



TAXI AND GENERAL COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS ON FRIDAY 25TH MARCH
2022 AT 10.00 A.M.

PRESENT

Councillor W. Williams – Vice Chair Presiding

Councillors:

M.A. Adams, Mrs E.M. Aldworth, J.E. Roberts

Together with:

J. Morgan (Trading Standards, Licensing and Registrars Manager), L. Morgan (Licensing Manager), M. Wallbank (Senior Solicitor), R. Barrett (Committee Services Officer), M. Afzal (Committee Services Officer)

Also present:

Mr G. Edwards (Caerphilly County Borough Taxi Drivers Association), Mr R. Salter (Relay Taxis) – part of meeting

RECORDING AND VOTING ARRANGEMENTS

Due to technical difficulties, the meeting start was delayed to 10.10 a.m.

The Chair reminded those present that the meeting was being filmed and would be available following the meeting via the Council's website – [Click Here to View](#). Members were advised that voting on decisions would take place via Microsoft Forms.

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Bevan, P.J. Bevan, D. Cushing, W. David, M. Davies, D. Harse, D.W.R. Preece, Mrs D. Price, J. Simmonds (Chair) and Mrs J. Stone.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest received at the commencement or during the course of the meeting.

3 PROPOSAL TO INCREASE HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARE TARIFFS

Lee Morgan (Licensing Manager) presented the report, which asked the Taxi and General Committee to consider the proposals set out in the report with a view to recommending to Cabinet an increase in the hackney carriage fare tariff, in light of requests received from members of the taxi trade.

Members were reminded that in accordance with Section 65 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, a local authority may fix and vary the rates or fares within their district and all other charges in connection with the hire of a hackney carriage. However, prior to bringing into force any changes, the Authority must publicise its proposals in the local press for a period of fourteen days to allow for any objections.

Mr Morgan explained that there are currently 290 licensed hackney carriage vehicles across the borough and the tariff of fares sets out the maximum tariff that those drivers may charge for a journey. The tariff of fares details the hours of operation that the tariff is applicable for, and also sets the charge for a 'waiting time', for example where a passenger could stop by a shop during the course of their journey and ask the driver to wait for them.

It was noted that the current hackney carriage fare tariff was last revised in 2018, and a table displaying the current fares was set out at Appendix A of the report. Members were also asked to note the daytime and night-time tariffs in effect and the tariff rates available for different sizes of vehicles (1-4 passengers and 5-8 passengers)

Mr Morgan referenced the current financial uncertainty arising from recent global events and the rise in living costs, and explained that two proposals were submitted to the Licensing Department in November 2021 and December 2021 requesting that the Council revise the hackney carriage fare tariffs currently in operation. One request was received from Mr George Edwards of the Caerphilly County Borough Taxi Drivers Association, and the other from Mr Robert Salter, a local hackney carriage vehicle proprietor. These proposals were set out at Appendix D of the report, and both proposals also suggested changes to the waiting time and the times for Tariff 2 to be applied.

All three elements of the proposals were set out at Sections 3.2 and 5.19 of the report for consideration by the Committee, who were asked to make a suitable recommendation to Cabinet in respect of their preferred proposals. It was noted that both parties had been invited to the Committee meeting to speak in support of their proposals if they so wished.

The Taxi and General Committee were referred to the National Hackney Carriage Table of Fares included as a comparison at Appendix B and referenced in Section 5.3 of the report. Members also noted the table showing 2-mile tariff comparisons across Wales at Appendix C of the report.

Members were advised that since the last tariff review in 2018, there has been an increase in the cost of living, particularly in relation to fuel prices, and Section 5.5 of the report highlighted 32.6% increase for petrol and 37% for diesel since 2018.

It was explained that following receipt of the proposals to revise the tariff, the local authority consulted with licensed drivers and proprietors of hackney carriages in the borough. This consultation was carried out electronically between 28th January 2022 and 12th February 2022, and information together with a survey form was circulated to the trade detailing each proposal and the prospective fares based on 1 to 5 miles and 10 mile journeys. This information was set out at Appendix E of the report.

Members were directed to a typographical error contained within the proposed options table at Appendix E, which was contained in proposal A for a 2 mile journey under Tariff 1 and should read an increase of £0.60 and not £0.40 as detailed. This has been amended and the corrected version was shown at Appendix F of the report.

It was noted that there were a total of 32 responses received to the consultation exercise, with 29 out of the 32 respondents agreeing that the existing tariff should be revised, 19 out of 32 respondents (58.06%) were in favour of Proposal B, and 11 out of 32 respondents (35.37%) were in favour of Proposal A. Members were asked to note that the consultation was conducted prior to the escalation of the situation in the Ukraine and the impact upon fuel prices.

Members noted Appendix F of the report which showed the prospective fares arising from each proposal side by side, together with the relevant increase. Aside from the tariff increase, the Committee were also referred to the other two elements under consideration at the meeting, namely a request to increase the waiting time from 10 pence per 30 seconds to 20 pence per 30 seconds, and the time that Tariff 2 should come into effect. Members were advised there is currently a daytime/evening split for Tariff 2, and one proposal advocated that this should not come into effect until 10pm and remain in place until 6am, and the other advocated that Tariff 2 should come into effect across the weekend, from Friday evening at 7pm until Monday morning at 7am.

The Committee were referred to Section 5.12 of the report, which asked Members to consider the proposals set out in the report and to recommend a preferred proposal to Cabinet. In addition to the recommendation from this Committee, Cabinet will be asked to note that following the statutory 14 day public consultation period, if no objections are received, the fare tariff shall come into effect immediately. If any objections are received, then Cabinet will receive a further report to consider these and to approve the fare tariff with or without modification and to determine the date upon the revised tariff should come into effect.

Members were reminded that the consultation was conducted prior to the commencement of events in Ukraine which have had a significant impact on fuel prices, and so it could be the case that some of the comments and views expressed by the trade at that time might have changed given the subsequent impact on the licensed trade.

The Committee were advised that the revised cost of a two mile journey would be £5.70 under Proposal B and £6.00 under Proposal A, which would both be under the UK national average of £6.06 per two-mile journey. Members were reminded that from the consultation, the majority of respondents supported an increase the waiting time from 10p per 30 seconds to 20p per 30 seconds. However, the consensus was split across the operation of Tariff 2 and whether to maintain the current timings (7pm to 7am) or apply Tariff 2 across weekends, the latter of which would result in a higher cost for people travelling over the weekend. It was noted that only 4 respondents were in favour of the other proposal put forward to increase Tariff 2 between 10pm to 6am 7 days a week.

In taking these proposals into consideration, Members were asked to have due regard to the cost of fuel and the impact on the trade, but to also to balance the need for taxi travel to be affordable to the public.

The Licensing Manager was thanked for his report and questions were invited from the Committee. One Member acknowledged the complexity of the proposals, the continuing rise in living costs and inflation rates since the proposals were submitted in November 2021 and December 2021, and the need to take these continued rises into consideration as part of the Committee's recommendations. The Member also referenced the lack of consultation responses received from the trade and suggested that a higher response rate would have been useful for the Committee to gauge the general strength of feeling across the whole of the trade regarding these proposals which are of the utmost importance to their livelihoods.

Mr Morgan confirmed that all licensed drivers and hackney carriage proprietors across the county borough had been consulted on the proposals. 32 responses were received from 370 consultees (as some hold a joint Hackney Carriage and private hire vehicle driver license) and every effort was made by the Licensing Department to encourage all eligible participants to

complete the consultation form. Mr Morgan also acknowledged that it has been four years since the last fare increase and so the requests to increase the tariff had been anticipated, particularly given the recent rise in living costs.

It was noted that Mr George Edwards (Caerphilly County Borough Taxi Drivers Association) was in attendance and he was invited to address the Committee. Mr Edwards outlined his reasons for submitting Proposal B, which advocated an increase to tariffs of between 10p-60p per mile across Tariffs 1-5, together with a request for the waiting time to be increased from 10p per 30 seconds to 20p per 30 seconds, and Tariff 2 to be implemented from 19:00 on Fridays until 07:00 on Mondays.

Mr Edwards explained that many trade members had called for a larger increase in fares, particularly in view of the rising costs of living, but it had since been acknowledged that this was not feasible and so proposing a small increase would still be of benefit to the taxi trade whilst not significantly impacting on the costs of taxi hire by the public. The trade wished for Tariff 2 to be implemented on the weekends (19:00 on Friday until 07:00 on Mondays) so that all drivers would see the benefits of the increase, including daytime drivers, and this small increase would help drivers with the rising cost of living. Mr Edwards explained that this proposal was felt to be sensible and proportionate by the trade, as having a 10-pence increase (across Tariffs 1 and 2) would only equate to £1.00 extra income for the driver over a 5-mile journey.

Mr Edwards made reference to the other proposal submitted (Proposal A) and explained that if this were to be implemented, the trade would effectively be taking a step back as this proposal reflected the tariff situation prior to 2018. He asked that if Members were not minded to support the change to Tariff 2 across the weekend, then they maintain the current situation where Tariff 2 applies 07:00 to 19:00.

Mr Edwards also highlighted the most recent hackney carriage fare increase in 2018 and explained that because there was such a significant increase in fares at that time, following a number of years where there was no increase, this led to an adverse impact on the trade where the public were reluctant to use taxis for a period of time because of the increased costs. Mr Edwards suggested that moving forward, it would be sensible to have smaller and more frequent increases every two years, rather than a significant increase in fares every five to ten years.

The Taxi and General Committee discussed the report and the proposals that had been put forward by the trade representatives. Clarification was sought on whether there had been a change in the number of members across the taxi trade since the consultation was undertaken. Mr Morgan confirmed that the figures had not significantly changed since consultation was undertaken, and there were around 400 licensed hackney carriage and private hire vehicle drivers in the county borough.

A Member asked Mr Edwards if there had been an influx of taxi drivers following the last tariff increase in 2018. Mr Edwards confirmed that membership has generally been at a consistent level, although the trade suffered the loss of some drivers during the pandemic and are finding difficulty in securing new drivers due to the general uncertainty around the industry at this time. Mr Edwards also emphasised that the CCBTDA do not want a massive increase in meter tariffs as this could lead to the public choosing not to use taxis due to the rising costs.

A Member asked Mr Edwards if the easing of Covid-19 restrictions and the removal of the requirement to wear face coverings on public transport would have an impact on the trade. Mr Edwards explained that many drivers prefer face coverings to be worn by passengers to protect the driver and their families, but that this is something that cannot be enforced by the driver, and so there is a mixed approach on the position taken by drivers as they do not want to refuse the fare and lose the income from that journey. Mr Edwards added that over the past few weeks, the trade has seen an increase in customer numbers but have also started to see an increase in the number of passengers that no longer wish to wear face coverings.

The Licensing Manager sought clarification from Mr Edwards on whether he still wished for Proposal B to be put forward as the preferred option from the Committee from the two proposals under consideration. Mr Edwards confirmed that this was correct as he felt that Proposal B would have a lesser impact with regard to the public and their use of taxis as the proposed increase in fares would be smaller than the other proposal.

A Member asked if Mr Edwards, if the larger increase of 10% were to be implemented, if the trade would then be able to use their discretion to adjust their tariffs as they saw fit below this rise, or if it would be more conducive for the trade to be provided with a set tariff. Mr Edwards explained that there would be a cost to all drivers across the trade to have their meters adjusted to the new tariff, irrespective of whether Proposal A or Proposal B was adopted, and that the trade are permitted to charge below the meter tariff but cannot charge above it.

It was noted at this point that Mr Robert Salter (Relay Taxis) had joined the meeting, and he was invited to address the Committee in respect of his proposal. Mr Salter outlined his reasons for submitting Proposal A, which advocated an increase of approximately 10% across all tariffs, together with a request for the waiting time to be increased from 10p per 30 seconds to 20p per 30 seconds and for Tariff 2 to be implemented from 22:00 to 06:00 7 days a week.

Mr Salter explained that as there has been no tariff increase for almost four years, he felt that a 10% increase across the board would be fair as this would equate to a 2.5% increase per year. Mr Salter was of the view that Tariff 2 should only apply from 22:00 to 06:00 and disagreed with the other Tariff 2 proposal put forward by Mr Edwards, explaining that this particular proposal would be unfair to customers and have a detrimental impact on Saturday shoppers and people going out for Sunday lunch, which comprise a significant proportion of trade.

A Member asked what impact a 10% rise would have on the hackney carriage fare tariffs paid by passengers and Mr Morgan referred to Appendix C of the report which provided the current fares and Appendix F showing the revised fares against both proposals as a comparison. The Member asked what 10% would look like across the board and it was noted that a 10% increase against a 1 mile journey of £3.40 would equate to a 34-pence rise, making a total of £3.74, which would be slightly less than the totals in both proposals put forward. Mr Morgan added that he would need time to produce a revised set of figures in full outside of the meeting, but in taking into account the first few examples of miles in the table at Appendix F, 10% would achieve a lesser total revised tariff compared to what had been proposed, and then the figures would increase accordingly as the mileage increased.

A Member acknowledged the increasing financial pressures placed on the trade and was in support of increasing the rate of waiting time in order to recognise the demands placed on drivers and the fact that they could be missing out on fares elsewhere. He also acknowledged that a change to the Tariff 2 timings across the weekends could act as an uplift to those drivers who work shifts across unsociable hours. In addition, the Member suggested that moving forward in the long term, a solution to assist with ongoing financial pressures faced by both drivers and customer could be to review and increase hackney carriage fares on a more frequent basis and in smaller increments.

Following consideration of the report and the representations made, the Taxi and General Committee considered the proposals on the amendments to the hackney carriage fare tariff as set out in Section 3.2 of the report, in order to make recommendations to Cabinet on the preferred proposals for approval, and to then enable the proposals to be advertised in the press for a 14-day public consultation period.

Members firstly took a show of Hands Up in respect of Recommendations 3.1(i) to 3.1(iii) to establish a general consensus across the Taxi and General Committee in respect of their preferred option for each recommendation. Each of the elements producing a consensus of opinion were then moved and seconded and put to the vote.

In respect of Recommendation 3.1(i), it was moved and seconded that Proposal B be recommended to Cabinet for approval as the revised hackney carriage fare tariff. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 4 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

In respect of Recommendation 3.1(ii), it was moved and seconded that an increase to the 'waiting time' by 10 pence per 30 seconds be recommended to Cabinet for approval. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 4 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

In respect of Recommendation 3.1(iii), it was moved and seconded that Option B be recommended to Cabinet for Tariff 2 to apply Friday 7pm to Monday 7am. By way of Microsoft Forms (and in noting there were 4 for, 0 against and 0 abstentions) this was unanimously agreed.

It was therefore RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that:-

- (i) Proposal B be approved as the revised hackney carriage fare tariff;
- (ii) The 'waiting time' be increased by 10 pence per 30 seconds to reflect a revised position of 20 pence per 30 seconds;
- (iii) Tariff 2 be applied Friday 7pm to Monday 7am.

The Chair thanked everyone in attendance and the meeting closed at 11.16 a.m.