

## **LICENSING COMMITTEE**

**18 MARCH 2013**

Present: Councillor J Brown (Chair)  
Councillor P Jeffree (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors J Aron, I Brandon, I Brown, J Connal, K Crout,  
G Derbyshire, J Dhindsa, M Hofman, M Meerabux, M Mills,  
D Scudder, L Scudder and D Walford

Officers: Head of Environmental Services  
Head of Legal and Property Services  
Licensing Manager  
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (JK)

### **10 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/ COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Aron replaced Councillor Hastrick.

### **11 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY)**

There were no disclosures of interest however Councillor Dhindsa advised that he had declared an interest in the past but as a former councillor who had similar interests took part in Licensing Committee discussions, he would not declare an interest and would take part.

### **12 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2012 were submitted and signed.

### **13 HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARE TARIFF**

The Committee received a report of the Head of Environmental Services asking Members to consider a fare increase for Hackney Carriages.

The Licensing Manager introduced the report and explained that the request to raise the fares had come from the Watford Hackney Carriage Drivers' Association (WHCDA). He outlined the consultation process that would be followed after the Committee had considered the matter. He reminded the Committee that the tariffs were the maximum that drivers could charge and only applied to journeys which started and ended in the borough. The WHCDA

proposal was to increase the starting fare from £2.20 to £2.80; a rise of 60 pence until 4.61 miles had been reached when the existing fare levels would apply.

Following a question from Councillor Brandon, the Licensing Manager confirmed that the proposal in the report was the increase the trade would like to see.

Councillor Dhindsa noted that this increase only applied to short journeys; a journey of ten miles would only incur a rise of 60 pence. The fares had not risen since 2010; he felt the fares should be reviewed annually. The Licensing Manager explained that authorities took different approaches but Watford Borough Council had only considered fare increases when the trade had asked.

Councillor Dhindsa advised that he talked to drivers and was aware that they waited a long time for a passenger. He said many drivers earned the minimum wage and their costs had increased. He asked how much the Council's fees had risen over the last six years. He said that drivers were subject to abuse and attacks. There was less work available in Watford and they were almost going out of business. He felt that the trade had made a reasonable request.

In response to Councillor Dhindsa's questions, the Licensing Manager advised that the licence fees had not increased this year and there may have been a slight increase the year before where amounts were rounded up. The driver's licence lasted three years.

Councillor Meerabux noted the rise in petrol and other costs and that drivers waited a long time for a passenger.

Councillor I Brown expressed his concern for taxi drivers. In his experience, when prices increased the volume of sales decreased and he felt taxi fares were already too high. A rise of this scale could be counter-productive.

Councillor Crout noted Councillor Dhindsa's comments that drivers struggled to make ends meet and asked how many plates had been surrendered. He concurred with Councillor Brown's points and observed that private hire vehicles were often less expensive than hackney carriages. The Licensing Manager advised that plates were less likely to be surrendered now that a limit had been imposed. Only a handful had been surrendered in the previous 12 months.

Councillor Derbyshire drew Members' attention to the role of the users and added that the Committee had a responsibility to them as well. The trade were asking for an increase of 36 percent on the starting fare and he asked whether this was justified. The fares incorporated the drivers' earnings and their running costs and he asked what would be a reasonable increase in earnings for the last three years. Many people had not seen a rise in their income for a number of years and income restraint should be demonstrated. However the cost of running a taxi had increased considerably and taxi drivers should be compensated accordingly. He felt that an increase of 60 pence was not justified and he noted that Transport for London had recently held the starting fare for hackney carriages at £2.40.

Councillor Connal advised that she was very worried for taxi drivers due to their vulnerable position and they were paid very little.

Councillor Jeffree said that there seemed to be a consensus that drivers deserved some sort of raise and he was also sympathetic to the drivers. There was no unmet demand in Watford; there was actually an excess of supply which was the root of the problems. It would be better if drivers were not stationary in ranks but drove around the town. They needed to act in a more entrepreneurial way to attract customers. Areas where bus services were poor provided an opportunity for drivers. The WHCDA proposal was needlessly complicated as it involved a tapered reduction in the increase and he felt it was too front-loaded.

Councillor Jeffree added that he would propose that there was an increase of 20 pence in the initial fare from £2.20 to £2.40 to be in line with Transport for London. This would mean that the fare for 1 mile would be £4.20 rather than £4.00, the fare for 2 miles would be £6.40, the fare for 5 miles would be £13 and the fare for 10 miles would be £27. This added 20 pence across the board.

Councillor D Scudder noted that although Watford's initial fare was low compared to other authorities the fare at 1 mile and beyond was one of the highest. He supported Councillor Jeffree's proposal. As fuel prices went up and down, a fare rise could not be given on the basis of fuel prices.

Councillor Brandon noted that the cost of other public transport had risen and counselled that the Committee should take inflation into account. He noted that drivers paid a premium to rank at Watford Junction and suggested that a higher fare could be charged from that location. With regard to demand, he proposed that the situation be reviewed to see if higher charges had affected demand. His view was that an increase of 20 pence was too low.

Counsellor Dhindsa outlined the problems experienced by taxi drivers in changing career. He felt that a rise of 60 pence after three years was quite reasonable.

In response to a question from Councillor Crout, the Licensing Manager said that it would be possible to have a surcharge for passengers leaving Watford Junction.

Council Derbyshire referred to Councillor Jeffree's proposal and asked if it would apply to tariffs one and two. Councillor Jeffree agreed that this would be the case.

Following a question from Councillor Derbyshire, the Head of Legal and Property Services advised that under section 65 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 the requirement was for the proposed tariff to be publicised for 14 days. . If any objections were received and not withdrawn the matter would come back to the Committee, otherwise the revised fares would come into effect.

Councillor Mills said that she would like to propose an increase of 80 pence which would only apply to tariff one. This would mean that the initial fare was £3 not £2.20.

Councillor Brandon proposed that the WHCDA be consulted on putting a surcharge on journeys from Watford Junction in addition to agreeing their proposal of a 60 pence increase in tariff 1. In response to Councillor Brandon's proposal, the Head of Legal and Property Services noted that this could not be consulted on as there was no final fare agreed. Councillor Brandon therefore withdrew his proposal.

Following advice from the Head of Legal and Property Services, Councillor Jeffree's proposal was put to the Committee and this motion was CARRIED.

RESOLVED –

1. that the Committee approved the revised tariffs below:

**Tariff 1**

*For any hiring during Monday to Sunday, between 6 am and 11 pm (except Public Holidays):*

<b>£2.40</b>	Minimum fare for 274 metres (299.6 yards approx) or 69 seconds (whichever is reached first), and then
<b>20 p</b>	for 146 metres (159.6 yards approx) or 35 seconds until the fare is £14 and then
<b>20 p</b>	for each 105 metres (114.82 yards approx) or 24 seconds.

**Tariff 2**

*For any hiring between 11 pm and 6 am or during Public Holidays:*

<b>£2.40</b>	Minimum fare for 183 metres (200 yards approx) or 45 seconds, and then
<b>20 p</b>	for 91 metres (99.5 yards approx) or 23 seconds, until the fare is £20.20 and then
<b>20 p</b>	for each 112 metres (122.48 yards approx) or 24 seconds.

2. that officers be authorised to consult and if no objections are received within 14 days the tariff will come into force. If objections are received the Committee authorises officers to consider these objections and if they can not be resolved, bring the matter back to Committee for further consideration.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.30 pm  
and finished at 8.35 pm