

Meeting of the Taxis Committee

Monday 18th March, 2024 at 6.00pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Priory Road,
Dudley, West Midlands, DY1 1HF

Agenda

Agenda – Public Session

(Meeting open to the public and press)

1. Apologies for absence.
2. To report the appointment of any substitute members serving for this meeting of the Committee.
3. To receive any declarations of interest under the Members' Code of Conduct.
4. To confirm and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 12th February, 2024, as a correct record (pages 5-9)
5. To consider any questions from Members to the Chair where two clear days notice has been given to the Monitoring Officer (Council Procedure Rule 11.8).
6. Resolution to exclude the public and press.

Chair to move:



“That the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information under Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, for the reasons stated on the agenda.”

Under the provisions of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, the Monitoring Officer has decided that there will be no advance disclosure of the following reports because the public interest in disclosing the information is outweighed by the public interest in maintaining the exemption from disclosure.

7. Review of a Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Driver's Licence – Mr FA (pages 10-95)
(The report contains exempt information relating to an individual)
8. Application for Grant of a Hackney Carriage Driver's Licence – Mr SS (pages 96-124)
(The report contains exempt information relating to an individual)
9. Renewal of a Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Driver's Licence – Mr NH (pages 125-171)
(The report contains exempt information relating to an individual)
10. Review of a Private Hire Driver's Licence – Mr SY (pages 172-198)
(The report contains exempt information relating to an individual)
11. Application for Grant of a Private Hire Driver's Licence – Mr MA (pages 199-202)
(The report contains exempt information relating to an individual)
12. Application for Grant of a Private Hire Driver's Licence – Mr RMIN (pages 203-206)
(The report contains exempt information relating to an individual)



Chief Executive
8th March, 2024

Distribution:

Councillor A Hopwood (Chair)

Councillor B Challenor (Vice-Chair)

Councillors M Aston, K Denning, D Harley, M Howard, W Little, J Martin and A Taylor.

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question (for example, he/she must have received the training required by the Council).

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General

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**Minutes of the Meeting of the Taxis Committee
Monday 12th February, 2024 at 6.00 pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor A Hopwood (Chair)
Councillor B Challenor (Vice -Chair)
Councillors K Denning, D Harley, M Howard, W Little, J Martin and A Taylor

Officers:

N Slym (Assistant Team Manager - Licensing and Waste Enforcement),
S Ahmed-Aziz (Solicitor) and K Malpass (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in Attendance:

J Deakin (Head of Waste and Fleet Operations), R Millard (Senior Principal Accountant) for Agenda Item No. 5 – Revision of Licence Fees

98 **Apology for Absence**

An apology for absence was received on behalf of Councillor M Aston.

99 **Appointment of Substitute Member**

There were no substitute Members appointed for this meeting of the Sub-Committee.

100 **Declarations of interest**

No Member made a declaration of interest, in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct, in respect of any matters considered at the meeting.

101 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15th January, 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.

102 **Revision of Licence Fees**

A report of the Interim Service Director of Environment Directorate was submitted on the revision of fees for Private Hire and Hackney Carriage licences administered by the Committee.

The Assistant Team Manager (Licensing and Waste Enforcement) presented the report in detail referring Members to paragraphs of specific importance.

The Senior Principal Accountant outlined the proposed budget for 2024/25 and confirmed that the projected budget had been calculated based on a 2.3% increase in fees to ensure the Council maintained a neutral cost position in relation to the administration of private hire and hackney carriage licensing. Comparison figures of neighbouring Local Authorities were referred to and outlined in Appendix 1 of the report submitted.

It was noted that should the 2024/25 budget be based on a 0% uplift, it would result in a £26,000 deficit. Members were advised that over the last three-year cycle, a deficit of £80,000 had been forecast and it was essential that an increase was agreed to mitigate the impact of inflationary pressures. The impact of the differing percentage increases on individual fees was outlined for illustrative purposes in Table B, and the financial implications in respect of private hire and hackney carriage licensing were outlined at Table C of the report submitted.

Members were advised that other costs included direct costs of the testing function, premises costs, and supplies and services which represented 30% of total costs. Other costs included support services within the Council. For 2024/25, the support services represented 7% of the total cost of the licensing service and was reviewed annually based on relevant cost drivers.

The licensing administrative team supported all licensing functions and figures represented an internal adjustment to demonstrate estimated administrative cost for supporting the taxi licensing role which was estimated to be approximately 70% and to show more clearly the full cost of the taxi licensing service.

Arising from the presentation of the report, Members asked questions, made comments and responses were provided as follows:-

- In referring to the cost of licences in comparison with neighbouring authorities, outlined in Appendix 1 to the report submitted, relating to new licences, Councillor K Denning queried the reason fees varied significantly. In responding, the Assistant Team Manager (Licensing and Waste Enforcement) indicated that Wolverhampton City Council had previously reduced their fees to a more competitive price which had attracted more applicants nationally resulting in fees remaining low whilst still able to cover the costs of the licensing function. In terms of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (Sandwell MBC) and Birmingham City Council, taxi licensing fees were set and approved by their own Committees.
- In responding to a question from Councillor J Martin in relation to the number of taxi drivers licensed in neighbouring local authorities, the Assistant Team Manager (Licensing and Waste Enforcement) reported that whilst accurate figures could not be provided, discussions that had previously taken place with Walsall and Sandwell, similar figures of licensed taxi drivers were recorded.
- In referring to the benchmarking processes associated with the service and the requirements of Local Authorities to propose fee increases to cover actual costs of the taxi licensing function, Councillor J Martin queried whether Dudley operated a more comprehensive provision compared to neighbouring Local Authorities to justify a significant increase in fees. Concern was raised that increasing fees would encourage taxi drivers to transfer licences to neighbouring Local Authorities where fees were more competitive resulting in a reduced number of drivers' licensed within the Dudley Borough. Improved strategies and incentives within the service were essential to attract additional drivers.

In responding, the Assistant Team Manager (Licensing and Waste Enforcement) indicated that whilst the level of new taxi licensing applications received each month fluctuated, new applications were being processed and the service were not concerned with current level of taxi drivers' licensed with the Local Authority. Saving initiatives were referred to with specific reference to the sale of the Narrowboat Way building and Members were assured that improved figures would be observed moving forward.

The Head of Waste and Fleet Operations indicated that whilst improvements within the service were essential, the Local Authority was only permitted to set licensing fees for taxis and hackney carriages up to the amount that could be ascertained as being the cost of administering the licensing function, which included enforcement, administration and ancillary costs relating to Member meetings to determine certain licensing applications.

- Members expressed concern at the lack of information provided in the report. It was essential that a detailed analysis of the licensing function to include current numbers of licensed drivers, applications granted/lost, and the level of staff employed to administer the function compared to neighbouring Local Authorities was included in future reports to support Members to make informed decisions moving forward. The Assistant Team Manager (Licensing and Waste Enforcement) acknowledged the comments raised and assured Members that additional information would be included in future reports. In terms of new applications received, Members were advised that whilst not all new applications were granted, between ten and twenty-nine had been received each month over the last twelve-month period.
- Councillor K Denning referred to an incident that had recently occurred involving a taxi driver licensed with Sandwell MBC and the proactive service provided by Dudley enforcement officers. It was considered that the Local Authority had a good reputation when protecting all residents within the Dudley Borough. The Assistant Team Manager (Licensing and Waste Enforcement) indicated that a proportion of the costs associated with the licensing function was attributed to regular safety inspections to ensure vehicles were fit for purpose and safe to carry passengers.

Resolved

- (1) That, after careful consideration of the information contained in the report submitted, and as reported at the meeting, approval be given to an increase in fees for Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licences by 2.3%.
- (2) That a detailed analysis of the licensing function to include current numbers of licensed drivers, applications granted/lost, and the level of staff employed to administer the function compared to neighbouring Local Authorities be included in future reports.

103 **Questions Under Council Procedure Rule 11.8**

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

104 **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Resolved

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business, on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to an individual(s) as defined under Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

105 **Application for Grant of Hackney Carriage Driver's Licence – Mr SS**

Following a request from Mr SS to delay consideration of the application for the grant of a hackney carriage driver's licence to enable his representative to attend the meeting, due to the estimated time of arrival of Mr SS's representative, the Committee determined to defer the item to a future meeting of the Committee to enable Mr SS's representative to be present.

The meeting ended at 6.38pm.

CHAIR