

# DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

## LICENSING COMMITTEE

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2019

**Councillors Present:** Peter Argyle, Howard Bairstow, Jeff Beck (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Graham Bridgman, Paul Bryant, Richard Crumly, Billy Drummond, Tony Linden and Quentin Webb

**Also Present:** Charlie Fletcher (Licensing Officer), Sean Murphy (Public Protection Manager), Julia O'Brien (Principal Licensing Officer) and Amanda Ward (Licensing Officer), Moira Fraser (Democratic and Electoral Services Manager) and Councillor Richard Somner (Portfolio Holder)

**Apologies for inability to attend the meeting:** Councillor James Cole

**Councillors Absent:** Councillor Sheila Ellison and Councillor Manohar Gopal

#### PART I

##### 18. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2019 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Councillor Jeff Beck welcomed members of the trade, the press and the Committee Members to the meeting.

##### 19. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

##### 20. Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licence Fees Consultation Responses

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 4) which provided additional information in relation to proposed fees for hackney carriage and private hire licensing.

The Chairman proposed conducting the meeting as follows:

- Charlie Fletcher (the Acting Principle Licensing Officer) be asked to introduce the item;
- Members would then have the opportunity to raise any points of clarification with the Officer;
- Standing orders would be suspended in accordance with paragraphs 7.6.2 and 7.12.4 of the Constitution (Part 7 – Regulatory and Other Committees Rules of Procedure) to allow members of the trade to address the Committee.
- Members would then have the opportunity to clarify any issues with the trade representatives
- Standing order would then be reinstated;
- Members would then debate the matter.

The Committee supported this approach.

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Charlie Fletcher stated that at the 11 February 2019 meeting the Committee had requested additional information relating to hackney carriage and private hire licence fees. In particular Members had requested additional information as to how the Public Protection Partnership (PPP) hourly rate of £55 had been derived and this was set out in paragraph 2.1 of Appendix C. He noted that the rate had already been agreed by the Joint Public Protection Committee. Officers reported that the standard fee was based on five hours of the PPP hourly rate.

Officers recognised that concern had been expressed about the significant increase in the operator licence fees and they were therefore proposing that a working group be set up to develop the fees to be introduced the following year. It was proposed that the working group would comprise Members, Officers and representatives from the trade. The group could also potentially consider taxi tariffs.

It was proposed that the fees for operator's licences which would come into effect on the 01 April 2019 would be based on the present fees but would be subject to a 2.5% increase in line with inflation. The fees would be rounded to the nearest pound.

It was agreed that the trade would be asked to put forward representatives to sit on the working group. The Chairman would nominate Members to sit on the group.

Members voted to suspend standing orders in order to allow representatives of the trade to speak.

Graham Cox stated that despite asking for the information it was still not clear how the hourly rate had been arrived at. In his opinion it would take no more than ten minutes to undertake an operator check. Julie O' Brien stated that the figures were based on time recording and time and motion studies. The fees were designed to recoup costs and could not be a profit making exercise. They were based on activity for both West Berkshire and Wokingham Councils as it was not possible to separate them out.

Mr Cox stated that miscellaneous provision checks had not been undertaken in the last five years and he was not convinced that that would change. Sean Murphy stated that he would be happy to meet with the trade to discuss this issue. He was also happy to discuss the issue of dispensations with them.

Councillor Quentin Webb asked if the trade was happy to be part of the working group as set out in the recommendations. Mr Cox stated that it made sense for the trade to participate and that it would be good to get involved with the process.

As there were no further issue that the trade wished to raise it was agreed standing orders would be reinstated.

Councillor Howard Bairstow asked if there was a set procedure for doing searches which time could be set against. Julie O' Brien stated that the database had numerous fields that had to be completed and the time taken to do so could be recorded. The information had to be manually inserted from scanned or paper documents.

Sean Murphy noted that the figure in Appendix D relating to Private Hire Vehicle Licence with dispensation needed to be amended to reflect five hours work at £55 per/hour plus a 2.5% uplift based on inflation. It was therefore agreed that this figure should be amended to read £282.00. Councillor Paul Bryant queried if decreasing the figure from £328 to £282 would have a negative impact on the budget. Officers noted that this would only affect circa 18 licences and would not have a significant impact on the budget.

Councillor Graham Bridgman thanked officers for the work that they had done and he was pleased that they were proposing to set up a working group. He supported the Officer's proposals including the amended licence fee for private hire vehicles with a dispensation. He also supported the holding position of increasing the fees by 2.5% so

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that they could be fully considered and that revised proposals be brought back to the Committee in the fullness of time.

Councillor Richard Crumly stated that he agreed with Councillor Bridgman. He believed that more time was needed to consider the fees especially given that they had not been revised for some time. Councillor Paul Bryant stated he supported an algorithmic approach to increasing costs. Councillor Peter Argyle urged Officers to get the working group up and running as soon as possible so that the fees could be agreed in a transparent fashion. Councillors Graham Bridgman and Peter Argyle offered to join the working group subject to the agreement of the Chairman. It was proposed that the trade identify three representatives and let Licensing know who they were putting forward.

Councillor Graham Bridgman proposed suspending standing orders again to allow Councillor Richard Somner, the Portfolio Holder responsible for Licensing, to address the Committee. The Committee voted in favour of this proposal.

Councillor Somner stated that he had noted the concerns raised and wished to add his support to the proposal to set up a working group to discuss issues and hopefully agree a way forward.

Standing orders were reinstated.

Councillor Jeff Beck stated that he would be happy to make the recommendations to full Council as set out in the report subject to the amendment of the fee in Appendix D. Councillor Beck thanked all parties for attending.

**RESOLVED that:**

**The consultation responses be taken into account and that:**

- 1. The Committee would recommend to Council that the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicles Licensing Fees for 2019/20 be set at the rates proposed at Appendix D subject to the inclusion of the amendments made at the meeting.**
- 2. The Committee would recommend to Council that the Private Hire Operators Licensing Fees for 2019/20 be set at the rates proposed at Appendix E**
- 3. A joint working group be set up between Officers / Members and representatives of licenced operators and the wider trade to consider the fee structure for Private Hire Operators and the proposals of the trade relating**

*(The meeting commenced at 5.30 pm and closed at 6.10 pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....