

Extraordinary, Informal Joint Licensing and Regulatory Committee



St Edmundsbury
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Title of Report:	Hackney Carriage Fare Review 2019 Stage 2 –Final Proposals Following Public Consultation
Report No:	LIC/SE/19/002
Report to and date/s:	Extraordinary, Informal Joint Licensing & Regulatory Committee – 29 January 2019
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Purpose of report:	To prepare hackney carriage fares for the creation of a single West Suffolk Council and address issues raised during the statutory two week public consultation.
Recommendation:	It is recommended that, Members approve the updated West Suffolk fare card in Appendix C for St Edmundsbury Borough Council for implementation on 18 February 2019, on the basis that this will continue as the West Suffolk fare card after 1 April 2019 (subject to agreement in parallel by Forest Heath District Council).
Key Decision:	<i>Is this a Key Decision and, if so, under which definition?</i> No, it is not a Key Decision - <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Consultation:	Statutory 2 week consultation held between 8 December and 21 December 2018.
Alternative option(s):	As detailed in Paragraph 1.4.1: 2. Adopt the proposed fare card with an additional 20p baggage charge 3. Approve the publicly advertised fare card agreed at the previous Informal Joint Licensing & Regulatory Committee on 4 December 2018
Implications:	
<i>Are there any financial implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Are there any staffing implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Are there any ICT implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Are there any legal and/or policy implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<i>Are there any equality implications? If yes, please give details</i>	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taxis are used particularly by older people, individuals on low income and people living in rural areas. An EQIA has therefore been prepared for these proposals. See section 1.4.2

1. Key issues and reasons for recommendation(s)

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Section 65 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 empowers a local authority to set the fares charged by Hackney Carriages licensed within their district or borough, at the council's discretion.

1.1.2 A review of fares started in April 2018 with stage one of the fare alignment across West Suffolk. This review was primarily undertaken to prepare for the creation of West Suffolk Council in April 2019 but it has also taken into account the time passed since previous fare reviews. The proposed fares from stage 2 of the review include the first increase for St Edmundsbury drivers since 2015 and for Forest Heath drivers since 2014.

1.1.3 The informal joint meeting of the Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury Licensing & Regulatory Committees took place on the 4 December 2018 (**meeting 1**). The fares set out in **Appendix A** which had been consulted upon with members of the taxi trade only were discussed at this meeting. Following feedback from the trade and officer recommendations, Councillors agreed the following changes:

- bringing back the start time for the night time tariff to midnight from 11pm; and
- removing the use of an extras button for 5+ passenger vehicles, used at the end of a journey, and replacing it with three additional tariffs for carrying extra passengers

This created a set of tariffs to be consulted upon with the public in **Appendix B** agreed by Committee members. Members also asked officers about the possibility of simplifying and clarifying the fare description. This has been taken on board and forms part of the final recommendations.

1.1.4 Setting the maximum fares hackney carriages can charge should be a fair and open process, which is why we are committed to improving simplicity and affordability for the customers while ensuring fairness for taxi drivers and proprietors.

1.2 Public Consultation

1.2.1 As required by statutory guidance, a two week public consultation took place from the committees' decisions from 4 to 21 December 2018. This included the proposed West Suffolk fare card set out in **Appendix B**, which was advertised in local newspapers, social media sites and West Suffolk Councils' website.

1.2.2 All hackney carriage proprietors were also written to inform them of the public consultation, and invite them to display the proposed new fare card inside their vehicles.

- 1.2.3 A small number of representations were received during this two week period. In keeping with statutory guidance, the committees are meeting again to decide whether the proposed fares need to be amended following the concerns raised. This is at members' discretion only and set out in the options in section 1.4.
- 1.2.4 The five representations received are set out in **Appendix D**, which includes a mix of members of the public (2) and hackney trade (3, 2 of whom were St Edmundsbury drivers). All 3 drivers participated in the original trade consultation from September to November 2018 but wanted to express any existing concerns again and respond to the updated proposal.
- 1.2.5 As part of the consultation, the three members of the trade (those submitting representations) were invited in by officers on 21 December to meet and discuss views. The outcome of this was a proposed adjusted fare card which can be found at **Appendix C**. These drivers then informally shared the updated fare card among their fellow drivers. No further comments have been received.

1.3 Adjustments

- 1.3.1 Post public consultation, the legislation allows members to meet and discuss representations received. At this meeting, Councillors may make any adjustments in response to representations and set the fares.
- 1.3.2 Officers have reviewed the representation feedback and created an adjusted far card, as in **Appendix C**, that responds to comments made during the public consultation. In summary, the changes considered are as follows:

In response to representations from members of the public:

1. Making the day rates cheaper, reducing the starting flag and running mile
2. Reducing the number of days when tariff 3 and 6 apply, to just Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day. The rationale for this is increasing affordability for the public on the two days previously included: Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve. These are not public holidays and recognised as times when there is limited public transport available. In the interests of public safety it is considered particularly import to not deter the public from using taxis on these occasions.

In response to representations from the trade:

3. Restoring tariff 2 and 5 fares to 'time and a half'
4. Bringing forward the threshold for tariffs 2 and 5 to finish at 6am, rather than 7am, as this may deter customers using taxis to get to work

5. Introducing even start prices for 4 or less passengers and odd start prices for more than 4 passengers. Helps transparency for customers who may have been charged incorrectly for extra passengers.

Following one driver representation, bringing the baggage charge of 20p per bag back as an optional extra was also considered but not included in the final officer recommended proposal. This is because it requires use of the extras button at any point throughout the journey and it was agreed this should be removed at **meeting 1** as it is not transparent for customers. This bag charge was used in Forest Heath prior to the 2018 fares review.

In response to comments from Councillors at **meeting 1**:

6. Making the threshold distances for each tariff the same.

1.3.4 The changes to tariffs 2 and 5 follow representations raised during the consultation by one driver and one member of the public. The change in time (7am to 6am) should ensure morning business is not impacted by the fare review. The increase up to 'time and a half' ensures drivers do not lose any income compared to current fares as a result of the alignment.

1.3.5 **Appendix E** sets out the running mile comparisons between current tariffs, tariffs that were previously consulted on and the amended tariffs that respond to concerns raised, and are recommended by officers.

1.4 **Options**

1.4.1 There are three options open to members for consideration in aligning taxi fares:

Option 1. It is recommended that the updated fare proposal, set out in **Appendix C**, is adopted for use from 18 February 2019 and continued into creation of single council for West Suffolk from 1 April 2019.

Option 2. Adopt the updated fare proposal in **Appendix C** with an additional change: a 20p baggage charge, as previously adopted in Forest Heath.

Option 3. To make no further adjustments and adopt the publicly consulted set of tariffs agreed on 4 December 2018 by members to commence on 18 February 2019.

1.4.2 **Option 1** is recommended by officers as it reflects feedback from the public and the trade and remains affordable for customers.

1.4.3 The Equality Screening Assessment prepared for meeting 1 remains relevant and can be found attached to reports LIC/FH/18/006 and LIC/SE/18/006. As outlined in the assessment, it is expected that

vulnerable groups will benefit from the increased transparency of fares. The assessment also outlines mitigating actions, such as a survey of supply and demand after April 2019, allowing any impact of the fare review to be monitored.