariffs 4, 5 and 6 and therefore welcomed the alternative fare card that was tabled at the start of the meeting by Officers and which proposed to retain these three tariffs.

Mark Goodchild (Licensed Driver - Goodchilds Cars)

Similarly to Jason Crooks, Mr Goodchild welcomed the alternative proposal to retain tariffs 4, 5 and 6 as tabled.

However, he argued against some of the other tariffs proposed particularly tariff 2 which he considered should have a lower starting rate but then a higher rate against each subsequent 160 yards.

He advised the Committee that insurance renewals had dramatically increased for drivers and that as national minimum wage was due to increase in April that the fares should increase for drivers proportionately to this.

Cliff Mullane (Licensed Driver)

Likewise to the previous two speakers, Mr Mullane firmly welcomed the alternative proposal to retain tariffs 4, 5 and 6 as tabled and stated that without the inclusion of the specific tariffs for 5 or more passenger vehicles there would be no incentive for drivers to operate the larger vehicles.

Mr Mackenzie (Licensed Driver)

Mr Mackenzie also strongly welcomed the alternative proposal to retain tariffs 4, 5 and 6 as tabled.

He also made reference to the recommendation to annually review taxi fares at the meeting scheduled closest to 1 March and argued that November would be preferred from his perspective.

22. **Review into West Suffolk Council's Hackney Carriage Fares Table for 2024 (Report No: LIC/WS/24/001)**

The Committee was reminded that the District's taxi tariffs were last reviewed at their meeting on 11 July 2023, where it was agreed that as fuel costs had decreased significantly that fares would not increase unless the fuel duty increased in the forthcoming budget.

Since that meeting a request for a formal taxi fare review was submitted to the Licensing Authority in November 2023, as attached as Appendix B to Report No LIC/WS/24.001.

Officers had reviewed the request received and developed a table of initially recommended fare increases. Part of the feedback received from the public was that the fare card was difficult to understand due to the number of varied tariffs included, accordingly, the proposed fare card attached as Appendix A to the report had removed tariffs 4, 5 and 6 which related to vehicles that carried 5 or more passengers.

Since publication of the agenda, Licensing Officers had received a number of objections from the Trade in respect of the proposed removal of the three tariffs. Henceforth, an amended version of Appendix A had been produced which reinstated the three tariffs and this was tabled to the meeting.

Councillor Charlie Lynch stated that he had spoken with some taxi drivers in Newmarket who, similarly to the majority of the drivers who had earlier

addressed the Committee, supported the increases within the proposed fare card subject to the reinstatement of the three removed tariffs.

There was some debate amongst the Committee as to whether the tariffs for the larger vehicles could be better managed on the fare card, in order to minimise public confusion.

Other Members remarked on the fact that the fare card had to be displayed in all vehicles and there was nothing to stop drivers advising their passengers at the start of the journey which tariff was being operated.

The Chair highlighted that any change to the fares agreed by the Committee would then have to undergo a public consultation period.

It was proposed by Councillor Roger Dicker, seconded by Councillor Pat Hanlon and with 9 voting for the motion and with 1 abstention it was

RESOLVED:

That:-

1. The revised table of fares for West Suffolk, as tabled to the meeting, be approved;
2. Taxi fares be annually reviewed by the Licensing & Regulatory Committee at the meeting scheduled closest to 1 March;
3. The proposed methodology for how an annual fare review will be undertaken, as set out in Report No LIC/WS/24/001, be approved; and
4. A temporary surcharge of £1 per journey be approved in the event that petrol and/or diesel prices increase to £2 per litre.

23. West Suffolk Council Street Trading Policy Consultation (verbal)

The Food, Safety & Licensing Manager verbally advised the Committee that the Licensing Authority was currently undertaking consultation on West Suffolk's Street Trading Policy in advance of a policy review later in the year.

The consultation sought views from street traders, businesses, events organisers, Town and Parish councils, residents and other stakeholders on some of the issues which could potentially be covered and addressed in the new policy.

Members were advised that the Council had directly written to licensed street traders, Our Bury St Edmunds and Love Newmarket Business Improvement Districts, Town/Parish councils across West Suffolk and a host of other groups and stakeholders, in order to encourage people of all ages and backgrounds to collaborate and help shape the future policy.

The consultation period was due to run from 5 February 2024 to 18 March 2024.

The Chair asked if feedback on the consultation responses received could be provided to the Licensing & Regulatory Committee and the Food, Safety & Licensing Manager agreed to pick this up at the next scheduled meeting in April 2024.

24. **Licensing Team Update (verbal)**

Prior to the Chair closing the meeting, he invited the Food, Safety & Licensing Manager to introduce Members to the new Licensing Team Leader who had recently been appointed to post and who was in attendance.

The Committee was also advised that other new team members were due to start imminently as part of an ambitious plan for service improvements.

The meeting concluded at 7.24pm

Signed by:

Chair
