

Licensing Committee

Meeting held 31 January 2022

PRESENT: Councillors David Barker (Chair), Karen McGowan (Chair), Angela Argenzio, Lewis Chinchen, Dawn Dale, Ruth Milsom, Joe Otten, Josie Paszek, Sioned-Mair Richards, Mick Rooney, Cliff Woodcraft and Ann Woolhouse

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Dawn Dale, Roger Davison, Neale Gibson and 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. HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARES REVIEW

4.1 The Chief Licencing Officer submitted a report to consider requests to increase the fares for journeys in Hackney Carriage vehicles.

4.2 The report contained the current table of fares at Appendix A, which had been determined by the Council in April 2016. Representations had been received from Mr Ray Chappell (Driver), Mr Ibrar Hussain (Driver) and Mr Hafeas Rehman (Sheffield Taxi Trade Association), and were set out at Appendix B to the report. Mr Hussain and Mr Hafeas attended the meeting.

4.3 Also in attendance were Mr Irfan Khan and Mr Nasar Raof (GMB) who had submitted their representations after the close of the consultation period, but were given permission to attend and put forward their representations. Mr James Martin (Sheffield Transport for All) also attended. He had not submitted representations during the consultation process, but would be allowed to speak.

4.4 Ibrar Hussain stressed that the last fare increase for Hackney Carriage vehicles had been in August 2016, and explained the reasons for why he believed there should now be a further increase. This included increases in the costs of vehicle parts, with parts for Hackney Carriages generally being more expensive than standard vehicles, fuel charges, insurance and road tax. Mr Hussain also referred to the requirement on drivers to replace their vehicles due to the proposed Clean

Air Zone (CAZ) in September 2022. He made reference to the additional charge for drivers at Midland Railway Station, whereby those drivers opting to pick up fares from this location had to purchase an annual pass, which was managed by a private company, and the costs of which had increased over the years. Mr Hussain concluded by referring to an expected income for a Hackney Carriage driver, based on their income from fares, minus their outgoings, and indicated that with the current fares in operation, most were struggling to earn a living wage.

- 4.5 Hafeas Rehman referred to the proposal submitted by the Sheffield Taxi Trades Association (STTA), which represented a more detailed submission to the one planned for the meeting on 20th December 2021, at which the report was due to be submitted, but which had subsequently been cancelled. He referred to an increase in fuel charges and the rate of inflation, and stated that based on such increases, together with an increase in other associated costs, the STTA was requesting an overall increase in fares of 2.2%. Mr Rehman made reference to increases in rail and bus fares, and stated that the proposed increase was more about drivers being able to recover their running costs, and not about making a profit. The increase would also help to provide drivers with a level of stability and confidence in the Hackney Carriage trade going forward, particularly given the recent problems facing the trade following the Covid-19 pandemic, which had resulted in a large reduction in the number of vehicles. He believed the proposal represented a modest increase - approximately 80p more for a standard three-mile journey and £2.00 more for a journey over 10 miles, and would not have a major impact on the public.
- 4.6 Ifan Khan stated that the GMB had not submitted any representations prior to the meeting due to structure changes within the branch. He stated that whilst the Union concurred with the comments already made, it believed that the meter charge at the start of a journey should increase to a fixed charge of £3.50 during the day and £4.00 during the night. The Union also requested that the waiting time should be increased to 30p per drop, every 59 seconds, a further increase of £1.50 on Friday and Saturday evenings due to increased demand, an increase from £2.00 to £3.00 on all Christmas holidays and an increase in the start time, to £4.50 start on all bank holidays. Mr. Khan stated that such increases would not adversely affect the public, but would help drivers in terms of earning a decent living, as well as helping them in terms of the costs of purchasing newer vehicles in the light of the proposed Clean Air Zone.
- 4.7 James Martin stated that the Hackney Carriage trade was vital to a large number of disabled people in the city, particularly those vehicles having wheelchair access. Whilst agreeing that there were grounds for an increase in fares, he requested that the Committee be mindful of the fact that many disabled people were on benefits, and often took short journeys in taxis, therefore any sharp increase in the start fare would have a negative impact. He stated that the Committee needed to be mindful of the reduction in the number of Hackney Carriage vehicles in the city, particularly those having wheelchair access. Mr. Martin concluded by stating that whilst he appreciated the difficulties being faced by drivers, he requested that the Committee should be mindful that any fare increases should not result in any unfair disadvantages to disabled people.

4.8 Members of the Committee raised questions, and the following responses were provided:-

- There had been a reduction of around 25% of the Hackney Carriage fleet over the last three to four years, with the Covid-19 pandemic having the biggest impact, mainly due to drivers being forced to find other employment, and not returning to the trade. There had also been increases in the costs of running vehicles which, in most cases, had resulted in a reduction in income for many drivers. In terms of a limit on the number of vehicles, the last unmet demand survey, which comprised a number of various assessments, had been undertaken in 2013/14, and had resulted in a limit of 857 vehicles being set. However, at present, the limit was not having to be applied due to the reduction to the size of the fleet, which currently stood at around 600 licenced vehicles.
- The amounts set out in the fares chart represented the maximum amounts drivers could charge. Whilst the Licencing Service was not aware of any drivers in Sheffield charging less than the maximum amount, officers were aware of this practice taking place in other areas.
- The role of the different taxi trades was to consult its own members, and the representatives would put forward their views on their behalf. Therefore, there had not been any cross-trade discussions on this issue, hence the different proposals. The GMB was currently in discussion with the STTA in connection with organising a unified trade. All the trades agreed to the principle of a fare increase.
- Those drivers offering the facility for customers to pay by credit or debit card would get charged approximately 1.69% for each transaction, and were not able to claim this back. Officers would look into the implications of drivers being charged in this way.
- There were currently two different tariffs - one daytime and one night-time, and any request for an increased charge at weekends, either at the start of the journey or on the drop, would require a further tariff, which would be displayed on the meter. The Council had tried to keep to a minimum of tariffs in order to avoid any confusion for both the driver and the customer.

4.9 The Chair (Councillor Karen McGowan) reported that (a) in response to concerns raised by the taxi trades with regard to the age limit of vehicles, officers had been requested to undertake research in terms of what action was being taken in this regard in other areas of the country, which would then inform the Council in terms of any decisions to be made going forward and (b) with regard to those drivers applying for extensions to their licences, officers had been requested to add further information on the application form, which would hopefully make it clearer for the driver to focus on providing more information regarding the exceptional circumstances of their vehicle, being the grounds on which the Licensing Sub-Committee, under current policy, based its decisions.

4.10 Councillor McGowan also expressed her personal thanks to the trade following two incidents where drivers had gone out of their way to assist her when travelling in

Hackney Carriage vehicles.

4.11 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-

- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, together with the comments now made and the responses to the questions raised;
- (b) agrees the changes to the table of fares for Hackney Carriage vehicles, to take effect from 1st March, 2022, as follows:-

FIRST 100 YARDS (91.4 metres)

Tariff 1	(7.00 am until 7.00 pm) Day	£3.10
Tariff 2	(7.00 pm until 7.00 am) Night	£3.30
Tariff 3	(7.00 pm until 7.00 am) (Weekend) Fri Sat Sun	£4.30

Then 20p for every 195 yards (178.3 meters) up to 17600 yards (10 miles/16093 metres). Then 20p for every 176 yards (160.93 meters) thereafter.

WAITING TIME

For every 48 Seconds the cab is kept waiting - 20p

Waiting time is calculated once the vehicle is stood or travelling at less than 8 miles per hour (£15.00 per hour)

EXTRAS

Each hiring begun between 6.00 pm on 24th December - £2.50 - and 6.00 am on 27th December and between 6.00 pm on 31st December and 6.00 am on 2nd January.

Each hiring on any other official government Bank Holiday - £1.00 - (07.00am to 07.00am)

Fouling the vehicle - MAXIMUM charge £50; and

- (c) requests that (i) an annual review of Hackney Carriage fares and (ii) a review of current taxi ranks in the city, be undertaken.

5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

5.1 RESOLVED: That the minutes of meetings of (a) this Committee held on 11th October 2021 and (b) the Licensing Sub-Committee held on 14th, 20th, 21st and 28th September, 4th, 5th, 11th, 12th, 18th and 19th October, 1st, 2nd, 8th, 9th, 15th, 16th, 23rd and 30th November and 7th, 13th, 14th and 21st December, 2021 and 4th January, 2022, be approved as correct records.