

LICENSING PANEL

15 APRIL 2014

PRESENT: Councillors Asghar Majeed (Chairman), Jesse Grey (Vice-Chairman), Philip Bicknell, Carwyn Cox, James Evans (substituting), John Fido and Peter Lawless.

Officers: Alan Barwise, Robert Cowan, Steve Johnson and Roxana Khakinia.

PART I

14/13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tom Bursnall, Geoffrey Hill, David Hilton, Sayonara Luxton and Derek Sharp.

Councillor James Evans kindly agreed to substitute.

15/13 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

16/13 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 14 January 2014 be approved.

17/13 PROPOSED INCREASE TO HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARES

The Panel considered the issue of increasing the RBWM Hackney Carriage fare.

Officers introduced the report and informed the Panel that the members of the trade wished for the rate of the fare which was set by the Local Authority to be increased. It was noted that the fare had last been increased in November 2011 by 5%.

Mr Yasin, a taxi driver, informed the Panel that drivers in the Borough were making approximately £3.50 to £4 per hour compared with drivers in Slough who were making £6.20 per hour. It was noted that since the last increase there had been an increase in the number of hackney carriages as well as an increased waiting time for drivers waiting for fares. This had culminated in a continually diminishing return.

Mr Frank Minal, GMB Union representative, stated that the Council needed to reconsider rates as a matter of urgency. The minimal fee that could be secured was

noted as important as many trips were less than half a mile in distance. Mr Minal also highlighted a need for greater capacity on taxi ranks and the introduction of a measure to stop drivers being fined when they spill over into the roads.

Councillors considered a number of factors when considering whether to increase in the fare. There were conflicting views as to whether prices for fuel and insurance had increased since November 2011. It was noted that competition for fares had increased as there were a greater number of hackney carriages providing their services. It was also noted that the needs of residents were a priority when making decisions. Members' concluded a small increase would be appropriate.

RESOLVED: The RBWM Hackney Carriage fare be increased by 3% with a 20p increase per additional passenger for fares of more than 2 passengers.

(Five Councillors voted in favour of the motion (Councillors Cox, Fido, Grey, Lawless and Majeed). One Councillor voted against the motion (Councillor Bicknell). One Councillor was not present for the vote or the discussion (Councillor J Evans).)

18/13

DOOR SIGNS FOR PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES

The Panel considered the issue of introducing door signs for Private Hire vehicles.

Officers introduced the report. The door signs proposal had arisen as a response to a woman having been raped when she got into an unmarked vehicle believing it to be a taxi. It was noted that Thames Valley Police supported the scheme. However, there had been strong objections from the trade. It was noted that the main objection came from private hire firms who offered services to corporate clients. Such firms used prestigious vehicles and the attachment of door signs would reduce the value of said vehicles. It was also noted that vehicles could be damaged when the signs were attached.

As a result, concern had been raised that private hire firms would relocate outside the Borough to avoid the door sign requirements. This would result in a loss of revenue for the Council.

It was noted that one possible alternative was exemptions for corporate work, whereby drivers would be required to carry magnetic door signs which could be stored inside the vehicle when carrying out journeys for corporate clients.

Speakers from the trade voiced their concerns with the scheme. Erica Seeking noted that her firm had 43 cars and 10% of their work was corporate. It was noted that their clients would not want to hire vehicles with door signs. She suggested the scheme

was not a proportionate response and was unlikely to have an impact on safety concerns.

Brian Truman, Windsor Cars, noted that taxi drivers took the rape incident very seriously but suggested the scheme was a knee jerk reaction. It was noted that drivers for Windsor Cars wore a uniform making their vehicles easily identifiable. Mr Truman noted that magnetic door signs could be lost, stolen or used fraudulently.

Mohammad Mosaddegh, a taxi driver, stated that public safety was paramount however a more pragmatic response was required. He noted a personal experience where pedestrians had tried to get into his convertible sports car believing it to be a taxi. He stated the scheme would not work and would have no effect on improving safety but it would negatively effect corporate work for private hire firms.

Councillors considered the responses from the trade and the general consensus was the scheme was not going to solve the problem. A small sticker in the window was considered a more appropriate response.

The use of exemptions for corporate work was considered likely to lead to confusion.

Members noted that more CCTV cameras would be of greater benefit when trying to improve safety for taxi users.

Councillors and Officers noted that the high quality of the private hire fleet working in the Borough.

RESOLVED: All Private Hire vehicles be required to display a sticker in the front window of their vehicle bearing the logo of their taxi firm.

Delegated power be given to the Licensing Team to approve front window stickers in private hire vehicles.

(Six Councillors voted in favour of the motion (Councillors Bicknell, Cox, Fido, Grey, Lawless and Majeed). One Councillor abstained from the vote as he was not present for the entirety of the discussion (Councillor J Evans).)

19/13 AMENDING RBWM'S HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE PENALTY POINTS SYSTEM

The Panel received an update regarding the issue of amending the RBWM Hackney Carriage and Private Hire penalty point system.

Steve Johnson, Trading Standards Manager, stated that legal advice had been received regarding the penalty point system which recommended a redrafting of the entire system, not just certain sections which had previously been envisioned. To

allow time for this revision, officers recommended the item be deferred until the next meeting of the Licensing Panel.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED: The item be deferred to the next meeting of the Licensing Panel.

20/13 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

Members noted the date of the next meeting was to be confirmed.

21/13 MEETING

The meeting, which began at 6.00pm, ended at 7.15pm

Chairman.....

Date.....