

Special Meeting of the Licensing Committee with Representatives of the Taxi Trade

Date: 22 January 2013

Venue: Council Chamber

Start Time: 14.00

End Time: 15 .16

Members attending: Councillors K Angold-Stephens (Chairman), A Lion (Vice-Chairman), A Boyce, K Chana, R Gadsby, L Leonard, R Morgan, M Sartin, P Spencer, D Wixley.

Also in Attendance: G Waller (Portfolio Holder for Safer Greener and Highways)

Officers in attendance: Alison Mitchell, Kim Tuckey, Mike Hobbs, Nula Clark, Sarah Kitts and Adrian Hendry

Approximately 32 Members of the Licensed Taxi Trade were also in attendance

The meeting was convened to discuss the application of a fixed fare and metre system. The independent drivers and operators were circulated with draft tariffs, which compared current fares charged within the district by local firms and had also considered other neighbouring local authorities charges. The local taxi trade were invited to this meeting to comment on the proposed tariff.

The Licensing Committee had already decided:

- meters should be fitted; and
- it would be down to individual drivers and/or firms to arrange for the installation of their own metres.

The main purpose of today's meeting was to discuss the detail of the tariff (table attached) and the fitting of the meters.

It was noted that the rates were gleamed from research across Essex;

The taxi drivers made the following comments:

- 1) Drivers would like tariff 2 to start at 10pm and not 11pm;
- 2) They thought that the tariff was too low – most other areas started at £3.70 up to £4.00 before 10pm;

- 3) There were fewer people out after 10pm so the higher rate should start at 8pm;
- 4) A firm now charges £4 for the first 2 miles – the proposed minimum charge would mean a massive increase and their regulars would stop using them;
- 5) Another firm said they charged per mile and did not increase their rate for different times of the day. They could earn a decent living using one rate but the new tariff 2 would mean a 50% increase on a 5 mile journey;
- 6) An independent driver noted that drivers who worked for a firm could still maintain their present rates (if it was lower than the agreed rate);
- 7) Companies could under charge but not charge over the metre price;
- 8) It was better for independents to have set charges;
- 9) Firms get their rent from their drivers who did not need to increase their fares;
- 10) If fares were put up too much they would frighten customers away;
- 11) The minimum fare in Harlow was £4, most towns have a minimum fare of £4. The proposed minimum of £3.50 was too low;
- 12) The starting rate was too low, but the increment rate was fine;
- 13) The Inland Revenue had the power to examine the metres and base charges and tax them on their metre rates;
- 14) Hackney Carriage Drivers could undertake private hire work;
- 15) If a Hackney Carriage Driver was doing private hire work then they should be allowed not to have their metre on;
- 16) A lot of firms have set prices for Airports and Theatres etc. which was cheaper than the proposed rates;
- 17) It was noted that for a pre-agreed run firms could come to a pre-arranged charge for journeys outside the district, but not inside the district;
- 18) Officers to look into the situation about Tax and metres and report back;
- 19) People working for firms should be issued with 'P' plates (for private hire), there would be no need for metres then;

- 20) Currently drivers working for a firm are Hackney Carriage drivers who can also undertake private hire work, although they rarely do;
- 21) Independent drivers should work with a metre;
- 22) There was at least one driver that worked for a firm and also worked independently as a Hackney Carriage Driver;
- 23) One driver who undertook contract work during the week asked if he had to use a metre for that type of work. He was a Hackney Carriage Driver, but if he used a metre he would be more expensive for his contract work;
- 24) £3.50 was a little cheap, drivers took risks working at night;
- 25) Firms were happy with the way things worked at present;
- 26) The firms did mostly private hire work and would like to have the option not to put metres in their cabs;
- 27) The Chairman noted that the Council was limited by legislation, although they could look at having different rates for companies and independents – they would look at the legislation;
- 28) There was a need to clarify if a private hire vehicle needed to use a metre;
- 29) Tariff 4 for use at Christmas time should start at £5;
- 30) It was noted that the quoted tariffs included VAT; and
- 31) If the driver was not VAT registered would it cause problems – would it be overcharging?

Taxi Ranks - Comments were:

- a) There were no ranks for the use of the independent drivers;
- b) They would like temporary ranks from 11pm to 6am in the urban areas. This would make it safer for them;
- c) As Hackney Carriage Drivers they should be allowed to use all ranks;
- d) Other areas have a percentage of the total number licences taxis places in various ranks in their district, usually about 40%, would it possible to have this amount in the district; and
- e) Parking spaces can be used during the night as rank spaces.