

LICENSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH COMMITTEE

12th December 2022

Present: Councillor Richard Udall in the Chair

**Councillors Agar, Barnes, Cronin,
Mrs L. Hodgson, S. Hodgson, Lawrance,
Mitchell, Stafford and Stephen (Vice-Chair)**

Also in Attendance:

Councillor Roberts

Officers: Sian Stroud – Corporate Director, Planning and Governance
Kiran Lahel - Licensing and Support Services Manager, WRS
Niall McMenamin - Principal Officer, Licensing, WRS

50 Declarations of Interest

None.

51 Public Representations

Councillor Andy Roberts asked to address the Committee in connection with the Equalities update item on the agenda, under Public Representations.

Cllr Roberts had been made aware of a constituent from another ward whose wife was a wheelchair user and had experienced difficulty finding a taxi in the City Centre who was willing to take her and her husband.

The couple had approached four cabs on the rank before the fifth finally agreed to take them. Cllr Roberts wished to draw the Committee's attention to the embarrassment and inconvenience caused, noting that it may be part of a larger issue for passengers with disabilities.

Mr Hassan from the Taxi Drivers' Association asked to address the Committee on behalf of Association members, on separate issues to those raised by Cllr Roberts.

Mr Hassan renewed requests to the Committee to consider increasing the current vehicle age limit from 3 years to 5 years. In addition, Association members had expressed concerns about bus lane restrictions in Lowesmoor, which meant drivers had to take a longer route during certain times of day, resulting in increased fares for passengers.

A sign to advise the public that the Cathedral Square bus layby is in use as a taxi rank in the evenings had not yet materialised. Mr Hassan also reiterated requests from Association members for taxi marshalls to manage queues at the ranks from 11pm to 4am on Fridays and Saturdays.

With regard to the bus lane query, Mr Hassan was advised that this fell within Worcestershire County Council's remit and that enquiries would be made and reported back.

52 **Minutes**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 27th September 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

53 **Draft Licensing and Environmental Health Fees and Charges - 2023/24**

Officers presented the annual report on Licensing and Environmental Health Fees and Charges for 2023/24.

Increases were proposed to some, not all, fees and charges. Officers explained that the proposals were calculated with the aim of covering costs, and that overall, the suggested increases fell short of current inflation levels.

Officers responded to questions from Committee Members regarding increases to taxi licence fees. Fees had remained static for two years but would now increase, subject to approval. Committee Members were mindful that such increases may ultimately be passed on to the public. Officers noted that any bid to increase taxi fares was dealt with via a separate process which was also subject to Committee approval.

Some fees contained within the report were set by statute in 2003 and had not been increased. These fees fell outside of the Council's control.

Committee members suggested writing to the local Member of Parliament to request that Government be lobbied on the Council's behalf, to address the issue. The Chair agreed.

RESOLVED: That Committee:

1. **Notes the contents of the report, and in particular the draft Licensing & Environmental Health fees and charges for 2023/24 at Appendix 1**
2. **Approves the undertaking of a 28-day public consultation in respect of the proposed increase to hackney carriage and private hire vehicles fees & charges as required by Section 70 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976**
3. **Delegates authority to the Corporate Director of Operations, Homes & Communities in consultation with The Chair and Vice Chair of Licensing & Environmental Health Committee, to recommend the draft Licensing & Environmental Health fees**

and charges 2023/24 to Council for approval, subject to review of the consultation feedback in respect of recommendation 1.2

- 4. Writes to the local Member of Parliament to request that Government undertakes an urgent review of historic statute-set licensing fees, to assist Local Authorities at a time of intense budget pressures.**

54 Equalities Update Report - Taxis & Private Hire Vehicles (Disabled Persons) Act 2022

Officers provided Committee members with an update on the Council's responsibilities with regard to the Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Disabled Persons) Act 2022.

Committee members noted that under the new legislation, Taxi and Private Hire drivers would be required to:

- Accept the carriage of any disabled person, provide them with reasonable mobility assistance, and carry their mobility aids, all without charging any more than they would for a non-disabled passenger.
- Provide any disabled passenger who requests it with assistance to identify the vehicle, at no extra charge. For example, if a passenger needs additional assistance due to sight of physical impairment.

And that Private Hire operators would be required to accept bookings for, or on behalf of, any disabled person.

Officers noted the representation from Cllr Roberts and expressed their disappointment in the poor experience cited by a local resident and his wife. A test purchasing exercise was planned to monitor the customer experience, particularly with regard to customers with disabilities. The results of the exercise would be reported back to Committee in due course.

The Chair commented that the vast majority of Taxi and Private Hire drivers looked after customers with disabilities very well, with just a very small number of individuals failing to provide a good service.

In response to questions regarding driver training, Officers confirmed that consideration was being given to providing ongoing training. Any drivers failing to meet the 'fit and proper' standard would be brought before the Licensing Sub-Committee.

RESOLVED: That Committee notes the contents of the report and in particular the work already undertaken to meet the requirements of the Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Disabled Persons) Act 2022.

55 Proposal to Apply a Fees & Charges Exemption for Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Electric Vehicles

Officers presented a report summarising a proposed scheme to incentivise the transition to electric hackney carriages and private hire vehicles through a fee and charge exemption for the period 2023/24 – 2025/26.

The Committee acknowledged that the significant additional cost of electric vehicles remained a barrier for many drivers. It was however anticipated that the cost of electric vehicles would gradually decrease as a second market for vehicles developed.

Committee members noted the financial burden involved in the move to electric vehicles and the Government's commitment to ending sales of new petrol and diesel vehicles by 2030. The fee waiver proposal represented a modest means of assisting drivers in making the transition to electric vehicles.

Ultimately the licensing authority would need to impose a deadline after which vehicles which run on fossil fuel would no longer be licensed. Officers were considering proposals to remove age restrictions on electric vehicles.

It had been suggested that the existing 3 year age limit on standard vehicles be reviewed with a view to increasing the limit to 5 years, which may help to support electric vehicle purchase in the future. These measures would require further consideration and Officers suggested that a proposal could be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

Concern was expressed at the implications of the impending 2030 deadline, and the effect it may have on the taxi trade. Committee members suggested a report for a future meeting of the Committee to consider these aspects.

RESOLVED: That Committee

- 1. Notes the contents of the report and in particular the proposal to incentivise the transition to electric hackney carriages and private hire vehicles through a fee and charge exemption for the period 2023/24 – 2025/26.**
- 2. Approves the undertaking of a 28-day fee consultation process in respect of the proposal as required by Section 70 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.**
- 3. Recommends to Environment Committee the release of up to £37,000 from the taxi reserve to implement this scheme, subject to the outcome of the consultation exercise referred to in recommendation 1.2.**
- 4. Delegates authority to the Corporate Director of Operations, Homes & Communities in consultation with The Chair and Vice Chair of Licensing Committee, to incorporate the fees & charges proposal into the 2023/24 Draft Licensing & Environmental Health Fees and Charges for consideration, subject to the review of consultation feedback.**

5. Notes that further work will be undertaken with the Worcester taxi trade in respect of the existing policy on vehicle age limits and reported back to this Committee in March 2023 for consideration.

56 Update Report on Taxi Rank Reinforcement

Committee Members received an update on recent hackney carriage and private hire vehicle enforcement. The scope of the enforcement had been broadened to encompass all traffic regulation within the City, e.g. public misuse of taxi ranks.

Committee Members were pleased to note that active enforcement was being undertaken, however despite this City traffic regulations were still regularly breached by trade and general public alike. Recurring issues would be brought to the attention of relevant Officers.

RESOLVED: That Committee notes the contents of the report.

57 Any Other Business

None.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00 pm to 8.30pm

Chair at the meeting on
12th December 2022