

Wiltshire Council

Licensing Committee

7 September 2020

Briefing Note - Proposed Changes - Taxi Tariff Schedule for Hackney Carriages

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this briefing note is to brief the Licensing Committee on the latest position in relation to implementing a new schedule of tariffs and fees for hackney carriages in Wiltshire.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 It was agreed at an extraordinary meeting of Wiltshire Councils Licensing Committee on 27 January 2020 to undertake a public consultation into proposals on a new fees and tariffs schedule for Hackney Carriages in Wiltshire.

The Consultation commenced on 6 February 2020 and finished on 20 February 2020. The details of the proposal were published on the Council's consultation portal for individuals and drivers to feed back on. As part of the consultation all licensed hackney carriage drivers were provided with a copy of the proposals and a driver feedback form and were asked to provide feedback.

- 2.2 The Council received 257 responses to the consultation, 207 of these from hackney carriage drivers and 50 from the public or businesses.
- 2.3 The 207 responses from hackney carriage drivers represented 24.1% of the total 856 hackney carriage drivers licensed at that time.
- 2.4 75.9% of licensed hackney carriage drivers did not respond to the consultation despite being sent a copy of the proposals and a feedback form.
- 2.5 9.3% of total licensed hackney carriage drivers were in favour of the proposal.
- 2.6 14.8% of total licensed hackney carriage drivers were against the proposal.
- 2.7 Of the 207 drivers who responded 39% were for the proposal and 61% were against.
- 2.8 The level of response and the split of for and against responses would indicate that the industry does not support change to the current schedule of fares and tariffs.
- 2.9 The biggest area of concern appeared to be the removal of the ability to charge Tariff 2 all day on a Sunday, with 37% of respondents stating they should be able to charge Tariff 2 all day. The proposal only allowed Tariff 2 to be charged between 22:00 and 05:59 where drivers had previously been able to charge Tariff 2 all day on a Sunday.

- 2.10 After evaluating the feedback and level of response from drivers the Taxi Licensing team considered the following options:

1. Leave the existing schedule of fees and tariffs in place.

Only 9.3% of licensed hackney carriage drivers supported the proposals in the current form. The taxi licensing team believe the level of support is not sufficient to adopt the new proposals. However, it recognises that failure to update the fee and tariff schedule will not address the issues highlighted by the night time economy in Wiltshire.

2. Adopt an amended proposal with Tariff 2 chargeable all day on a Sunday

The most frequent comment during the consultation was in relation to the ability to charge Tariff 2 all day on a Sunday. 76 drivers commented that Tariff 2 should be chargeable on a Sunday, 37% of total respondents. If these respondents supported the proposal with Tariff 2 being chargeable it would change the percentage for the proposal to 76% and against at 24%. It should still be noted that 76% of respondents for the proposal still only equates to 18% of total licensed hackney carriage drivers. The Taxi Licensing team believe this was a major factor in drivers voting against the proposal and that an amended proposal with Tariff 2 chargeable all day would receive a higher level of support.

The Council would demonstrate that the consultation has been effective and that it has listened to the views of drivers when arriving at a final proposal.

3. Adopting the proposal

Adopting the proposal will address the issues highlighted by the night time economy but would be unpopular with drivers given the level of responses against the proposal.

The consultation integrity could be called into question given the low level of support for the proposal and the Council could leave itself open to allegations that drivers feedback was not considered.

The level of hackney carriage drivers not responding (75.9%) may indicate that drivers are not unduly concerned about the proposal and did not see the need to feedback. Therefore, they may be in favour of it - however this cannot be proven.

It should be noted that legislation dictates any change to the existing tariff would have to be advertised in the local press for 28 days to allow the public and drivers to raise objections. The cost to the Council of advertising the new tariff will be approximately £10,000 and at present there is no budget to support this. The team will look at options for funding via the Communities Fund, an Area Board grant and the Salisbury recovery fund.

3.0 Current Position

- 3.1 After review, it was agreed to implement Option 2, an amended proposal that allowed drivers to charge Tariff 2 all day on a Sunday. The Council listened to driver feedback from the consultation and amended the proposal to reflect this.
- 3.2 In January 2020 the Licensing Committee delegated implementation of the new tariffs to the Taxi Licensing Team with a proposed implementation date of summer 2020.

- 3.3 The advertising spend required to fund publicising the proposed changes is unbudgeted. It is a legal requirement to advertise the proposed changes for 28 days.
- 3.4 Covid 19 has impacted all industries/sectors and the taxi industry has not been immune to this, experiencing a significant reduction in business. Changes to the tariff would incur a small cost to adjust every vehicle meter. It is felt that at this point, given the hardship experienced by drivers and vehicle owners since March 2020, to implement this change would not be supportive of the industry.
- 3.5 In light of the financial pressures placed on the Council due to Covid 19, the Councils current guidance is that all advertising spend is unauthorised. In view of this it would be inappropriate for the Taxi Team to undertake any advertising using unbudgeted spend.
- 3.6 Senior management have agreed that a funding request for the additional £10,000 spend will be submitted as part of the 2021/2022 budget setting process.

4.0 Conclusion

- 4.1 Implementation of the proposed changes the schedule of fees and tariffs for Hackney Carriages will not take place in the 2020/21 financial year. The implementation is still planned but will be delayed until after 1 April 2021.

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