

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LICENSING COMMITTEE HELD IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2/3, CIVIC OFFICES, ANGEL STREET, BRIDGEND ON WEDNESDAY, 13 APRIL 2011 AT 2.00PM

Present:

Councillor D K Edwards - Chairperson

Councillors

R D L Burns
M E Butcher
D Buttle
E M Dodd
C E Hughes
C J James

Councillors

B I Quennell
D A Unwin
C Westwood
M C Wilkins
R Williams

Officers:

L Jones - Group Manager Public Protection
Y Witchell - Licensing and Registration Officer
P Gavigan - Principal Solicitor
A Rees - Senior Democratic Services Officer - Committees

76 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members:

Councillor R D Jenkins - Other Council Business
Councillor D N W Jones - Other Council Business

77 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declaration of interest was made:

Councillor C E Hughes - Agenda item 4 - Taxi Licensing: Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 - Section 65 - Applications to Amend the Table of Taxi Fares - Personal and prejudicial interest in that the Chairman of the Taxi Association is a tenant of his. Councillor Hughes withdrew from the meeting during consideration of this item.

78 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of a meeting held on 17 March 2011 were approved as a true and accurate record.

79 TAXI LICENSING: LOCAL GOVERNMENT (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT 1976 - SECTION 65 - APPLICATIONS TO AMEND THE TABLE OF TAXI FARES

The Group Manager Public Protection reported on an application to amend the Table of Taxi fares by Mr Paul Pride and Mr Tom Burke who are licensed taxi drivers and vehicle licensees. The proposals were accompanied by the current Table of Fares for comparison purposes. He indicated that the Council is only required to set the maximum fare that can be charged by drivers and that they are free to charge less if they wish.

The application proposed the increase of fares across Tariffs One to Four. Changing the structure of the waiting time tariff to a variable charge for waiting time calculated as £15 per hour or part thereof between 6.00 am and 8.00 pm and at £20 per hour or part

thereof between 8.00 pm and 6.00 am and to £25 per hour or part thereof for Tariffs 5 and 6. Amending the tariffs charged over the Christmas and New Year Period introducing a new Tariff 5 and 6 and rationalising the times at which higher fares apply over these periods. Changing the wording on the tariff sheets to emphasise to drivers and passengers that the meter must be switched on at the start of a journey and continue to operate throughout the duration of the journey. The application also proposed amending the fee for a Credit Card/Payment Card transaction from £1 to 10% of the fare.

The Group Manager Public Protection reported that officers had met the applicants where it was established that the application had been submitted as taxi drivers were now feeling the effects of the recession. There had been no increase in the authorised tariffs since December 2007 and since then there had been a number of factors affecting taxi driver and owner incomes, namely the impact on the day and night time economy, with two night club premises closing down in Bridgend Town Centre since the last application. This application had been discussed by Bridgend based taxi drivers.

He also reported that a major concern highlighted by the applicants was the uncertainty with fuel price increases alongside other vehicle running costs. The applicants were also concerned that reduced income would lead to owners cutting back on maintenance of vehicles and replacement tyres which would have an impact on public safety. The applicants stressed that there was decreasing scope for discounting fares to the public as margins were so tight.

The Group Manager Public Protection reported that the request to increase waiting time, which is to cover the cost to the driver of waiting for the customer to leave the house or premises in case of delay, had been made as drivers feel that they lose out when passengers stop the taxi on the way home so that they can order takeaway food. The drivers also feel that they miss out on potential custom as they wait outside a take away for food to be cooked. The applicants had also requested that Tariff Two be proportionately higher for unsocial hours due to the waiting time during this period.

The Group Manager Public Protection reported in response to the applicants proposals and informed the Committee that the Council was ranked 321 out of 380 Councils in a national league table of taxi fares based on information provided in March 2011. He stated that the current the current fare in the County Borough for a 2 mile journey on tariff one (daytime journey) is £4.50 and the proposal is to increase to £4.90. He stated that running costs in the form of Council licence fees have increased since the last fare increase was approved in 2007 as have the costs of insurance and fuel. He stated that a balance was required between the needs of the travelling public, with reference both to what it is reasonable to expect people to pay, but also to the need to give taxi drivers and owners sufficient reward to provide a service when it is needed and to mitigate the risk of declining standards in vehicle maintenance. There were no comparable national statistics available in respect of the request to change waiting time.

He reported on amendments to Tariffs 5 and 6 which would result in higher fares for the public going out before midnight on Christmas Eve but with a reduction of 15p on a four mile journey throughout Christmas Day. The public would also face higher fares on Boxing Day. Moves to simplify taxi tariffs to ensure that they are easy to understand by both the public and the drivers were supported by Officers. However, a particular issue arises regarding implementing Tariffs 5 and 6 for Christmas and New Year because of the different types of meter installed in vehicles. This risk can be mitigated if the Council resolved to adopt calendar controlled meters as standard in all taxis. However, this will involve a change to vehicle conditions and additional expense to those vehicle owners who are using standard pulse meters, and a change to vehicle conditions would require consultation and further consideration by the Committee.

He reported that the application to amend the fee for payment by credit card/debit card is to ensure that charges levied for use of the machines are recovered by the vehicle owner. The proposal is to amend the current fee of £1 per transaction to up to 10% of the transaction.

He also reported that if the Committee was minded to accept an application with or without amendments consultation will take place by publishing the proposal by way of Public Notice, the Committee could also consider accepting only some of the recommendations and further review others. The Council also published a Notice on its website and consults vehicle licence holders by letter. If no objection is received, or if objections are received and subsequently withdrawn, the variation to the Table of Fares will come into effect on the date of the expiration of the period specified in the Public Notice or the date of withdrawal of the last objection, whichever date is the later. Any objections which are not withdrawn will be reported to a further meeting of the Licensing Committee for further consideration.

The Group Manager Public Protection also reported on a proposal to approve clarification to the wording of the official tariff for Extra Charges; Waiting Time by adding the words "or part thereof" to any description of the charge.

He also reported on a proposal to amend the advisory note to passengers from passengers are advised to ensure that the meter is switched on at the start of each journey to passengers and drivers should note that the meter must be switched on at the start of each journey and operate for the entire journey.

RESOLVED:

(1) That the application for an increase to all or part of the Table of Fares be approved as follows subject to the statutory consultation process:

(a) An increase to the general tariffs 1-4 as specified in the application;

(b) New tariffs 5 and 6 to cover the Christmas and New Year period as set out in the application;

(c) A variable system of waiting time calculated as £15 per hour or part thereof between 6.00 am and 8.00 pm and at £20 per hour or part thereof between 8.00 pm and 6.00 am and £25 per hour or part thereof for Tariffs 5 and 6.

(2) That the following amendments to the wording of the Table of Fares be approved:

Extra Charges; Waiting Time; add the words "or part thereof" to any description of the charge.

(3) That an amendment to the advisory note on the wording on the Tariffs be approved to: Passengers and drivers should note that the meter must be switched on at the start of each journey and operate for the entire journey.

(4) That an amendment to the charge for payment by credit card/debit card from £1 per transaction to up to 10% per transaction be approved.

The meeting closed at 2.28pm.