

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL
LICENSING AND REGULATORY COMMITTEE

At a virtual meeting of the **Licensing and Regulatory Committee** held on Thursday, 11 February 2021 at 1.30 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor I Hutchinson
(Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

L Bowman
T Cessford
B Crosby
R Gibson
J Lang
K Parry

W Pattison
M Purvis
G Roughead
C Seymour
A Sharp
KG Stow

OFFICERS

T Hardy
N Masson
P Soderquest

N Turnbull
D Wilson

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

11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Campbell and Wilson.

12. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee held on Wednesday 26 February 2020, as circulated be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

REPORTS OF THE HEAD OF HOUSING AND PUBLIC PROTECTION

13. Future Reports

Ch.'s Initials.....

The purpose of the report was to facilitate discussion with Members regarding future items to be included in a work programme for the Licensing and Regulatory Committee. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed minutes).

The Head of Housing and Public Protection identified a number of areas proposed for inclusion in the work programme, to aid Members understanding of issues and enable more informed decision making. These included:

- Review of locally set license fees.
- Consideration of removal or amendment of hackney carriage zones.
- Amendment of policy in relation to CCTV in licensed premises.
- Review of Hackney Carriage Tariffs.
- Review of Street Trading Policy.

Members commented that:

- Many businesses had been hugely impacted by the pandemic which had also affected their ability to engage in consultation.
- The taxi trade had largely been unable to trade during the previous 12 months.
- There had been a lack of consistency between the support given to taxis compared to coach companies and the financial support had varied between Local Authorities.
- The eligibility criteria for grants should be made clearer as many taxi drivers had applications declined for financial assistance. Officers were asked to work with colleagues and Cabinet members.
- Whilst there was much sympathy with the difficulties experienced by the trade during the previous 12 months, license fees could not be waived as the Council were required to cover the cost of providing the service.
- It was easier to get a taxi in some areas of the county compared to others and it was queried whether the introduction of a single zone would assist this.
- Any review of licence fees or other charges should not be introduced with immediate effect, given the financial struggles many operators were experiencing.

The following information was provided in response to questions from Members:

- Currently there were 6 Hackney Carriage zones inherited from the former district councils. This could be amended to a single zone, which would be of benefit to the Licensing Authority, increasing consistency and uniformity and enabling the issue of a standardised plate. The approach would also potentially benefit, operators, residents and visitors. There would be arguments for and against the introduction of a single zone, including the creation of a 'honeypot' location, as had been seen in Durham.
- Locally set fees were designed on a cost recovery basis. It was good practice to review these on a regular basis.

- A maximum tariff was set for Hackney Carriages with operators being able to charge a lower tariff with perhaps the maximum fee being charged for evening fares.
- A significant amount of work had been carried out with public transport operators to ensure they understood the latest Government advice and changes to regulations, during the pandemic. Introduction of screens to separate drivers and passengers had not been made compulsory as it would be complex and costly for some vehicles. Some operators had introduced screens, particularly in black cabs where the style of the vehicle meant it a screen could more easily be installed.
- In order to aid the new online electronic application system, initially operators had been restricted to a one-year license to enable these to be processed in a timely manner, operators had paid and applied for a one-year license. However, it had been agreed that this would be extended to the 3-year license on the payment of the difference between the two fees.
- The lack of consistency was appreciated. The opportunity to implement a standard framework had been missed following the Law Commission Review in 2014/15.

RESOLVED that the following items be included in the work programme with the timetable to be agreed with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee:

- a) Review of locally set license fees.
- b) Review of Hackney Carriage Tariffs.
- c) A report on the hackney carriage zones, number of licensed vehicles in each zone and details of taxi ranks within each locality.
- d) Amendment of policy in relation to CCTV in licensed vehicles.

14. Vehicle Emissions

The report updated Members on delays in the consultation with the licensed trade in relation to proposals to amend the hackney carriages and private hire licensing policy. (A copy of the report is attached to the signed minutes).

Tasmin Hardy, Licensing Manager, outlined the report which explained the work that been undertaken prior to the last meeting of the Committee on 26 February 2020. The imposition of the national lockdown due to the Covid 19 pandemic, had prevented work with the trade to identify a workable solution from taking place.

Several members referred to the Council's declaration of a Climate Change Emergency and the need to be proactive. Whilst it would be desirable to have consistent policies across the region, the issue was too important to wait for agreement by others in the North East Public Protection Partnership or that we should rely on the local authorities in the urban areas with higher emissions, to take the lead.

It was also suggested that there should be a sliding scale of licenising fees with electric vehicles being charged less and consideration be given to the introduction of a longer period to phase in the changes, to alleviate some of the difficulties that operators were facing due to the pandemic.

Reference was made to the advances and changes in technology which might mean that vehicles could be charged whilst being driven in special motorway lanes or whilst waiting in a taxi rank and therefore electric vehicles could become more practical for more drivers, sooner than initially thought.

In answer to a question, it was confirmed that details of the number of electric or hybrid licensed vehicles would be circulated to Members after the meeting. Numbers across the county varied due to the large distances travelled by some operators and also the availability of electric charging points.

RESOLVED that the information be noted and further information be considered at a future meeting when further engagement / consultation had taken place with the trade.

15. FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting was scheduled to be held on Thursday 29 April 2021 at 2.00 p.m.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____