

Wiltshire Council

Licensing Committee

8 December 2014

One Zone/One Tariff Consultation - Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing

Cabinet member: Councillor Keith Humphries – Public Health,
Protection Services, Adult Care and Housing

Summary

The Licensing Committee at its meeting held on 2 September 2013 considered and agreed a proposal to carry out formal consultation with the taxi trade on the proposed introduction of a single zone for Wiltshire Council and one table of fares which would apply throughout the single zone.

The consultation was undertaken from 23 June 2014 for an eight week period and the results of the consultation have informed the proposals.

As part of its service delivery harmonisation Wiltshire Council has undertaken consultation regarding taxi zoning within its administrative area and its preference for one table of fares. This would effectively cap the maximum fare for journeys across the county so that the public would be charged a fare which does not exceed a pre-determined maximum for travelling the same distance anywhere in the county.

This report has been developed to update members on the results of the consultation with the taxi trade, and to consider the options for harmonisation across the county.

Members are asked to approve one of the options set out in the proposal and, if relevant, to select a table of fares.

Proposal

That the Licensing Committee

i) approve one of the following options:

1. No change to zones or table of fares
2. Move to one zone and one table of fares
3. No change to zones and move to one table of fares and keep existing

zone structure.

ii) If option i) 2 or i) 3 above are approved, select a table of fares, from appendix 3:

1. Proposal 1
2. Proposal 3

and if option i) 3 above is approved authorise officers to carry out the necessary public consultation and to implement any changes to the fare tariffs, in the event that no significant comments arise from that consultation.

Reason for Proposal

Two of the three proposals, if adopted, would be a further step towards the harmonisation of the services across the county.

The table of fares would set out the maximum fare for taxi journeys across the county. The paying public would be charged a fare which does not exceed a pre-determined maximum for travelling the same distance anywhere in the county.

Tracy Carter
Associate Director, Waste and Environment

Wiltshire Council

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Protection Services, Adult Care and Housing

Purpose of Report

1. This report has been developed to update members on the results of the consultation with the taxi trade on the proposal to introduce one zone and one tariff, and to consider the options for harmonisation.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The process of controlling and licensing Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle operators (the taxi trade) assists the Council in achieving a number of the outcomes in the Business Plan 2013-2017.
 - 1 - Wiltshire has a thriving and growing economy
 - 3 - Everyone in Wiltshire lives in a high quality environment
 - 5 - People in Wiltshire have healthy, active and high-quality lives
 - 6 - People are as protected from harm as possible and feel safe.

Background

3. The Licensing Committee at its meeting held on 2 September 2013 considered and agreed to consult on a proposal to move to one zone and one table of fares for licensing hackney carriages and private hire vehicles (taxis), throughout Wiltshire.
4. Although Wiltshire Council has been a unitary authority since 2009 taxi licensing continues to operate in four separate zones based on the old district council areas. The relevant legislation however allows the council, to merge these existing zones into a single zone that would cover the whole of the Wiltshire Council area.

Consultation

5. All current licence holders (one thousand and seventy three) in the taxi trade in Wiltshire were sent a survey questionnaire as part of the consultation process.

A copy of the questionnaire is attached at Appendix 1. The consultation period commenced on 23 June 2014 and respondents were given eight weeks within which to complete the questionnaire. They were also invited to add any comments.

6. The Council received one hundred and twenty four responses to the consultation.

Trade Meetings

7. All the licence holders were invited to a series of trade meetings. Six sessions were held around the county to try to attract as many members of the taxi trade as possible.

Main Considerations for the Council

8. Due to the diversity of the current tables of fares and of the tariffs which prevail in each of the four zones, the following implications may arise as a result of the proposed change to one zone and one table of fares.
 - a) Customers in west, east and north may experience an increase in fares as the maximum fare would increase.
 - b) Customers in the south may experience an increase in fares where journeys include five to eight passengers.
 - c) Drivers may choose to operate from one preferred area due to earning potential, leaving other customer areas under resourced if licence holders choose, at certain times, to ply for hire at busier locations.
 - d) Licence holders may choose to charge lower fares than their competitors at various times to improve their journey numbers and income. This may lead to complaints.
 - e) Under the current legislation if to the proposal to introduce one zone is adopted, the same maximum fares and conditions would apply across the whole county. It would not be possible to vary the tariff for different areas of the county or to revert to separate zones at a later date. This situation may change in the future, if proposed changes in legislation are effected.
9. While the overall response to the survey was disappointing this seems to be a typical response rate for this service. Previous consultations have elicited a similar low response rate. Each license holder and operator was written to and all had an opportunity to reply to the survey.
10. The taxi trade have, since 2009, been regularly updated with regard to the need to review and change the zoning and table of fares. Therefore, the low response rate could be due to the trade's acceptance of a harmonised single zone and tariff for the county.
11. The trade meetings allowed both drivers and operators to raise any concerns and the council was able to address these immediately and reinforce these with responses to the frequently asked questions set out in Appendix 3.

12. The Department of Transport best practice guidance states the following.

The Department recommends the abolition of zones. That is chiefly for the benefit of the travelling public. Zoning tends to diminish the supply of taxis and the scope for customer choice - for example, if fifty taxis were licensed overall by a local authority, but with only twenty five of them entitled to ply for hire in each of two zones. It can be confusing and frustrating for people wishing to hire a taxi to find that a vehicle licensed by the relevant local authority is nonetheless unable to pick them up (unless pre-booked) because they are in the wrong part of the local authority area. Abolition of zones can also reduce costs for the local authority, for example through simpler administration and enforcement. It can also promote fuel efficiency, because taxis can pick up a passenger anywhere in the local authority area, rather than having to return empty to their licensed zone after dropping a passenger in another zone.

13. The potential for reduction in administration and enforcement costs will be minimal as the council has centralised and harmonised our control measures.
14. The Law Commission in their recent review of taxi licensing, recommended that local authorities should be given greater flexibility to create and amend zone structures. If and when this proposal becomes law the council will be able to review its position on zones.
15. The results of the consultation are set out in Appendix 2.

Options

16. The options that could be considered following the consultation are listed below, with key implications for each proposal.

- 16.1. Option 1 - No change to zones or table of fares

84 of the 124 responses requested no change to the current system. However, the current system could be confusing to the public due to there being four existing zones all operating with differing tables of fares. This could cause confusion to the public travelling across different licensing zones within the county. Further confusion could be caused if a member of the public attempts to flag down a vehicle which has travelled outside of its licensed zone and so the driver refuses the fare. The Council is committed to ensuring that access to services should be the same throughout the county. There would be a greater administrative task and cost in reviewing four rather than one tariff each year and this option would not enable to council to comply with Department of Transport Best Practice

- 16.2. Option 2 - Move to one zone and one table of fares

40 of the 124 responses were in support of this option, which would enable the council to achieve its objective of delivering a harmonised service. Maximum fares would also be harmonised. This may promote more efficient working for the taxi trade by reducing empty return journeys. A single harmonised table of

maximum tariffs would reduce ongoing administrative and consultation costs as there would be one per year. However, in the west, east and north of the county, customers may experience higher fares. Under current legislation the council would be unable to go back to four zones. All geographical tests for drivers would need reviewing as drivers may be working in areas outside their current local knowledge. Drivers may begin to operate countywide, causing overcrowding at some ranks.

16.3. Option 3 - Move to one table of fares and keep existing zone structure

84 out of 124 responses support retaining the existing zone structure and this would result in no change in administration or enforcement requirements for the service. One table of fares would cap maximum charges across the county. A single harmonised fares table would reduce ongoing administrative and consultation costs as one would be reviewed per year). This would not meet the council's objectives of harmonising service delivery and would be less flexible for operators, who could only operate in their licensed zone. In the west, east and north of the county, customers may experience higher fares. As with option 1 this could cause confusion to members of the public travelling across different licensing zones within the county and does not meet Department of Transport Best Practice

Table of Fares

17. One table of fares would ensure pricing is capped at the same level across Wiltshire, giving clarity, consistency and simplicity for the public and the service.
18. Under a consultation process carried out in 2013 a single table of fares was presented. This is set out as proposal 1 in Appendix 4. This met with considerable resistance from the taxi trade at the time. For the recent consultation two further tables of fares proposals were created in response to this feedback. Due to the low levels of response (seven responses from the south only) on proposal 2, this has been removed.
19. The 2014 consultation considered the three different tables of fares. The taxi trade were split almost equally between proposals 1 and 3 shown in Appendix 4.
20. The following scenarios help illustrate the impact on the customers' travel costs.

i) Fewer than four people travelling, two miles during daytime hours

	Proposed Maximum charge	Difference in the west	Difference in the north	Difference in the south	Difference in the east
Proposal 1	£7.00	+£1.00	+£1.00	£0.00	+£1.00
Proposal 3	£7.00	+£1.00	+£1.00	£0.00	+£1.00

Both proposal 1 and 3 costs could increase charges in the west, north and east Wiltshire by £1.00 per trip.

ii) More than four people travelling two miles at 3am

	Proposed Maximum charge	Difference in the west	Difference in the north	Difference in the south	Difference in the east
Proposal 1	£13.50	-£4.50	-£1.50	+£3.30	-£1.70
Proposal 3	£17.40	-£0.60	+£2.40	+£7.20	+£2.20

Under proposal 1, the maximum price relative to the current price reduces for customers in the west, north and east Wiltshire as the journey length increases, whilst for customers the south this continues to rise.

Under proposal 3, the maximum price relative to the current price reduces for customers in the west as the journey length increases, whilst for customers in the south, north and east this continues to rise.

Safeguarding Implications

21. There are no safeguarding implications arising from the proposal.

Public Health Implications

22. None.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

23. There are no environmental impacts arising from the proposal.

Equality Impact of the Proposal

24. The impact of these proposals is assessed as 'low' against the Council statutory responsibilities.

Risk Assessment

25. There are no risks arising from these proposals.

26. Public expectations are different from the desires of the trade and therefore there is a risk that in getting a solution that works for one group it is not in favour with the other group, however new options have been considered following the initial consultation with the trade.

Financial Implications

27. There are no financial implications arising from these proposals.

Legal Implications

28. The Council is required to advertise any changes to the existing Table of Fares and consider any objections before adoption. Therefore, there may be a need for a further report to this Committee, if any advertised changes lead to objections being received. In addition, if the decision is taken to abolish the existing zones, then there is again a separate notification process that has to be carried out. This involves giving public notice in the local press of the intention to abolish the zones (which could be carried out in parallel with the advertisement of changes to the table of fares) as well as notifying parish councils. There will then need to be a specific resolution from this Committee following the public consultation process.
29. It should be emphasised that, under current legislation, any resolution to abolish the taxi zones is irreversible and will mean that the same table of fares and conditions will apply across the whole county.

Options considered

30. The options that have been considered are:

No change to zones or table of fares
Move to one zone and one table of fares
Keep existing zone structure and move to one table of fares.

Conclusion

31. The consultation was undertaken from 23 June 2014 for an eight week period and the results of the consultation have informed the proposals.
32. Two of the three proposals, if adopted would be a further step towards the harmonisation of the four original zones.
33. A single table of fares would achieve an effective cap of the maximum fare for taxi journeys across the county; therefore the public would be charged a fare which does not exceed a pre-determined maximum for travelling the same distance anywhere in the county.

Recommendation

That the Licensing Committee

- i) approve one of the following options:

1. No change to zones or table of fares
2. Move to one zone and one table of fares
3. No change to zones and move to one table of fares and keep existing zone structure.

- ii) If option i) 2 or i) 3 above is approved, select a table of fares, from appendix 3:

1. Proposal 1
2. Proposal 3

iii) and if option i) 3 above is approved, authorise officers to carry out the necessary public consultation and implement any changes to the fare tariffs, in the event that no significant comments arise from that consultation.

Reason for proposal

Two of the three proposals, if adopted would be a further step towards the harmonisation of the service across the county.

The table of fares would set out the maximum fare for taxi journeys across the county. The paying public would be charged a fare which does not exceed a pre-determined maximum for travelling the same distance anywhere in the county.

Tracy Carter
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Background Papers

Copies of original feedback sheets available

Appendices

Appendix 1 Consultation questions,
Appendix 2 Results
Appendix 3 Frequently Asked Questions from Feedback
Appendix 4 Proposed Tables of Fares

Taxi and Private Hire One Zone/Tariff Proposal – June 2014 Consultation Questionnaire

Name:

Driver Licence No:

Address:

Contact Telephone No:

Company working for:

Which Zone do you currently hold your licence in:

	Yes	No
The Council is proposing to move from the existing four zones to one zone for the whole of the Council's area. Do you agree?		

	Proposal One	Proposal Two	Proposal Three
If the Council decides to move to one zone which of the enclosed tariff proposals would you prefer?			

Comments (Any comments should relate to the one zone/tariff consultation only):

Please note all questionnaires must be returned by 5pm Monday August 16 2014.

Consultation results

The survey questionnaires were sent out to 1073 members of the taxi trade.

Of these 1073 questionnaires 124 responses were received, this equates to a percentage return of 11.5%.

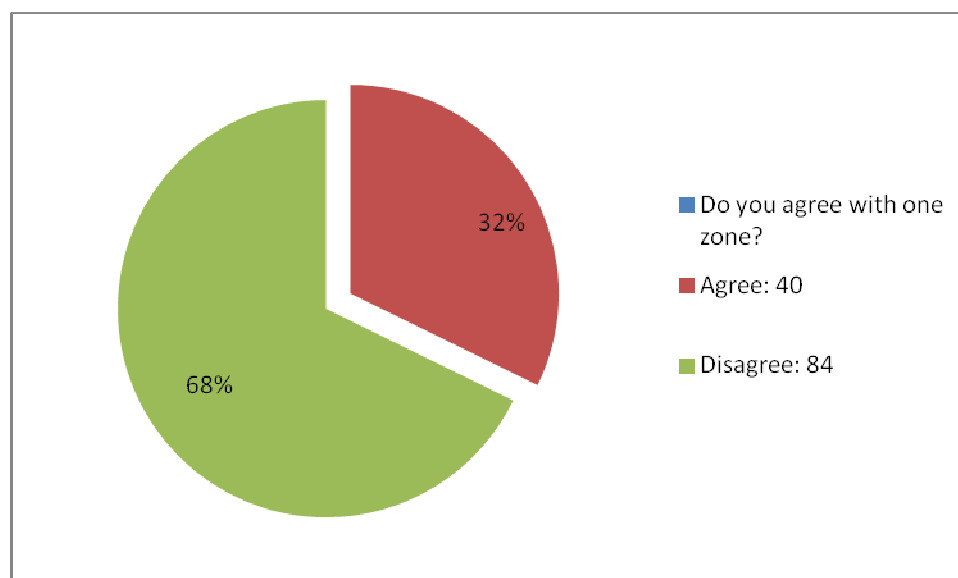
Feedback by Zones

	Total No. of Surveys Sent	Returned	%
Total of four zones	1073	124	11.5
South	339	33	9.7
North	230	25	10.8
West	358	54	15
East	147	12	8.1

Question 1:

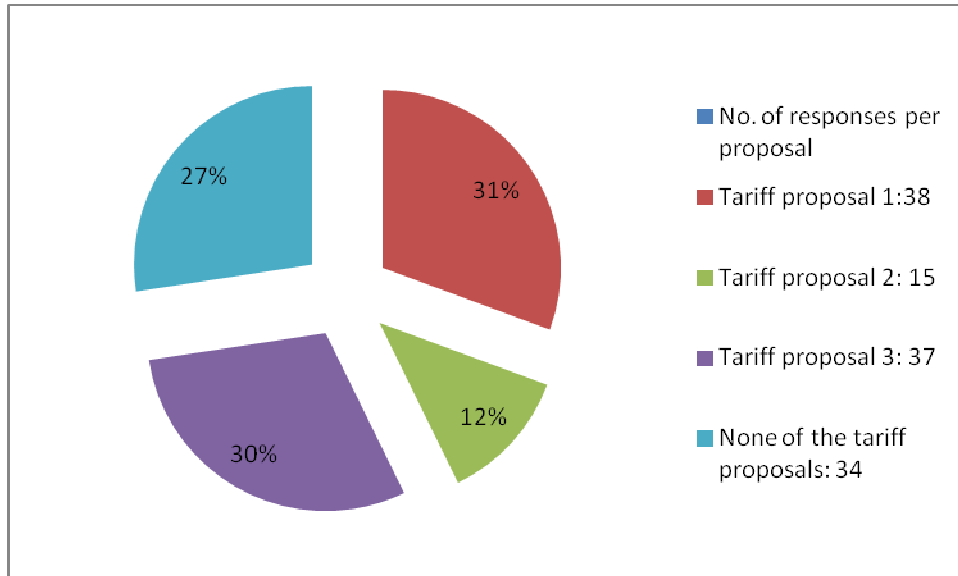
The Council is proposing to move from the existing four zones to one zone for the whole of the Council's area. Do you agree?

Total (Four Zones)



Question 2:

If the Council decides to move to one zone which of the enclosed tariff proposals would you prefer?



Survey response to questions:

	Yes	No
The Council is proposing to move from the existing four zones to one zone for the whole of the Council's area. Do you agree?	40	84

	Proposal One	Proposal Two	Proposal Three	None of the Proposals
If the Council decides to move to one zone which of the enclosed tariff proposals would you prefer?	38	15	37	34

The proposed harmonised table of fares for Wiltshire Council are included at appendix 4.

Summary of Taxi Trade feedback from trade meetings and completed questionnaires:

1. There is no need to change, it is not wanted:

Response – If could be argued that with forty seven of the trade responses not in favour of one zone this could be the case. However, the taxi trade have been regularly updated with regard to need to review and change the zoning and table of fares. Therefore, the response rate could be due to the trade's acceptance of a harmonised "one zone one tariff".

2. Multiple zone working issues: feedback from thirty four of the trade raised concerns regarding local knowledge, influx of drivers from neighbouring zones with risk of reduced local knowledge, less space on already crowded ranks.

Response – The current geographical tests would be reviewed for one zone model; to include base area test and questions to cover the likely countywide destinations i.e. hospitals, schools, train, bus stations and main road numbers to Wiltshire towns.

We will work with planning colleagues to identify potential sites to increase ranks available.

3. One Table of fares / tariff increases: feedback from forty six of the trade raised concerns that any increase in table of fares / tariffs in current climate may affect their earning potential, increased cost to vulnerable people to travel.

Response - Our table of fares examples show the impact across areas to be mainly increases in fares. However, this is a maximum cap of fee so the operator can decide to charge a more competitive fare should they choose to.

4. Timings of Tariff changes in the table of fares: feedback from forty three of the trade believed the timings should be changed from the proposals.

Response – these same was claimed at the last consultation where 2 tables of fares were consulted on. Listening in response to that feedback a third table was created to address the trade concerns. However, the feedback on this consultation has shown that a number of the trade are still against the timing changes accounted for in the table contained in proposal 3

5. Costs to OAP/ vulnerable adult's, feedback from thirty of the trade raised concerns regarding extra burden on vulnerable people.

Response – This is due to the diversity of the current table of fares and each of the tariffs which prevail in each of the four former district council zones. Currently the Council, by continuing with the separate table of fares, is supporting inequality to these groups.

6. Demographic divide: feedback from thirty five of the trade believed there is a need to recognise different demographic areas across the county, specifically the city of Salisbury where they feel they should have a separate tariff.

Response – This would create public perception that this is not harmonised, fares only partially harmonised.

Vehicles operating within different zones could cause confusion to the public if a vehicle is flagged down outside of its area and a fare is refused.

This would remain a less flexible operation for trade.

Higher administration/enforcement costs involved from table of fares reviews (four per year)

Administration/enforcement issues - The Council could be open to complaints due to table of fares varying across the County.

Proposal 1

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL
HACKNEY CARRIAGE
MAXIMUM TABLE OF FARES

For journeys starting	Vehicles up to 4 seats	Vehicles with more than 4 seats carrying more than 4 passengers
0600 hours – 2259 hours	Tariff 1	Tariff 2
2300 - 0559 hours and Sundays, Bank Holidays, Public Holidays and Easter Sunday and after 8pm Christmas Eve & New Years Eve	Tariff 2	Tariff 4
25 December, 26 December and 1 January	Tariff 3	Tariff 5

	Tariff 1	Tariff 2	Tariff 3	Tariff 4	Tariff 5
Journeys up to 176 yards (1/10 Mile)	£3.20	£4.50	£6.00	£4.95	£6.60
Subsequent 176 yards (1/10 Mile)	20p	30p	40p	45p	60p
Waiting time per minute	20p	30p	40p	45p	60p
	30p	30p	30p	30p	30p
Fouling charge (minimum)	£100	£100	£100	£100	£100

Hackney Carriages are regulated by Wiltshire Council
Tel: 0300 456 0100

Proposal 2

Removed due to low response rate

Proposal 3



WILTSHIRE COUNCIL
HACKNEY CARRIAGE
MAXIMUM TABLE OF FARES

For journeys starting	Vehicles up to 4 seats	Vehicles with more than 4 seats carrying more than 4 passengers
0600 hours – 2229hours	Tariff 1	Tariff 2
2230 - 0229 hours and Sundays, Bank Holidays, Public Holidays and Easter Sunday and after 8pm Christmas Eve & New Years Eve	Tariff 2	Tariff 4
0230 – 0559 hours and 25 December, 26 December and 1 January	Tariff 3	Tariff 5

	Tariff 1	Tariff 2	Tariff 3	Tariff 4	Tariff 5
Journeys up to 176 yards (1/10 Mile)	£3.20	£4.50	£5.00	£4.50	£6.00
Subsequent 176 yards (1/10 Mile)	20p	30p	40p	45p	60p
Waiting time per minute	20p 30p	30p 30p	40p 30p	45p 30p	60p 30p
Fouling charge (minimum)	£100	£100	£100	£100	£100

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