

Tuesday 2 August 2005
at 6.00pm



General Licensing Committee

MEMBERS: Councillor Mrs MURRAY (Chairman) Councillor BOWKER (Deputy Chairman), Councillors BELSEY, HARRIS, HERBERT, LACEY OBE, MARSH, Mrs SIMS, SKILTON, SLATER, STEVENS, TAYLOR, WARNER and Miss WOODALL.

(An apology for absence was reported from Councillor Mrs Pooley).

1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2005 were submitted and approved and the Chairman was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

2 Consultation on Delimitation of Taxi Numbers.

The Committee considered the report of the Licensing Manager regarding options for changes to the Council's current policy of restricting the number of hackney carriages in response to the Government's Action Plan for Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles. A report had been considered by the Committee on 9 March 2005 regarding the Council's current limit on the number of hackney carriage proprietor's licences (plates) and the issues to be considered for a change in policy. Consultation on the policy options had been undertaken with the hackney carriage and private hire trade, representatives of local businesses and voluntary groups, Sussex Police and officers of the Council. Details of the representations received were set out in the report. It was noted that no representations had been received in response to the public notice published in the Herald on 6 May 2005.

Mr B Morris (Chairman, Eastbourne and Country), P Smith (Hackney Carriage proprietor), Mr A Curryer (Independent Driver), Mr M Reeves (independent proprietor), Mr R Doxford, Mr N Bodle (Transport & General Workers' Union) and Mr F Hafernik (Director, National Taxi Association) addressed the Committee in opposition to de-limitation. It was stated that this policy would result in an oversupply of taxis into the trade, increased congestion on the roads and taxi ranks, reduced earnings and hardship for drivers leading to deterioration in vehicle standards and increased fares.

Comment was made that applications for any new licences issued in the future should be considered in accordance with certain criteria to include driver knowledge and experience.

Mr C Islip (General Manager, Sussex Cars) addressed the Committee in support of the option of managed growth and that private hire drivers were prevented from entering the trade as no additional plates had been issued since 1975.

Councillor Lacey OBE queried whether a response had been submitted to the Department of Transport's letters received in June 2004 and June 2005 in respect of the review of the Council's policy. The Commercial Services Manager agreed to investigate the matter and provide a written response to Members of the Committee.

To maintain a restriction policy the Council was required to undertake a survey to determine any unmet demand. Consultation with other authorities and the transport consultants who undertook the previous survey had placed the average cost of a survey at approximately £25,000. Quotations would be sought and Members were advised that the survey costs must be recovered via the hackney carriage proprietors licence fees. Councillor Warner commented on the timing of the survey and the importance of allowing time for the new Licensing laws and decriminalisation of parking to become established to ensure the validity of the survey results.

The Committee favoured maintaining the current policy and that a survey would determine whether a significant unmet demand for taxis existed, and if so, determine the number of licences required to meet unmet demand and whether an increase in wheelchair accessible taxis was also required.

RESOLVED: (1) That in response to the Government's Action Plan for Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles, the Council's current policy of restricting the number of hackney carriage licenses be maintained.

(2) That the requirement to undertake an unmet demand survey be noted.

(NOTES: (1) Councillor Warner declared a personal interest as Chairman of the board of Eastbourne Buses.

(1) Councillor Slater declared a personal interest as a non-executive director of the board of Eastbourne Buses, and in this item and item 3 below as a distant member of his family was a taxi driver).

3 Review of Hackney Carriage Fare Structure.

The Committee considered the report of the Environmental Health Manager regarding a proposed formula for introducing Hackney Carriage Fare increases with effect from 1 April 2006.

The General Licensing Sub-Committee at its meeting on 5 July 2005 had considered four proposals for fare increases submitted by the trade and requested that this Committee consider options for future fare setting arrangements to streamline the process. It was also recommended that consultation with the trade in respect of future increases commence as early as possible to enable an implementation date to coincide with the beginning of the financial year.

It was proposed that fare increases should be calculated as a combination of the RPI: Motoring Index on an equal basis and that the fares, rates and rate times set in 05/06 were used as the baseline for future increases.

Mr P Smith, Mr B Morris and Mr F Hafernik addressed the Committee against the proposed use of the RPI. The use of a formula to determine future increases was supported, however it was requested that consultation with the trade take place on proposed options before a decision was made.

The Committee supported the need for further consultation with the trade on this issue.

RESOLVED (1) That consultation be undertaken with the hackney carriage trade on options for future fare setting arrangements and that a report be submitted to this Committee in due course.

(2) That arrangements in respect of the timetable for the implementation of future fare increases be approved as follows:

- (a) Proposed increases to be published in the local paper in mid January allowing 14 days for representations.
- (b) Subject to no representations being received, the fare increase determined by the Council shall be implemented with effect from 1 April.
- (c) Relevant representations, to be agreed by the Environmental Health Manger, in consultation with the Chairman of the General Licensing Committee, be considered by the Sub-Committee within 2 months of the date of publication in the local paper, and the fare increase approved be implemented with effect from 1 April.
- (d) In exceptional circumstances there should be provision for fare increases to be considered at any other time. Exceptional circumstances to be defined and agreed by the Environmental Health Manager in consultation with the Chairman of the General Licensing Committee.

The meeting closed at 7.30 p.m.

**Mrs A Murray
Chairman**