
GENERAL LICENSING COMMITTEE 25/09/23

Present: Councillor Elfed Williams (Chair)
Councillor Gwynfor Owen (Vice-chair)

Councillors: Anwen Davies, John Brynmor Hughes, Gareth Tudor Jones, Eryl Jones-Williams, Edgar Wyn Owen, Huw Rowlands, Angela Russell, and Gareth Williams.

Officers: Gareth Jones (Assistant Head - Environment), Gwenan Mai Roberts (Licensing Manager) and Lowri Haf Evans (Democracy Services Officer).

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Alan Jones Evans, Annwen Hughes, Linda Ann Jones and Arwyn Herald Roberts.

2. DECLARATION OF PERSONAL INTEREST

No declarations of personal interest were received from any members present.

3. URGENT ITEMS

None to note

4. MINUTES

The Chair signed the minutes of a meeting of this committee, that took place on 12 June 2023, as a true record

5. GENERAL LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

Submitted and received, for information, the minutes of the General Licensing Sub-committees held on 21 April 2023 and 14 July 2023 as true records.

6. PROPOSED TAXI LICENCE FEES 2023/24

A report was submitted requesting the Committee to approve the proposed taxi licence fees for 2023/24. Members were reminded that the Committee's decision on 12 June 2023, was to approve increasing the taxi licence fees subject to a full public consultation, in accordance with the statutory requirements.

It was reported that it was a requirement for the Council to review its fees in respect of taxi licensing (i.e., hackney carriage licences, private hire vehicle licences, private hire operator and driver licences) on a regular basis and in 2013 this Committee resolved that the taxi fees would be reviewed annually.

It was explained that Sections 53 and 70 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, note that fees may be charged at a level sufficient to recover reasonable costs.

- For granting a driver's licence for a hackney or private hire vehicle – costs associated with processing, administration and issuing licences.
- For granting a vehicle and operator's licence – inspection costs, hackney carriage stand, public notices, management and supervision of vehicles and any other costs associated with processing an application.

It was noted that the industry had received a letter outlining the proposed changes to fees and a public notice had appeared in the local press on 20 July 2023. The consultation period expired on 18 August and it was reported that one objection had been received expressing concern that the increase in fees would:

- make things difficult for companies to attract new drivers to apply for taxi operator licences due to the costs involved with the licensing process.
- there were already a shortage of taxis in Pwllheli and Pen Llŷn.
- the industry was continuing to recover their businesses following a significant reduction in income during Covid.
- the costs of the Licensing Unit were likely to have decreased as companies now used the online self-service system to submit applications.

Gratitude was expressed for the report.

In response to a question regarding the operating rights across the County, it was noted that every taxi driver had the right to operate across Gwynedd, however issues / conflict / complaints arose when a taxi operated on another 'local' taxi rank. Outside Gwynedd, it was noted that any company had the right to operate across Counties, however booking was essential.

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 the Welsh Government's statutory requirements, including checking tax payments).

In response to a question regarding how Gwynedd compared with other Councils across North Wales, it was reported that Gwynedd was cheaper than Conwy County Borough Council but more expensive than Cyngor Ynys Môn: on average Gwynedd fees lay mid-table.

In response to a comment that a statutory consultation had been undertaken and although it had been advertised in the Daily Post only one objection had been received, it was reported that the Licensing Unit had communicated with the taxi industry prior to the consultation and several companies by now had accepted that costs were increasing. It was added that the industry itself was increasing their costs.

During the ensuing discussion, the following observations were made by Members:

- A decision had been made during Covid-19 to refuse increasing the fees as a means of protecting the industry; it would be timely to increase the fees now.
- Appreciation of the industry was highlighted for its service during Covid-19.
- There was concern that drivers and taxi companies in Penllyn would be lost due to significant increase in costs.

- Some companies refused short journeys - the fixed rate of 2 miles was unpopular within the industry (although it was aimed at vulnerable / needy persons).
- It had to be ensured that the increase paid the service costs.

It was proposed and seconded to raise the fees

RESOLVED:

That the Committee finally approves the proposal to raise the fees with effect from the 1 October to the recommended level in accordance with the procedure outlined following the public consultation.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am and concluded at 10.30 am

CHAIRMAN