
GENERAL LICENSING COMMITTEE 12/06/23

Present:

Councillors: Annwen Hughes, John Brynmor Hughes, Eryl Jones-Williams, Gareth Tudor Jones, Linda Ann Jones, Edgar Wyn Owen, Rheinallt Puw, Huw Rowlands, Elfed Williams, Gwynfor Owen, Arwyn Herald Roberts and Gareth Williams

Officers: Sion Huws (Solicitor - Legal Services), Gwenan Mai Roberts (Licensing Manager) and Lowri Haf Evans (Democracy Services Officer)

1. ELECT CHAIR

RESOLVED TO ELECT COUNCILLOR ELFED WILLIAMS AS CHAIR FOR 2023/24.

2. ELECT VICE CHAIR

RESOLVED TO ELECT COUNCILLOR GWYNFOR OWEN AS VICE-CHAIR FOR 2023/24.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Anwen Davies, Alan Jones Evans and Angela Russell.

4. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

The following member declared that he had an interest in relation to the item noted:

Councillor Arwyn Herald Roberts in item 8 on the agenda, as he had a close connection with local taxi companies.

The Member believed it was a prejudicial interest, and withdrew from the meeting during the discussion on the application

5. URGENT ITEMS

None to note

6. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of a meeting of this committee, that took place on 5th December 2022, as a true record.

7. GENERAL LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

Submitted and received, for information, the minutes of the General Licensing Sub-committees held on 13 March 2023, 10 February 2023, 23 January 2023, 14 December 2022, 23 November 2022, 14 November 2022 and 8 November 2022 as true records.

8. PROPOSED TAXI LICENCE FEES 2023/24

Submitted - the report of the Licensing Manager, requesting that the Committee approve the proposed taxi licence fees for 2023/24. Members were reminded that this Committee had resolved back in 2013, that taxi fees would be reviewed annually, in order to fully recover costs of receiving, processing and the administration of licences only. It was highlighted that Gwynedd's fees had not changed since 2019 and although the situation had been reviewed in 2020/21, the Committee decided not to increase the fees because of the impact of the Covid crisis.

It was reported that the Licensing Authority recognised that vehicle maintenance costs, insurance costs and fuel costs had bad increased over the past 18 months, and that the situation had been difficult for the taxi industry as it emerged from the effects of the Covid pandemic.

In the context of the Licensing Unit's costs it was highlighted that inflation, together with factors such as officers' training needs, the costs of advertising and consulting on fee changes, and an increased level of checks required to ensure the suitability of drivers, vehicles and operators were also considerations to increase the costs of providing a taxi licensing service. The need to complete the review of the Combined Taxi Policy was reiterated, which would adopt the recommendations of the Department for Transport's National Statutory Hackney and Private Hire Vehicle Standards; as well as incorporating the proposed far-reaching changes likely to emerge from the Welsh Government's White Paper consultation on how the taxi industry is regulated. Consequently, it was considered that there was no option but to increase the fees to maintain the service that expected by the public and the industry.

It was reported that the income deficit for the different taxi licences varied; depending on the extra effort that takes place in processing applications and verifying compliance and therefore an average increase of 12% was recommended in fee levels subject to consultation with the taxi industry and consultation through public notice.

Members gave thanks for the report.

Matters arising from the ensuing discussion:

- Although increasing any fees was against the grain, costs had to be recovered
- Concern that some companies would cease because of the increase - there was a need to ensure that help was available
- A lack of drivers in rural areas, why did they therefore have to pay the same price as drivers in urban areas
- Some companies ignored the tariff

In response to a question regarding using the proposed substantial increase in the 3-year licence, it was accepted that this was the biggest increase that was recommended due to the work of ensuring that a driver is a fit and proper person (that will also in the future be in line with statutory requirements, including checking

tax payments).

In response to a question regarding why an increase of 12% could not be introduced for all the fees rather than an average percentage, it was noted that the Licensing Unit merely had powers to recover costs and that there were specific factors regarding the process. It was highlighted that a costs exercise had been undertaken for all types of licences to highlight fairness and it was considered that one percentage would not be a fair reflection of the situation.

In response to the comment that some small taxi firms ignored the tariff, it was noted that the Welsh Government's White Paper made the process more complex by introducing two regulatory systems - one for hackney vehicles / taxis and another for private hire vehicles. In response, the need to create one system that would avoid any complexity was noted and to refer that opinion to the Government. The Licensing Manager, who was also Chair of the North Wales Licensing Group, noted that the Group had submitted observations to the recent consultation by the Welsh Government (May 2023) and they were very disappointed with the Welsh Government's decision to continue with two processes.

Councillors were encouraged to refer complaints about any company that did not adhere to the Licensing Unit's fees.

A vote was taken on the proposal to increase the fees

RESOLVED:

To approve the proposal to raise the fees to the recommended level, subject to consultation with the taxi industry and consultation through public notice.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 10.40 am

CHAIRMAN