

SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

Licensing Committee

Meeting held 11 August 2016

PRESENT: Councillors David Barker, Alan Law, Andy Bainbridge, Jack Clarkson, Neale Gibson, Kieran Harpham, Adam Hurst, George Lindars-Hammond, Anne Murphy, Andy Nash, Moya O'Rourke, Josie Paszek, Bob Pullin and Cliff Woodcraft

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1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 An apology for absence was received from Councillor Vickie Priestley.

2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

4.1 The minutes of meetings of (a) the Committee held on 12th and 18th May 2016, and (b) the Sub-Committee held on 19th and 26th April, 16th May, 2nd, 7th, 9th and 14th June 2016, were approved as correct records.

5. REQUEST FOR INCREASE IN HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARES

5.1 The Chief Licensing Officer submitted a report on a request made by the GMB Union and the Sheffield Taxi Trades Association (STTA), on behalf of their respective members, to increase the fares for journeys in Hackney Carriage vehicles. The report indicated that the last review of this policy took place in April 2013, where no changes were made, and that the last increase had been agreed in October 2010.

5.2 The report set out details regarding the requested changes, fare calculations, financial implications and consultation with the trades. The report also contained, as appendices, a current table of Hackney Carriage fares, details of the request, a table of fares showing the proposed increase, and a list of the approved suppliers of Hackney Carriage tariff meters.

5.3 Ibrar Hussain (GMB) expressed his thanks and appreciation to officers in the Licensing Service for the work they had undertaken with the trades following the initial request for an increase in fares. He stated that, following discussions with GMB members and the other trades, the majority of drivers had requested that the

night-time tariff should take effect from 18:00 hours through to 06:00 hours, based on the fact that many drivers started their shifts at 18:00 hours. He also stated that its members supported the proposed increase in the railway station surcharge, mainly on the basis of the increasing cost of the annual permits, which presently cost £515. Mr Hussain made reference to the problems being experienced by the permit-holders at the Station, referring specifically to the large number of permit-holders, currently 277, having to wait for long periods of time before reaching the official taxi rank. He concluded that there was unanimous support from the GMB's members for the proposed increase in fares, in terms of changes to the drop distances.

5.4 Members of the Committee asked questions of Mr Hussain, and the following responses were provided:-

- At the present time, with regard to Hackney Carriage fare comparisons with other areas, the Authority was around mid-table in terms of other Metropolitan authorities and just below middle in terms of Country-wide.
- In terms of the proposed increase in fares from the railway station, drivers considered such an increase to be reasonable, both in the light of the increasing costs of the annual permit they had to purchase and on the basis that other cities adopted a similar practice. It was considered that there should be a maximum limit on the number of drivers being able to purchase permits, say 120, but there was nothing stopping drivers from making this choice, and there was little or no likelihood of the Station Manager limiting such permits as it was viewed as a useful form of income generation. Despite several meetings with the Station Manager to look at how the situation could be improved, the GMB and STTA still viewed the current situation unsatisfactory. Based on the average number of fares picked up from the Station, the 20p increase was seen as justifiable. The main problems at the Station related to capacity issues, which was not only causing frustration for those drivers who had purchased a permit, but was also creating congestion on the access roads leading to the Station. The GMB and STTA would continue to put pressure on the Station Manager to put a limit on the number of permits sold.
- The trades considered that there was an urgent need for more taxi ranks in the City, particularly in the City Centre, and believed that there was a need for improved communication between the Licensing and Highways Services on this issue. It was appreciated that this was one of the aspects being considered as part of the unmet demand survey currently being undertaken.
- Whilst there was little detail in the report, highlighting how Hackney Carriage drivers' costs had increased, in terms of the trades being able to justify the increase in fares, it was hoped that the public would acknowledge that the cost of driving, including insurance and maintenance charges, had increased since the last review in 2013.
- In terms of the proposed increase in charges regarding the use of credit and debit cards, it was considered that, in order to provide such a service, which

was becoming increasingly popular with the public, the trades considered it reasonable that they should be able to recover any costs in terms of providing this service.

- Drivers would not incur any costs in terms of dealing in cash, although there were obvious risks in terms of theft which, thankfully, were very rare.

5.5 Hafeas Rehman (STTA) also expressed his thanks and appreciation to the officers and Members who had been involved in working on the proposals. Mr Rehman stated that Hackney Carriages still represented good value for money in terms of travel in the City, and stressed that the STTA had always been sensible in terms of requests for increases in fares. With regard to the station, he stated that there were only 16 spaces on the rank directly outside the Station, and that the problems, which the STTA had envisaged some years ago, had been caused by the Council's Planning Service. He stated that the STTA supported the proposals as set out in the report.

5.6 In response to questions from Members of the Committee, Mr Rehman stated that the STTA supported the proposal regarding credit and debit card payments on the basis that many drivers were struggling to make a living, and that it was only fair that they could recover the costs of hiring the equipment required. He also made the point that Hackney Carriage vehicles were more expensive than private vehicles to purchase, and had extra benefits, such as being wheelchair accessible.

5.7 In response to comments and questions from Members of the Committee, Clive Stephenson (Licensing Strategy and Policy Officer) confirmed that additional charges were made in terms of Hackney Carriages ranking in stations and airports in other cities. He stated that if the night-time charges operated from 18:00 hours to 06:00 hours, this would be one of the earliest, if not the earliest, start time in the country, as many other areas' night-time charges became effective from 22:00 or 23:00 hours. It was accepted, however, that there were less additional charges in Sheffield, such as weekend, luggage and additional passenger charges. In terms of future requests for increases in fares, officers in the Licensing Service had started to create a matrix, setting out the running costs of individual Hackney Carriage drivers, together with details of their income, which could be used by the Committee when considering such future requests. Following concerns raised by Councillor George Lindars-Hammond, Mr Stephenson stated that, at the present time, the matrix was in its infancy, and did not contain any factual information in terms of drivers' costs and income, therefore he did not deem it suitable to include in the report now submitted. In terms of safeguards relating to the additional charge for drivers picking up fares at the railway station, namely with regard to ensuring that permit-holders could only impose the additional charge when picking up from the Station, and not from any other ranks in the City, Mr Stephenson stated that, whilst it would be possible to make the necessary adaptation to their meters at the time of purchasing the station permits, he was not sure there was any way of stopping permit-holders implementing the additional charge when picking up fares from other ranks in the City.

5.8 Ibrar Hussain stated that there needed to be an element of trust on those drivers

with Station permits, and that it needed to be made clear on the meter, at the end of a journey from the Station, that there had been an additional 20p charge.

- 5.9 RESOLVED: That the public and press and attendees be excluded from the meeting before further discussion takes place on the grounds that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, if those persons were present, there would be a disclosure to them of exempt information as described in paragraph 5 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.
- 5.10 Marie-Claire Frankie reported orally, giving legal advice on various aspects of the request for a fare increase.
- 5.11 At this stage in the proceedings, the meeting was re-opened to the public and press and attendees.
- 5.12 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-
- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the comments now made and the responses provided to the questions raised;
 - (b) further to the representations now made in connection with the request for an increase in Hackney Carriage fares, approves:-
 - (i) the list of suppliers of Hackney Carriage tariff meters;
 - (ii) the initial fare drop tariff to be at 100 yards, and then a further fare drop at 160 yards; the yardage after the initial two drops to be reduced to 220 yards up to 10 miles, and then reduced further to 195 yards;
 - (iii) the night-time tariff to run from 20:00 hours to 07:00 hours and the daytime tariff to run from 07:00 hours to 20:00 hours;
 - (iv) a 50p flat charge for the use of credit and debit cards for payments of fares at £10 or under; and
 - (v) the 20p additional charge for journeys made from the railway station; and
 - (c) requests the Chief Licensing Officer to submit a report to this Committee in 12 months' time, containing a review of the changes referred to in paragraph (b) above.