

# SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

## Licensing Committee

### Meeting held 20 September 2018

**PRESENT:** Councillors Josie Paszek (Chair), David Barker, Dawn Dale, Adam Hurst, Douglas Johnson, Mike Levery, George Lindars-Hammond, Joe Otten and Vickie Priestley

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#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andy Bainbridge, Lisa Banes, Jack Clarkson, Neale Gibson, Mick Rooney and Cliff Woodcraft.

#### **2. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

2.1 No items were identified where resolutions may be moved to exclude the public and press.

#### **3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

3.1 There were no declarations of interest.

#### **4. LICENCE FEES REVIEW (DETERMINATION OF FEES) - 2018/19 FINANCIAL YEAR**

4.1 The Chief Licensing Officer submitted a report on the Licensing Fees Review (Determination of Fees) for the 2018/19 financial year, relating to Private Hire Vehicles, Hackney Carriage Vehicles, Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Drivers, and Private Hire Operators. The report attached, as an appendix, a table setting out the proposed increases to the licence fees.

4.2 The report was supported by a presentation from Steve Lonnia (Chief Licensing Officer), who referred to the various Acts and Regulations which the fees must be set in accordance with, details of the Licensing Service's staffing structure, and information on how the fees were set, based on staff allocation of time, in respect of all the different administrative procedures required. Mr Lonnia also referred to the action required, in terms of cost savings, if the proposed increase in fees was not approved, and provided a breakdown of the weekly cost of the fees to drivers, based on the proposed increase. He concluded by providing a comparison of the fees from 2014 to 2018.

4.3 Members of the Committee raised questions, and the following responses were provided:-

- In terms of enforcement, it was not so much a case of knowing how much enforcement work was required, but more a case of utilising the eight full-time posts of Enforcement Officers in the most efficient and productive manner, based on their 37-hour week. The Officers rotated in terms of day and night-

time enforcement. Ideally, the Service could do with more Enforcement Officers, but this would have to be funded through further licence fee increases.

- The taxi licence fees had last been increased in 2016.
- It had been the Service's aim to sell more electronic licences on the basis that they provided a cheaper alternative for drivers, but it had not been able to do so due to the continuing problems with the IT system. At the present time, whilst there were problems with the IT system, the Service was not penalising those drivers who preferred to purchase their licence electronically.
- The licence fees in several of the other licensing systems had increased each year.
- The licence fees were based wholly on the number of hours worked by staff in the Service, and would not be increased by a specific percentage. The cost of the fees in respect of the various different licences was reflective of the work required in processing each type of licence.
- The Service was totally self-financing, therefore was not subsidised to any extent.

4.4 Ibrar Hussain, representing the GMB, referred to the submission made by the GMB in response to the proposal to increase licence fees, which had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting. He stated that, whilst welcoming the information reported as part of the presentation, which had been requested by the trades for some time, there were still a number of outstanding issues that needed addressing. He considered that the report was not as detailed as it should be, and pointed out that the GMB had still not received responses to the questions raised at the Committee meeting in December 2017, despite several requests. Mr Hussain stated that performance of the staff in the Service, including frontline and back-room staff, was not satisfactory, and that enforcement had not been at the level expected of the licence fee payers. He considered that a higher percentage of income raised by the Service, in terms of licence fees, should be allocated towards enforcement work. He stated that drivers were experiencing delays when ringing the Service, and referred to the continuing problems with regard to the IT system, indicating that those drivers wishing to use on-line services were not able to do so, and were therefore being penalised financially. Mr Hussain made specific reference to the lack of consultation held with the trades with regard to the closure of the office on Wednesdays, which he considered unsatisfactory. He raised a number of issues, which he had raised in previous Committee meetings, including a request that the Service be split into two sections – general licensing and a dedicated hackney and private hire taxi section; further exploration regarding private hire operators' fees banding, based on the Transport for London and Doncaster models; the provision of three-yearly audited accounts to the taxi trades; and a request for the Service to be autonomous. Mr Hussain concluded by stating that the GMB strongly objected to the proposed increase in licence fees, and requested that consideration of the report now submitted be deferred, subject to detailed discussions between the Service and taxi trades.

- 4.5 The Chair stated that the Committee only had the remit of looking at the fees, and would not be able to discuss, or make any decisions in terms of, the other issues raised by Mr Hussain relating to the general management of the Licensing Service. In the light of this, she suggested that arrangements be made for the trade representatives to meet with Councillor Jack Scott (Cabinet Member for Transport and Development), the Director of Business Strategy and Regulation and the Chief Licensing Officer, to discuss these issues.
- 4.6 In response, Steve Lonnia stated that he accepted that some elements of the Service were not at a standard expected by the trades and members of the public, and appreciated that the trades were simply fighting for what was best for their members. He confirmed that the Service's accounts were audited by the Council's Audit Service, and were available for inspection on the Council website. With regard to the request for the Licensing Service to be autonomous, Mr Lonnia stated that, whilst he did not totally object to the principle of the request, he considered that this was a discussion for Members. Similarly, Mr Lonnia stated that he would be happy to discuss the private hire operators' fees banding further, but indicated that there was a need to explore this in more detail, based on the Transport for London and Doncaster models. He stressed that it was important that licence fees needed to increase, in order to ensure that there was no further deterioration in the level of service. He stated that he wanted to deliver a quality service, but was struggling due to low staffing levels, and that if there was no increase in the fees, he may have to look at making savings elsewhere within the Service.
- 4.7 Tariq Nazir (GMB) concurred with Mr Hussain's comments, and indicated that he had been a private hire driver with City Taxis for a number of years, and whilst the Company had not increased the fees for some time, it still provided an excellent service to the public.
- 4.8 Ibrar Hussain raised further comments, indicating that the suggested meetings with the Cabinet Member and Director need to be time-lined, and regular, and also pointed out that there were insufficient taxi ranks in the City.
- 4.9 In response, the Chair stated that arrangements would be made for the link to the Licensing Service's accounts, on the Council website, to be sent to the GMB. She added that it would be inappropriate to arrange a time-line in respect of the meetings with the Cabinet Member and Director, as neither were present, to give their approval for holding such meetings, and for arranging specific dates.
- 4.10 Hafeas Rehman (Sheffield Taxi Trades Association) concurred with the previous comments made by the trade representatives, indicating that the current service provided by Licensing was not satisfactory, even bordering on being not fit for purpose. Mr Rehman expressed his frustration, as the service provided to the trades had been excellent in the past and, despite the latest increase in licence fees, there had been a deterioration in the service provided. He believed that taxi drivers were subsidising certain elements of the Service, in the form of their licence fees, and that he was getting extremely frustrated at the poor level of service he was receiving which included, amongst other things, officers failing to respond to calls or emails. Mr Rehman concluded by stating that he was fed up of receiving

apologies, and that action was now required.

- 4.11 The Committee also considered written representations submitted by the Sheffield Taxi Trade Association, which had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting.
- 4.12 In summary, Steve Lonnia highlighted the fact that the consultation period in respect of the proposed increase in fees ended on 4<sup>th</sup> October, 2018 and indicated that, if there were still outstanding objections in place after that date, the Committee would have to meet to determine the fees.
- 4.13 RESOLVED: That the public and press and attendees involved in the meeting be excluded before further discussion takes place on the grounds that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, if those persons were present, there would be a disclosure to them of exempt information as described in paragraph 5 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.
- 4.14 Members raised a number of comments with regard to the report now submitted, the information reported as part of the presentation now made and the representations now made, and Marie-Claire Frankie provided legal advice on various aspects of the proposals.
- 4.15 At this stage in the proceedings, the meeting was re-opened to the public and press and attendees.
- 4.16 RESOLVED: That the Committee:-
- (a) agrees to defer the decision to determine the fees to a date after the end of the consultation period, on 4th October 2018, and arrangements be made for the taxi trades to have an initial discussion with Councillor Jack Scott (Cabinet Member for Transport and Development) on the issues raised as part of their written representations and the issues raised at the meeting before being presented back to the Committee; and
  - (b) requests that:-
    - (i) that arrangements be made for meetings to be held with Councillor Jack Scott, the Director of Business Strategy and Regulation and the Chief Licensing Officer to discuss the other points raised by the GMB, the Sheffield Taxi Trades Association and the Sheffield Eagle Taxi Association, relating to operational issues within the Licensing Service; and
    - (ii) the Chief Licensing Officer circulates a link to the Licensing Service's accounts, on the Council's website, to the taxi trade representatives and Members of the Committee.

## **5. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

- 5.1 The minutes of the meetings of (a) the Licensing Committee held on 26<sup>th</sup> July

2018 and (b) the Licensing Sub-Committee held on 19<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> June, 10<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> July, and 7<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> August 2018, were approved as correct records, with the exception of the Licensing Committee meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2018 – Item 5 – Private Hire Vehicle Policy, which was amended by the deletion of the line ‘he added that he supported the installation of CCTV which would overcome the issue of vast differences in manufacturers’ specifications and personal choice’, in paragraph 5.5.

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