

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL
LICENSING AND REGULATORY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Licensing and Regulatory Committee** held on Wednesday 15 June at 1.30 pm.

PRESENT

Councillor I Hutchinson
(Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

E Chicken
J Foster
B Gallacher
C Humphrey
S Lee

C Seymour
A Sharp
A Wallace

OFFICERS

H Bowers
M Bulman
T Hardy
P Soderquest

D Wilson

Democratic Services Officer
Solicitor
Licensing Manager
Head of Housing and Public
Protection
Business Compliance and Public
Safety Manager

01. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Membership and Terms of Reference, as agreed by Council at the meeting on 4 May 2022, had been circulated for information.

The Chair pointed out that the membership was currently with a vacancy for one member.

RESOLVED that the Licensing & Regulatory membership and terms of reference, as agreed by Council on 4 May 2022, be noted.

Ch.'s Initials.....

02. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Beynon, Hardy, Parry, and Swinbank.

03. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee held on Wednesday 09 March 2022, as circulated be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

04. SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Licensing and Regulatory Subcommittee held on 17 March 2022 be received for information.

05. REPORTS OF THE HEAD OF HOUSING AND PUBLIC PROTECTION

05.1 Hackney Carriage Tariff

Members were updated on the formal consultation that was undertaken with the Hackney Carriage Trade, on whether there should be changes to the current hackney carriage table of fares.

Phil Soderquest, Head of Housing and Public Protection informed members that paragraph 14 of the report had been incomplete and this had since been amended.

On 9 March 2022, the committee resolved to increase all 6 tariffs with an increase of 5%, to be reviewed in one year. In accordance with the request of the Committee consultation had been undertaken with the trade.

Mr Soderquest stressed that the requirement of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, was for an advert be placed in the local newspaper of notification of the proposed increase to the trade with the invitation to comment. The statutory requirement had been met and Licensing Services notified members of the trade of the proposed increase and invited them to comment, which was over and above the statutory requirement.

The actual response to the consultation had been very limited, with five comments received.

Additional information to consider would be shared with members of the committee.

Some additional comments had been received following the closure of the consultation process and Mr Soderquest referred to an email from Berwick Taxi Association to members direct which would be included with the information circulated to members. It had been disappointing that comments had not been received within the consultation period, and following a meeting with Berwick Taxi Association, comments had not been received. However, it would be wrong to ignore the comments.

In total, 8 consultation responses had been received from approximately 1000 individuals, which was a low consultation response.

Members were asked if the number, quality and content of the representations was enough to modify the position, if not, the original recommendation could still proceed. However, if members felt the representations were such to modify the position, that was up to members to decide. Mr Soderquest pointed out that since the last committee, there had been a significant increase in the cost of living and fuel, and if the consultation had been carried out as of today, more responses might have been received.

Mr Soderquest commented that previously there was no single trade body, or association which represented Northumberland as a whole and that it would be useful if there was such a body/association. Many of the representations received had come from organisations which may have a geographic base with members from other parts of Northumberland but there was not one single monogenous organisation which represented the views of all in Northumberland. The representations received had been from individuals or collectives which had made it challenging for the consultation exercise.

In legal terms, members would agree the tariff at the meeting and the tariff would be the maximum that could be charged for journeys in a particular zone. When the tariffs were set, the trade would set as they thought appropriate.

All representations had been advocating for a flag fall to be increased.

Mr Soderquest explained the various ways to increase the tariff, which historically had been around yardage.

The recommendations in the report were explained to members. The decision of the committee would be relayed to the trade and a date set upon which the agreed fares should come into effect, which in any event must be no later than 6 July.

Additional information was circulated to members of the committee.

In reply to a query regarding the responses from larger organisations, Berwick Taxi Association had sent comments via email, which had been forwarded to members. It was understood that Berwick Taxi Association had an affiliation with Berwick but it was not known who they represented, and as a body did not have a mandate to speak on behalf of all of the trade in Northumberland.

Tasmin Hardy, Licensing Manager explained the table of proposed tariffs.

In response to a comment regarding school runs and SEND and the request for an annual increase, Mr Soderquest explained that this was not dealt with in this process and could be dealt with separately through Local Services.

Members were informed that they should bear in mind when considering the fares, that drivers working in urban areas would make more and frequent journeys and benefit from flag fall increase. However, in the rural areas, journeys would be fewer but longer, and would only benefit from the flag fall once. A solution was required that worked for all of the trade.

In response to members' comments/questions, the following information was given:-

- No one had given a representation on the waiting times
- The consultation had been carried out appropriately and for the correct time. Berwick Taxi Association had not responded and following a meeting carried out with Licensing Officers, they still had not responded until after the consultation period ended. The consultation process had actually been extended by a further two weeks. The consultation had gone over and above and the level of responses had been disappointing.
- It had been agreed at the Licensing & Regulatory meeting on 9 March to increase all 6 tariffs with an increase of 5%, to be reviewed within one year.
- If a further Review was required, the process would take approximately 4 months, for public notice, consultation and comments as required by legislation.
- There was not a lot of support for hybrid cars.
- The majority of taxis were combustion engines.

Clarification and discussion took place on the yardage and the flag fall.

Councillor Wallace was mindful of Rep 2 for the reasons outlined in the report.

Councillor Foster put forward a suggestion for the following tariffs:-

Tariff 1	£2.80
Tariff 2	£3.30
Tariff 3	£5.35
Tariff 4	£3.10
Tariff 5	£3.65
Tariff 6	£5.35

Significant discussion and debate took place on the tariffs, hybrid vehicles and it was stated that the committee had taken into account everyone's concerns.

Councillor Lee proposed recommendation 1, which was seconded by Councillor Cessford.

On a show of hands, 6 voted in favour of the proposal, with 2 against and 1 abstention.

Councillor Foster proposed that the agreed fares should come into effect on Monday 4 July, this was seconded by Councilor Cessford and was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that:-

1. The table of fares proposed, be implemented without modification.
2. The agreed fares shall come into effect on Monday 4 July 2022.

05.2 Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Act 2022

Members were notified of the Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Act 2022 and the statutory guidance.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

06. NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED that the next meeting of the Licensing and Regulatory on Wednesday 24 August 2022, be noted.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____