

Confirmed



Minutes of a Meeting of the **Licensing Committee** held in the Conference Room, Riverside, on **Monday, 17 October 2022 at 6.30pm.**

Members of the Committee present:

Councillor Paul Ashdown, Councillor Edward Back, Councillor Alison Cackett, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Janet Craig, Councillor John Fisher, Councillor Andree Gee, Councillor Colin Hedgley, Councillor Mark Newton, Councillor Keith Robinson

Other Members present:

Councillor Judy Cloke, Councillor Mark Jepson

Officers present:

Teresa Bailey (Senior Licensing Officer), Martin Clarke (Licensing Manager & Housing Lead Lawyer), Sarah Davis (Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny & Member Development)), Alli Stone (Democratic Services Officer (Governance)), Alison Woodley (Licensing Officer)

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tony Cooper, Tony Goldson and Steve Wiles. Councillor Judy Cloke attended the meeting as Councillor Goldson's substitute.

2 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

3 Minutes

It was by consensus

RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 August 2022 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 Proposed Taxi Fare Increase

The Committee received report **ES/1310** of the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Health, which required the Committee to consider objections and comments received following a consultation regarding the proposed increase to the

hackney carriage fares tariff in the north of the East Suffolk district. The Chairman noted that this matter had been debated at the Committee's previous meeting of 1 August 2022.

Councillor Jepson, Assistant Cabinet Member for Community Health, noted that following the Committee's approval of the new fares at its previous meeting, a consultation had taken place with hackney carriage drivers and operators in the North of the district. As a result of feedback received from this consultation the initial waiting time had been recalculated and was included in the proposed tariff fare table attached as Appendix A to the report. Councillor Jepson invited the Senior Licensing Officer to provide further information.

The Senior Licensing Officer noted that two objections had been received during the consultation, with both objections relating to the need to replace meters as older meters could not be recalibrated to the new fares.

The Committee was advised that comment had also been received from one of the larger operators in the North of the district regarding the calculation of waiting time, which had not been taken into account when the proposed figures had been rounded up. The Senior Licensing Officer confirmed that this calculation had been verified with an independent meter agent and the proposed figures, attached as Appendix A to the report, had been amended to reflect this calculation.

The Chairman invited questions to Councillor Jepson and the officers.

The Senior Licensing Officer advised that 139 hackney carriage drivers had been consulted, along with 30 operators. Councillor Coulam expressed surprise at the low response to the consultation; the Licensing Manager & Housing Lead Lawyer noted that responses were more likely to be received when consultees are not happy with proposals.

In response to a question regarding hackney carriage drivers not upgrading or recalibrating their meters, officers explained that drivers are required to have their meters calibrated to the tariffs set by the Council and this is the maximum they can charge a passenger for a fare; it was noted that it was at individual drivers' discretion to charge lower than the fare indicated on their meter, including whether or not to barter with a passenger to agree a lower fare. The Committee was informed that meter calibration was checked during a vehicle inspection and a vehicle with an incorrectly calibrated meter would fail its inspection.

The Senior Licensing Officer explained that vehicle meters would be recalibrated by an agent from the meter manufacturer and then Council officers would undertake a measured mile in the vehicle to ensure the meter had been calibrated correctly.

Members discussed the cost to drivers to upgrade or replace their meters; the Chairman noted this would be a personal decision to each driver.

It was confirmed that the waiting time calculation had been correct when the current fares had been agreed.

Councillor Jepson noted that the Council had worked closely with hackney carriage drivers in the North of the district and had been influenced by drivers when considering raising the tariffs.

In response to a question on the proportion of drivers consulted supporting the proposed increases, the Licensing Manager & Housing Lead Lawyer set out the consultation publication requirements set out by the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 (the Act) and noted that only those wishing to object to the proposals were invited to respond, considering those supporting the proposals were not required to respond.

The Licensing Officer confirmed that the current hackney carriage fares were set in 2012/13, so most meters in the North of the district were approximately nine to ten years old and some meters could not accept the latest chips to be recalibrated. The Committee was advised that there were 44 hackney carriage vehicles that would need to be recalibrated.

Officers reiterated that the two objections, identical in nature, had objected to the proposed fares on the grounds that the consultees would be required to replace their meters, as they could not be recalibrated. The Licensing Officer highlighted that three other drivers had acknowledged they would need to replace their meters should the proposed fares be agreed and were prepared to do so, adding that the figure of £360 cited by the objectors was not a universal figure and was lower in some cases, depending on the make/model of the meter.

It was proposed by Councillor Hedgley and seconded by Councillor Ashdown that the proposed hackney carriage fares for the North of the district, attached as Appendix A to the report, be adopted with effect from 17 October 2022. The Chairman invited the Committee to debate the proposal.

Councillor Craig supported the officers' comments that supporters of the proposals were not required to respond to the consultation but expressed sympathy with the views of the objectors.

Councillor Coulam noted that, at its last meeting, the Committee had asked to see the consultation letter before it was distributed and considered that the Committee had not received enough information. Councillor Coulam was of the view that a response from all hackney carriage drivers and operators was required to get an accurate picture. In response, the Senior Licensing Officer advised the Committee that the consultation letter was a covering letter including a replica of the newspaper advertisement as set out by the requirements of the Act.

Councillors Back and Cackett both spoke in support of the proposal, noting the low objection responses and considering that the main issue raised was the replacement of meters rather than the fare increases themselves.

The proposal was put to the vote, and it was unanimously

RESOLVED

That the proposed hackney carriage fares for the North of the district, attached as Appendix A to the report, be adopted with effect from 17 October 2022.

NOTE: Councillor Ashdown left the meeting at the conclusion of this item.

5 Issued Licences in East Suffolk and an Overview of the work of the Licensing Sub-Committees July – September 2022

The Committee received report **ES/1311** of the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Community Health, which provided an overview of the current number and licences issued with regard to the Licensing Act 2003, the Gambling Act 2005 and taxis by East Suffolk Council. The report also summarised the applications received and the work of the Licensing Sub-Committees from July to September 2022.

There being no questions it was by consensus

RESOLVED

That the overview of some of the work of the Licensing Team and the Licensing Sub-committees during the third quarter of 2022 be noted.

The meeting concluded at 7.04pm.

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Chairman