

LATE-NIGHT TAXI FARES TASK GROUP

NOTES OF THE LATE-NIGHT TAXI FARES TASK GROUP MEETING HELD ON 31 JULY 2018 AT ALAMEIN SUITE - CITY HALL, MALTHOUSE LANE, SALISBURY, SP2 7TU.

Present:

Cllr Derek Brown OBE, Cllr Matthew Dean and Cllr Ian McLennan

Also Present:

Julie Anderson-Hill, Jo Hulbert and Henry Powell

1 Election of Chairman

Cllr Matthew Dean was elected as chairman.

2 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Dalton, Evans and Payne.

3 Task Group Protocol

Noted.

4 Terms of Reference

Noted.

5 Scoping the review

Jo Hulbert, Compliance Officer, and Julie Anderson-Hill, Head of Service, attended and answered members' questions.

Key discussion points:

- The current system was introduced by the Licensing Committee in 2014 in order to harmonise the different tariffs of the four district councils. It includes a single set of maximum tariffs that applies across the whole county.

- However, Licensing Committee chose not to remove the four 'zones' (against the preference of the Department of Transport and council officers, who were seeking consistency). This means taxi drivers are still only allowed to pick up passengers (off the street or rank) from within their designated zone. They can however drive them beyond their designated zone. Private hire vehicles are not zoned and so can be pre-booked outside of their designated zone. The decision to retain the zones was taken due to concerns about busier areas being 'flooded' with taxis and upsetting the supply-demand balance across the county. Members questioned whether this 'flooding' would in reality happen. Adherence to the zones is also not proactively policed in any way.
- Members noted that the 2014 system followed consultation with the taxi trade but not with anyone else, e.g. representatives of the night-time economy (NTE). At present NTE reps in the Salisbury area are certainly pushing hard for change to the late-night tariffs, but taxi drivers are not. Members agreed to seek evidence from:
 - Taxi trade representatives
 - Salisbury Business Improvement District (BID)
 - Salisbury Chamber of Commerce
 - Pubwatch
 - Purple Flag (which includes representation from a number of other organisations)
 - Ian Garrod, Licensing team member
 - Pate Sparrow, Salisbury Community Police Officer
 - Licensing teams from neighbouring areas
- Members considered whether to engage with equivalent groups from other parts of the county e.g. Chippenham. However, it was believed that only Salisbury now has nightclubs (with Chippenham only now having bars) that open late into the night and the question of late-night tariffs was therefore significantly more relevant in that area.
- Anecdotally, customers in Salisbury often refuse to take the first taxi in the rank if the driver insists on using the proper (i.e. maximum) late-night tariff. The driver is then unhappy when the customer takes a taxi further behind in the queue having negotiated a lower fare with them. The situation leads to confusion and discord, particularly in an environment where customers can be intoxicated.
- Taxi drivers must pay approximately £20 to make tariff changes to their electronic meters.

- Looking at comparisons with other LA tariffs, Wiltshire's tariffs are comparable until 1.00am, but then rise steeply and can be as much as double those in neighbouring areas. There are particularly high charges for 5-8 seater taxis, whereas in other areas (except Test Valley) tariffs for larger taxis are either the same or only slightly higher. Drivers of 5-8 seaters may argue that their expenses are higher.
- Every year the council's Licensing team meet with trade reps to discuss the tariffs. Most recently the general consensus was to leave it alone due to a lack of consensus over what changes were necessary.
- While it could be said that high taxi fares are an inevitable and reasonable result of living in a rural area, members felt it is not a reasonable consequence of being stationed in rural areas due to being in the armed forces.
- Late-night / antisocial hours premiums nationally have been in decline across all areas of the economy in recent years. High late-night taxi fares would appear to be an exception to this. The potential risk of having too few taxi drivers available late at night if fares were more equivalent with those in the daytime would need to be considered.
- It was questionable whether the taxi trade itself always understands the tariff and regulatory system they are working within.
- The task group agreed to meet again in Salisbury in mid-September. The chairman also asked officers to consider their views on the situation and potential changes and to share these with the task group in the coming weeks.

6 **Next steps**

See above.

(Duration of meeting: 10.00 - 11.30 am)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Henry Powell 01225 718052, of Democratic & Members' Services, direct line , e-mail