

REGULATORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 16 December 2013, at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 2.30 pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Illingworth (Chairman); Councillors Doody, Gill, Mrs Goode, MacKay, Pratt, Weed and Wreford-Bush.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs Gallagher and Shilton.

40. **SUBSTITUTES**

Councillor Doody substituted for Councillor Mrs Higgins.

41. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

42. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 August 2013 were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

43. **REQUEST TO INCREASE THE HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARES AND FOR A REVIEW OF FARES TO TAKE PLACE ANNUALLY**

The Committee considered a report from Health and Community Protection, following receipt of a petition requesting that the current hackney carriage fares be increased and reviewed annually.

The petition had been signed by 127 drivers and submitted in September 2013, along with a proposed fare increase, cost saving examples and fare examples and these were attached as appendix 7 of the report. A copy of the petition was made available to the Committee at the meeting.

Section 65 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 allowed a Licensing Authority to fix the fares and all other charges in connection with the hire of a hackney carriage vehicle in its area. This Authority was therefore responsible for regulating fares in Warwick District.

Under the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities)(England) Regulations 2000, as amended, this was an Executive function. However, the report had been submitted to Regulatory Committee to enable it to pass comments onto the Executive, who would be considering the report in February 2014. The report advised that Warwick District hackney carriage fares had last been reviewed in February 2008 with the increased fares coming into effect in March 2008.

Since then, the cost of fuel had increased by around 33% and the cost of insurance had increased by around 67%. Licence fees and maintenance costs had also risen since 2008 with drivers paying an average of £75 a year more for the hackney carriage vehicle licence.

Appendix 2 of the report was an extract from 'Private Hire and Taxi Monthly' and showed the cost of a two mile journey across various local authority areas within the UK.

The District Council was at position 293 of 364 Councils with the fare being £5.00 and below the national average of £5.56. The table also showed neighbouring authorities Stratford-On-Avon at position 172 and Coventry City Council at position 210. Fare cards for Stratford-On-Avon and Coventry City Council were also detailed at appendices 3 and 4 to the report.

Appendix 6 to the report showed the new fare card which would be displayed in every Warwick District Council hackney carriage vehicle should the recommendations be accepted.

The proposed new fares would be subject to a 14 day consultation period, which would begin on a date to be agreed by the Executive. During the 14 day consultation period any person may write in with a representation against the fare increase. Should representations be received, these will be presented to the Executive to decide whether or not to modify the proposed table of fares. If no objections are received the new fare tariff would commence 14 days from the date of the public notice.

The consultation would be advertised in the local press and via the District Council website.

The report to the Executive also recommended that further reports be submitted annually, reviewing hackney carriage fares and taking into consideration the rate of inflation and Consumer Price Index.

Three taxi drivers attended the meeting and Mr Ahmed Rafik addressed the Committee, when permitted, to answer questions that Members had. Mr Rafik queried whether the Regulatory Committee should be the deciding body for this report and was advised that the Regulatory Committee would be able to note the report and suggest amendments but that, ultimately, the Executive was the deciding body.

Councillor Mrs Goode asked if other Local Authorities reviewed their fares annually. She was advised that no neighbouring authorities did this, although it would take a minimal amount of work to produce an annual report.

Councillor MacKay referred to the table at Appendix 2. He noted that out of six neighbouring local authorities, Warwick District was nearer the bottom of the table. He also reminded Members that it was five years since the fares had been agreed.

Members agreed that it was reasonable that the drivers should be able to increase their income, taking into account the length of time since the fares had been increased, and bearing in mind that the cost of living had increased. In addition, Members could see no reason why the fares should not be reviewed on an annual basis.

Mr Rafik was asked why only 127 drivers had signed the petition when the District licences 204 hackney carriage vehicles. He advised that some of the drivers had been unavailable due to workload and working part time.

The increased soiling charge was also discussed because some Members felt that a 50% increase was quite high. However, it was felt that due to the potential loss of earnings and the time that the vehicle would be off the road in order to be cleaned, this was also a reasonable amount.

Members were mindful that if the new fares increase was agreed, it would place Warwick District further up the table of Local Authorities in Appendix 2, ahead of Stratford upon Avon District and Coventry City Councils.

Mr Rafik advised Members that Stratford upon Avon District Council was due to undertake a review of its fares soon, following the last review in 2008.

Having read the report, and having heard from the representative, the Committee supported the recommendations in the report, subject to some grammatical changes. This included the reference in recommendation 2.1 reading 'approve the increase of hackney carriage fares as set out in the report and appendix 6'.

RESOLVED that the recommendations in the report be noted, subject to recommendation 2.1 being amended to read:

2.1 That Executive approves the increase of hackney carriage fares as set out in the report and appendix 6.

44. **MINUTES**

The confidential minutes of the meeting held on 28 August 2013 were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

(The meeting ended at 2:55pm)