

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

**COUNCIL
9 NOVEMBER 2010**

COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS

**FROM COUNCILLOR ERNIE CLARK
HILPERTON DIVISION**

**TO COUNCILLOR KEITH HUMPHRIES
CABINET MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

Question 1

Since the inception of 'one council' the administration has been very keen to 'harmonise'. However, eighteen months on it seems odd that each of the ex district council areas still has its own Hackney Carriage hire rates and various times of day when these rates change. I also understand that taxi drivers are still licensed only for their old areas when plying for hire, rather than 'Wiltshire'. Why is this? Also, with diesel costs having escalated, when will the hire tariffs next be reviewed?

Response

The issue of the hackney carriage (taxi) and private hire vehicle licensing regime was considered by the Licensing Committee at its meeting on 26 May this year. The report followed an extensive consultation exercise involving all taxi and private hire vehicle licence holders in Wiltshire, as well as a broad cross section of 600 members of the public and other bodies representing disabled users. Meetings were also held with the taxi trade in all four hub areas as part of the consultation process, to gauge their views on the review of the licensing regime.

The Licensing Committee agreed to introduce the following changes from 1 October 2010:

- Introduce a single penalty points scheme for hackney carriage drivers in the Wiltshire Council area
- Harmonise conditions relating to vehicle age
- Phase in changes to harmonise conditions relating to wheelchair accessible vehicles
- Harmonise vehicle inspection checks
- Retain four zones within Wiltshire Council area
- Retain four existing tariffs (fares) within the harmonised conditions, enforcement and administrative arrangements.

On the specific issue of tariffs, there was a considerable difference in the range of the four former district hub tariffs, which reflect the variation in locality and demand (i.e. rural/city/tourism/night time economy hire rates. In addition during all four

meetings with the trade it became apparent the trade representatives were opposed to the proposed single tariff. As there was no clear consensus amongst the trade the committee agreed to continue with the four different rates, and to carry out further consultation. This consultation is ongoing at present. A significant additional issue to be aware of is that where the council imposes a new single rate then it is responsible for the cost of both recalibrating the taxi meters (around £22,500) and for the cost of advertising the changes (approx. £8,000 – £10,000).

The effect of the increase in fuel prices has led to the taxi trade in the north and west areas requesting a review of their tariffs. Drivers in the south and east areas have not asked for any review. A meeting with the trade is planned for 15 November to progress this. Where the trade ask for a review the council is not responsible for bearing any costs.

With regard to the zoning question, the trade survey results showed that 68% of drivers returns wished to retain the four separate zones. This influenced the committee's decision. Drivers who wish to ply for hire across the entire Wiltshire Council area are able to apply to drive in all four zones for a small administrative fee.

FROM COUNCILLOR ERNIE CLARK

TO COUNCILLOR JANE SCOTT
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Question 2

Wiltshire Council produces a magazine titled 'Housing Matters'. Could I please be provided with answers to the following questions relating to this publication.

- a) What is the annual cost of production inclusive of officer time etc.?
- b) Why is there no 'external' advertising?
- c) The back page advises, in four non-English languages, how information on WC can be obtained. What are these four languages and how was the decision made to use these rather than any other non-English language?
- d) The two-page article in the Summer 2010 edition on the council leader was 'different'. I now know that Jane has been 'The Dairy Queen of Blackpool'. However, what serious purpose did this article serve? The recipients presumably receive other WC publications that extol the savings target of 'one council', area boards etc. Why the duplication?

Response

- a) The production costs below are based on estimates, as staff time includes branding and communication officers, as well as the Housing Tenant Participation Officer.

Annual production cost of design and print	- £20,000
Officer time over a year	- £10,000
Postage for 4 issues	- £ 5,300

Note – to save on postage costs, wherever possible Housing Matters is sent out with the quarterly rent statements.

b) A policy decision was taken by the editorial board (made up of housing staff, tenants, and a leaseholder) not to have advertising. Although selling advertising space would reduce costs, the revenue is likely to be low given the small circulation.

c) The languages are Cantonese, Arabic, Urdu and Polish. These were selected on the basis that they represent the four biggest communities in Wiltshire that do not speak English as a first language. The 2011 Census will provide updated information if these are still the appropriate languages.

d) The background information on me was compiled from an interview I gave to give the feature some human interest, as in the past “Housing Matters” has been criticised for containing an excessive amount of official information. It is recognised that tenants receive other council publications and that there may be some duplication. The housing editorial staff liaises with the corporate communications team to discuss and plan content.

“Housing Matters”, is well received by tenants. As the social landlord the council has a legal duty to maintain communication and regularly consult with its tenants. Some of the information is of a statutory nature, i.e. gas appliances servicing and other health and safety advice, notification of Annual General Meetings, the annual tenant’s survey and report.

It is widely regarded as best practice for social landlords to send their tenants a regular magazine particularly where tenants have the opportunity to get involved in contributing to the publication and participating in the wider service.

To improve the production process, the communications team is producing some terms of reference for “Housing Matters”, and production guidelines. The guidelines will be agreed by the editorial board and the Tenants’ Panel in November, and by the Housing Commission. The guidelines will include editorial board membership, forward planning, suitable content, number of pages and frequency, and sign off arrangements.

FROM COUNCILLOR ERNIE CLARK
TO COUNCILLOR JANE SCOTT
LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Question 3

It has been reported in the press that the Chief Executive of the new (unitary) Cornwall Council is to take a 5% pay cut in order to 'lead from the front'.

Is either the Leader, or her Cabinet, thinking of approaching the Chief Executive of Wiltshire Council to see if he will be following this example?

Response

No.