

## **GENERAL LICENSING COMMITTEE**

Tuesday, 25 January 2022

**PRESENT** – Councillors B Jones (Chair), Crumbie, Donoghue, Dulston, C L B Hughes, Newall, A J Scott and Snedker

**APOLOGIES** – Councillors Clarke, Lee, Mills and K Nicholson,

**ABSENT** – Councillor Haszeldine

**OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE** – Allison Hill (Democratic Officer), Amy Wennington (Principal Lawyer (Litigation)), Brian Murray (Assistant Licensing Manager), Colin Dobson (Licensing Manager) and Sgt C Dickenson (Durham Constabulary)

### **LG12 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

### **LG13 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THIS COMMITTEE HELD ON 2 NOVEMBER 2021**

Submitted – the Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of the General Licensing Committee held on 2 November 2021.

**RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the meeting of the General Licensing Committee held on 2 November 2021 be approved as a correct record.

### **LG14 TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GENERAL LICENSING SUB COMMITTEE HELD ON 2 NOVEMBER 2021**

Submitted – The Minutes (previously circulated) of the meeting of the General Licensing Sub-Committee held on 2 November 2021.

**RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the meeting of the General Licensing Sub-Committee held on 2 November 2021 be approved as a correct record.

### **LG15 LICENSING FEES AND CHARGES FOR 2022-2023**

The Group Director of Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to invite Members to determine the fees relating to licensing in accordance with the decision taken at Full Council on 28 January 2016 to delegate the setting of those fees and registrations to the General Licensing Committee.

It was reported that the fees are based on the cost recovery of administering and where appropriate enforcing the relevant legislation relating to such licences; and Councils are responsible for administering a range of licences and for the majority of these regimes the costs are recovered through fees set by each council and paid by the licence applicant.

It was also highlighted that Locally set fees are a vital means of ensuring that full costs can be recovered, reducing the risk of a subsidy from local tax payers, and that businesses do not pay more than they should.

The submitted report outlined that whilst all areas of licensing had been affected by the Covid pandemic, the dynamics within the taxi trade was currently a significant concern, with the loss of 100 licensed drivers and costs rising significantly for drivers and proprietors e.g. fuel, second hand vehicles and as a consequence the trade had asked for a tariff increase.

It was reported that the current estimates were that the taxi budget will carry forward a deficit of £43,312 into 2022/23 financial year inclusive of Covid costs; If however, the costs of Covid are removed, this deficit is estimated to be reduced to £6,633. At this time, by seeking an increase in fees for 2022 – 2023 it would place the taxi trade under additional financial pressure that will be difficult to sustain. Any deficit for Covid related issues can be recovered centrally and a modest deficit (Covid costs removed) can be carried forward.

A review of the general licensing fees was undertaken for the current financial year, which showed that at the end of the financial year there will be a projected deficit of £3,246 inclusive of Covid costs. If Covid costs are removed however, there would be an estimated surplus of £1,754. A deficit (inclusive of Covid) of this modest amount would not ordinarily prompt a fee increase.

Discussion ensued on the difficulties experienced by the licensed trade, the loss of licensed drivers and the effects of the pandemic and acknowledged the taxi trade was still in a process of recovery; and therefore agreed with the officers recommendation that the licensing fees remain at the current level due to exceptional circumstances and recent pressures on the licensed trade.

**RESOLVED** – That Members agree that licensing fees continue at their current rate from 1 April 2022.

## **LG16 VARIATION TO HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARES**

The Group Director of Services submitted a report (previously circulated) to give consideration to an application from the trade for an increase in hackney carriage tariffs.

It was reported that following consultation and taking into consideration the changing dynamics within the taxi trade due to the Covid-19 pandemic, three options for potential changes had been proposed by representatives of the trade; a fourth option being for the tariffs to remain unchanged.

Section 65 of The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 provides for a District Council to fix the rates of fares for Hackney Carriage Vehicles (HCV). It may fix the fares on time as well as distance and any other charges that may be made in connection with the hiring of the vehicle.

It was also reported that the last increase in hackney carriage tariffs was in 2012 and the responses from the trade to the four options were outlined in the submitted report.

Mr Nevison and Mr Volkman, representatives of the taxi trade, attended the meeting and gave their views on the options presented in the submitted report and highlighted the recent difficulties experienced by the taxi trade, particularly in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Members discussed the three options for potential change presented and in doing so acknowledged the balance between the needs of the taxi trade to increase the hackney carriage tariff with the impact on the public. Members also considered the table of fares that had been prepared and appended to the submitted report using data from taxi trade magazine Private Hire Monthly to highlight comparative fares for a two mile daytime journey for each of the 12 north-east local authorities.

**RESOLVED** – (a) That Members of his General Licensing Committee agree to increase the tariff applied to hackney carriages.

(b) That Members approve Option 2 and that be subject to the statutory consultation process by way of advertisement.