

8 MARCH 2024

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee held on Friday, 8 March 2024

- * Cllr Neil Tungate (Chairman)
- * Cllr Richard Young (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

- * Steve Clarke
- Jack Davies
- * Philip Dowd
- * Allan Glass
- * David Harrison
- * David Hawkins

Councillors:

- * Nigel Linford
- * Colm McCarthy
- Neil Millington
- Dave Penny
- * Alvin Reid

*Present

In attendance:

Councillors:

Jacqui England

Officers Attending:

Christa Ferguson, Richard Knott, Joanne McClay and Joe Tyler

Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Davies, Millington and Penny.

14 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meetings held on 10 March 2023 and 5 January 2024 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

16 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were members of the public present who had registered to speak on item 4, Taxi Fees and Charges 2024-2025. The Chairman invited them to address the Committee at the relevant time during item 4.

17 TAXI FEES AND CHARGES 2024-2025

The Chairman introduced the item and explained the running order of business. He invited the members of the public that were in attendance to address the Committee.

Public Speakers:

- Paul Osborne (in objection to the proposed Taxi Fees and Charges 2024)
- Jason Kauder (in objection to the proposed Taxi Fees and Charges 2024)

The main points raised by those members of the public who spoke were as follows:

- There was issue taken with the fact that the proposed increases did not follow a single, set percentage. Some fees and charges would increase 17% increase with others increasing by 30%.
- It was feared that increased fees and charges would prevent operators and drivers from continuing to work in the District and would deter potential drivers from joining the industry.
- It was felt that using neighbouring cities' fees and charges as a benchmark was unreasonable as, in the case of Southampton, their taxis operated for 24 hours a day and therefore received a much higher rate of potential income.
- Vehicle testing costs were felt to be unfairly high.
- It was hoped that more taxi driver licences would be issued within the District.

The Licensing Manager introduced the report and summarised the matter. The main points were as follows:

- As per section 7.2 of the Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976, if an increase to a vehicle or operator charge is proposed an advertise and 1 month consultation period must be held. Following advertisement of the proposed fees and the public consultation, 17 responses were received, and a General Purposes and Licensing Committee meeting was scheduled to consider the proposed fees and charges alongside the consultation responses and the deputations made by members of the public.
- Appendix 3 of the report pack indicated the wide variety of fees across 10 local authorities.
- Service fees and charges had not increased since 2017 despite costs to the authority increasing in the last 10 years. The authority must recover costs and therefore recommended to the Committee the proposed taxi fees and charges for 2024/2025.

Members of the Committee were invited to make comment and ask questions on the report. The main points raised were as follows:

- Following a question on cost recovery, it was confirmed that the fees and charges proposed were necessary in order to cover costs to the authority and that by law, the authority were not allowed to make any profit on taxi fees or charges, therefore the proposed increases were purely a cost recovery process.
- On the vehicle compliance fee, the Committee heard that the figure had been calculated by the Transport Manager and it covers all costs faced by the authority. The compliance test covers a range of different mechanical matters to an MOT test and therefore has a different fee.
- Long waiting list for drivers wanting to take knowledge test, these are carried out weekly, unfortunately we have a low rate of people turning up following booking of the test. The Council are working to improve the pass rate by assisting applications with the relevant preparatory information as well as signposting to relevant websites. A number of applicants are drivers from outside the area too which contributes to the long waiting list.
- At a previous meeting, it was within the report that taxi fees were not being considered during Covid in order to support the trade.
- The Licensing Authority carry out a number of different functions and when comparing to other Hampshire based authorities the fees remain comparably low.
- On equality and diversity, it was explained that the taxi policy itself would involve the relevant equality and diversity considerations; this matter purely related to the fees and charges and would be an applied increase across the board affecting all individuals equally.
- NFDC's charges have been set to cover costs. If the trade wish to go elsewhere due to cheaper costs they can do as drivers and proprietors can be licensed elsewhere whilst still operating within the District.
- It was explained that the legislative requirement when advertising proposed fees and charges increases is to do so through the local press. The Licensing Authority followed the legislative requirements and acknowledged that further communications could go out in future.
- On metered fees, the Committee were reminded that taxi tariff fees only related to Hackney Carriages and that a review of the taxi tariff fees was undertaken two years ago. Private hire vehicles don't have to support taxi tariff fees but do have to inform the customer how much they will be charged.
- On reviewing charges more regularly, members heard that charges were reviewed annually but that this had not been the case throughout the Covid period due to the disruption the industry faced.
- Compliance tests must be carried out by law. A partial re-test for minor issues was introduced and often were matters that could be rectified the same day.
- One member emphasised the real terms increase to the fees and charges and explained that these were relatively low, particularly after a prolonged

period of no increase. The member referred to the fact that a three-year renewal licence would only cost £20 more with the proposed increase than it does already. It was acknowledged that the authority had been as reasonable as it could be leading up to this proposed increase and that cost recovery had to come from somewhere. It was heard that if the authority didn't increase the fees to the drivers and operators that it would need to recover its costs from another source which would have its own impact.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee approve to the proposed taxi fees and charges as set out in the report and set the level of taxi licensing fees for the financial year 2024/25 which are effective from 1 April 2024.

CHAIRMAN