

Outcome of the Non-Statutory Hackney Carriage Tariffs Consultation with the Taxi Trade

Background

West Berkshire Council is committed to balancing the legitimate aims of the taxi trade to maintain profitability in the face of increasing costs, while protecting the public from excessive fares. The current hackney carriage fare scale came into effect on the 29 July 2022. An amendment to the presentation of the tariffs was agreed in September 2022 which provided separate tariff cards for multi seater and saloon vehicles.

As was previously agreed a discussion about the tariffs took place at the 09 January 2023 Taxi Trade Liaison Group meeting where the trade suggested that:

- For 2023 they would like to see an uplift of the fares linked to Consumer Price Index (CPI) (circa 10% in November 2022);
- If approved they would like modifications to be implemented as close to the 01 April as was practicably possible each year but accepted that for 2023 the implementation date was likely to be in June or July;
- They would like the maximum fouling charges to be revisited and increased and suggested that a maximum charge of £200 should be implemented;
- They would like to see calendar time and date control on the meters to be mandated;
- They would like the words 'Hiring when journey commences between' to be revisited and replaced to reflect journeys between certain times; and
- The Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy be amended to mandate a requirement for all vehicles to accept card and online payments.

As a result of these discussions a report was taken to the [Licensing Committee on the 23 January 2023](#) where it was agreed that an informal consultation should be undertaken with the wider trade to establish their views.

What Was Proposed

The Licensing Committee proposed the following timetable for considering any modifications to the tariffs in 2023 provided that a formal request was received from the trade:

25 January to 08 February 2023	Two week informal consultation with the trade on any proposals put forward at this meeting.
20 March 2023	Special Licensing Committee to be updated on the proposals being presented to the Executive for consideration (any comments made at the LC to be reported either verbally or as a to follow item to the Executive)
23 March 2023	Formal Report Setting out Proposals to the Executive

11 May to 25 May 2023	Statutory consultation (minimum of 14 days) the timing can be amended at the discretion of Executive Members but needs to reflect that the implementation date must be within two months of the consultation closing.
09 June 2023	<p>Decision taken by the Executive if any objections to the modifications are received and the Executive must set a date when the varied table of fares, with or without modification, will come into operation. This date must be within two months of the consultation closing.</p> <p>If no objections are received or if they are withdrawn the modified tariffs would come into effect on the day after the statutory consultation closes or the date of withdrawal of the last objection whichever date is the later.</p>
July 2023	Outcome of the consultation to be reported back to the Licensing Committee.

Who and How we Consulted

The Licensing Committee requested that an informal (non-statutory) consultation be undertaken with the trade to ascertain the level of support for the proposals raised at the Taxi Trade Liaison Group meeting on the 09 January 2023. A consultation document was emailed to all Members of the trade on the 26 January 2023. The consultation was open for comments from members of the West Berkshire Taxi Trade from the 26 January 2023 to the 09 February 2023.

The consultation sought to establish:

1. The extent to which the trade supported aligning future tariff changes to the financial year i.e. implementing them as close to the 01 April each year as was practicably possible;
2. The extent to which the trade supported the mandating of acceptance of card and other electronic payments;
3. The level of support for requiring meters to be capable of being time and date controlled;
4. What changes should be made to fouling charges for both the interior and exterior of vehicles;
5. Suggestions for resolving disputes between the trade and customers in relation to fouling charges;
6. Whether or not the trade supported displaying saloon and multi-seater tariffs on different cards;
7. Whether or not the trade supported the 50% uplift for multi-seater vehicles;
8. If the trade supported linking annual modifications to tariffs to the Consumer Price Index;
9. If there was support for increasing tariffs by 10% in 2023;

- 10. What percentage of change to the tariffs the trade supported for 2023; and
- 11. The level of support for keeping the flag rate the same in 2023.

What You Told Us

The Council received nine responses to the survey. Of those respondents five identified themselves as WBC Licensed Hackney Carriage Drivers, two were both Hackney Carriage Drivers and WBC Licensed Operators, albeit one was a Private Private Hire Operator and one a Private Hire Driver.

Question 2: To what extent do you agree with the proposal to align any modifications to the tariffs with the start of the financial year (i.e. from the 01 April in any year modifications are made) as of 2024?

Response:

- 7 (78%) respondents strongly agreed with the statement;
- 1 respondent agreed with the statement; and
- 1 person disagreed with the statement but did not offer a reason for doing so.

Comments

(C1) The cost of living is going up and up and although some think it's expensive all other charges are going up such as repairs etc. The cars need to be kept in good condition and legal

Question 3: To what extent do you agree with the request that the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy includes a requirement mandating that all vehicles accept card payments?

Response:

- 7 (78%) respondents strongly agreed with the statement (see C2 and C3 below);
- 1 respondent neither agreed or disagreed with the statement; and
- 1 respondent strongly disagreed with the statement for the reason set out in section C1 below.

Comments

(C1) A crazy idea there are operators like me that do mainly contract work and a card machine is an expense not needed. Also in rural areas there could be a problem with reception. As long as an operator informs the passenger they may prefer to pay by BACS. If it is private hire this can easily be informed. My own work is probably 95% contract work and I think the benefits would out way the risks.

(C2) ensure the public can get home now nearly all banks have shut

(C3) should be implemented ASAP

Question 4: To what extent do you agree with the request that all meters must be capable of being time and date controlled?

Response:

- 7 (78%) respondents strongly agreed with the statement (see C2 below); and
- 2 (22%) respondents strongly disagreed with the proposal with one citing the reason set out in C1 below.

Comments

(C1) An added expense. I don't have a meter as I am private hire. Perhaps insist when a car has a new meter installed it should be time/ date controlled
(C2) protect public from being overcharged

Question 5: Current Maximum Fouling Charges are set at £75 (Interior) and £25 (exterior). What changes, if any, do you think should be made to these charges?

<p>Interior: 4 respondents stated that £100 would be more appropriate; 1 respondent stated that £150 would be more appropriate; 2 respondent stated that £200 would be more appropriate; 1 respondent stated that £250 would be more appropriate; 1 person did not respond to this question</p>
<p>Exterior: 5 respondents stated that £25 was acceptable; 2 respondents did not respond to this question; 1 respondent stated that £50 was more appropriate; 1 respondent stated that £75 was more appropriate.</p>

Question 6: If fouling charges are set as a maximum would you always charge the maximum?

Yes	4
No	5

Question 7: If the answer to the above is no what factors would you use to determine the charge?

(C1) If it can be cleaned and safe to use then I would use my initiative. However if car is off road the £200 is a must but you also have loss of earnings.
(C2) How bad it was
(C3) The charge would be the same cost as charge to myself for cleaning if able to keep the contact of customer or would take maximum if not able to keep contact of customer
(C4) Dependent on the mess and time of day/shift
(C5) depending on mess

Question 8: How would you propose that any disagreements on the level of fouling charges be resolved?

(C1) It should be down purely to the driver. As stated it is not just the cleaning fee it is also the loss of earnings.
(C2) consultation
(C3) I would like to think the council would have our backs with any disputes with the public
(C4) reasoning
(C5) I will call to police
(C6) Difficult but I would like to think that the person doing the fouling is willing to pay
(C7) All depends on circumstances. Some fouling is tantamount to criminal damage

Question 9: To what extent do you support the introduction of different tariff cards for saloon vehicles and multi seaters?

Response:

- One respondent stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and the remaining 8 respondents were strongly supportive of the new tariff cards for the reasons set out below.

Comments

(C1) Makes sense. If a larger car during the day or night why shouldn't it be more
(C2) makes it a lot easier to explain to customers
CC3) good idea

Question 10: To what extent do you support the current uplift of 50% for vehicles that are carrying five or more passengers?

Response:

One respondent stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and the remaining 8 respondents were strongly supportive of the 50% uplift for multi seater vehicles citing the reasons below.

Comments

(C1) saves people money not having to get 2 cars and helps pay for the extra costs
(C2) these vehicles can cost a lot more than a standard car

Question 11: To what extent do you agree with the suggestion that modifications to the tariffs be linked to the Consumer Price Index each year?

Response:

One respondent stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and the remaining 8 respondents were strongly supportive of linking annual price increases to CPI.

Comments

(C1) Drivers need to maintain their cars. If you are not earning extra money to pay the higher operating costs then people may start to cut corners.

Question 12: The Taxi Liaison Group discussed increasing the fares by circa 10% in 2023. To what extent would you support this proposal?

Response:

- One respondent did not answer this question;
- 5 respondents were strongly supportive;
- 1 respondent agreed with the proposal;
- 1 respondent neither agreed nor disagreed;
- 1 respondent disagreed with the statement (see C1).

Comments

(C1) I just think with the cost of living crisis at the moment we run the risk of putting up prices too much for the public to accept.

(C2) cost of living in West Berkshire is going up all the time

(C3) cost of living

Question 13: If the tariffs are to be modified in 2023 what would be your preference?

10% decrease	1 (may be an error as they were also strongly supportive of 10% increase see question 12)
5% decrease	0
Stay the same	1
5% Increase	0
10% Increase	7
Other	0

Question 14: If the Executive is minded to amend the tariffs to what extent do you with the suggestion that the flag rate should not be changed?

Response:

- 5 respondents strongly agreed with this suggestion;
- 1 respondent agreed with retaining the current flag rate;
- 3 respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the proposal;
- None of the respondents objected to the suggestion.

Question 15: Any Other Comments:

(C1) I would like the Licensing Authority to move legislation a lot quicker than at present. West Berkshire Taxi standards are lagging a long way behind other authority areas.

What We Are Proposing To Do

The outcome of the non-statutory consultation will be sent to all members of the West Berkshire taxi trade and will be published on the Public Protection Partnership website. It will also be circulated to Members of the Licensing Committee and the Portfolio Holder. It will help to inform the report to the Executive and will be included as an attachment to that report.

The outcome of this initial consultation will be taken to a Special Licensing Committee meeting on the 20 March 2023 where Members will be asked to discuss the outcome of the non-statutory consultation.

As there is support for modifying the tariffs a report will now be taken to the Executive meeting on the [23 March 2023](#). The Executive will make a decision about any proposed modifications, the methodology for undertaking the required statutory consultation and timetabling. These decisions will be undertaken in accordance with the procedure for setting fares and public notice requirements as stipulated within section 65 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

If changes are proposed to be made the Council will publish a notice setting out the proposed changes in at least one local newspapers which will explain that readers will have at least fourteen days from the date of the first publication of the notice to object to the change. Notices will also be displayed at the Council Offices and will be placed on the Public Protection Partnership and Council's website and information will be emailed to the Trade.

If no objections to any proposed variation are received within the consultation period or if all objections are withdrawn, the revised fares will come into operation on the date of the expiration of the consultation period specified in the notice or the date of withdrawal of the last objection whichever date is the later.

If objections are received the matter will be discussed by the Executive at the 08 June 2023 Executive meeting and a further date would need to be set to determine when

the new table of fares, with or without modifications following consideration of the objections, would come into force. This date is required to be no later than two months after the consultation period.