

THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL
REGULATORY SERVICES COMMITTEE
MEETING
MINUTES

Of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth on Wednesday 29 June 2022 from 6.00pm to 6.30pm

Councillors:-	Raj Khiroya (Chair) Tony Humphreys Phil Williams	Roger Seabourne (Vice-Chair) David Coltman Shanti Maru
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RG1/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stephen Cox, Rue Grewal and Alison Wall.

RG2/22 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Regulatory Services Committee Meeting held on 8 March 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

RG3/22 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

None received.

RG4/22 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

RG5/22 APPLICATION FOR HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARE INCREASE

The, Development Management Team Leader provided a summary of the report, as follows. Following a request from South Oxhey Radio Taxis to increase the current Hackney Carriage Table of Fares, Officers have reviewed the fare table and agree, in light of the fact that the fare table has not altered since 2013 and given the current economic climate, especially in respect of motoring costs, that an increase as proposed is acceptable, with the exception to the change in the extent of the night time charging hours, but this can be subject to further discussion.

Officers have used the same methodology from 2013 for consistency. This has included using The National Hackney Fares Table which shows Three Rivers is currently below the national average for a 2 mile daytime journey. The proposed increase would put Three Rivers above the national average, an 8.3 % rise on the current price. In addition, data from the Office of National Statistics has been used and as set out within the report shows the rising costs of motoring expenditure such as maintenance of motor vehicles, petrol and oil and vehicle tax and insurance. Furthermore, it is also recognised that the cost of applying for licences has increased.

The Officer recommendation is to: - Agree the fare increase with the exception of the night time charge, which instead should start from 10pm rather than the suggested 8pm
- Agree for officers to publish the agreed version in the Watford Observer

- Subject to no objections that the varied fares takes effect following the expiry of the press notice
- For the Director of Environmental Services rather than Head of Regulatory Services to consider any objections in consultation with the Lead Member.
- If objections are received and maintained that a further Extraordinary Regulatory Services Committee is arranged by 29 August to consider the representations received.
- To agree that the fare tariff be reviewed on a routine basis every two years.

Points for members of the Committee to discuss were:

- Whether or not to accept the proposed fare increases
- to consider the extent of the consultation period in the Watford Observer (legislation requires a minimum of 14 days for the notice to be included in the Watford Observer) a report makes a case for 21 days but it may be determined that 14 days is sufficient, especially in view of the cost of placing an advertisement in the paper
- to agree whether further applications during a specified timeframe should be restricted
- whether the fares table should be reviewed every two years as a matter of routine

A Member of the Committee asked what had happened to the 2019 request for a review. The Lead Licensing Officer advised that an application from South Oxhey Radio Taxis had been received, but Officers asked for further evidence in order to trigger a review. No further correspondence was received and therefore there was no further action on this matter. A Member expressed surprise that the requested fare increase was as low as it was given that inflation was c.30% above the Consumer Price Index (CPI) rate over the whole period, and was therefore accepting of the proposed new tariffs. The main problem was the shortage of taxis available for hire late at night, and a suggested compromise for the time at which the evening charge began was 9pm. The member felt 14 days public notice was sufficient as it met the legal requirements.

The Lead Licensing Officer emphasised that this review was specific to Hackney Carriages and was not relevant to private hire firms, to which the Member responded that private hire companies and Hackney Carriages work to similar guideline.

A Member asked for clarification that there were too few taxis to meet demand at certain times of the day, and asked whether there was a limit on the number of licences that could be issued to operators, to which it was replied that there was not.

The Development Management Team Leader said there were very few taxi ranks in Three Rivers and there is a very limited night time economy, especially when compared to Watford, and the pandemic also impacted the demand for taxis considerably.

A Member made reference to the table of comparison and said the figures were broadly in line with other Councils and was therefore probably reasonable.

The Development Management Team Leader said other neighbouring councils were in the process of reviewing their fares, and as different methodologies were used, comparisons would be unreliable but a useful guide nonetheless.

In response to a Member's question about the time it was proposed to commence the night time tariff, the Development Management Team Leader said 10pm was believed to be of benefit to the more vulnerable users, but was happy to consider 9pm if that was considered to be more appropriate.

Councillor Phil Williams moved, seconded by Councillor Roger Seabourne, that the recommendation be adopted, with an amendment to the start time of the night time tariff to 9.30pm. The Team Leader asked that the Committee consider the other points in the recommendation, i.e. the 14 days consultation period, a limit to applications for tariff reviews and whether to review as a matter of routine every two years.

A Member said a review of tariffs every six months in light of the current volatility of petrol prices and other operating costs was realistic, and that the proposed two years was overly restrictive. The Member agreed that the consultation period of 14 days was adequate.

The Development Management Team Leader advised that following this review the onus would be on the trade, as it was now, to seek amendments to the tariff. A Member said it might be worthwhile the Council being a little proactive in this matter, rather than wait for taxi companies to make a request each time, and the point was agreed by another Member.

The Chair said he was in favour of reviewing the situation regularly as a matter of good practice, with the question of how often to be determined.

A Member asked for clarification that there was no cost to the Council in the issuing of taxi licences, and it was said in response that officer time and consultation costs were the only financial impacts.

A Member asked whether officers would prefer a regular review to be included in the work programme or dealt with on an ad-hoc basis. The Team Leader (Development Management) said it was difficult to choose a preference due to the volatility of the economy but if pushed, the preference would be an ad-hoc approach.

Councillor Phil Williams moved the recommendation at Option 1, seconded by Councillor Roger Seabourne, with an amendment to the start time of the evening tariff of 9.30pm.

On being put to the Committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being unanimous.

RESOLVED:

Agreed the amended Policy subject to any new response(s) received. Any response(s) received within the consultation period to be circulated to all Members of the Committee with an officer response.

Following receipt of any further responses the Director of Environmental Services will determine whether the amended Policy (attached to the report) can be presented to the Policy and Resources Committee for determination on formal adoption or returned to a future Regulatory Services Committee.

- a) Agreed the increase of HC fares as mentioned in the Hackney Fare Table.
- b) Agreed to amend the change in the hours of the night time charge from 23.00 – 06:00 to 21:30 hours - 06:00 hours (a change in one and a half hours).
- c) Agreed for Officers to publish the agreed varied version of the Hackney Fare Table in the Watford Observer for 14 days and for the Director of Environmental Services to consider any objections in consultation with the Lead Member.
- d) If no objections are received for the varied tariff to take effect following the expiration of the press notice.
- e) If objections are received and not withdrawn, for Officers to arrange an Extraordinary Regulatory Services Committee by 29 August 2022 to consider the representations received.
- f) Agreed that another application for a review of tariffs would not be considered within six months of the existing fare tariff period

RG6/22 REGULATORY SERVICES COMMITTEE - WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the four items on the Regulatory Services work programme. The contents of the work programme were agreed by General Assent.

RESOLVED:

That the items in the work programme be noted.

CHAIR