

HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING: LICENCE FEES AND CHARGES 2023/2024

Licensing Committee - 28th September 2022

Report of: Chief Officer, Planning & Regulatory Services

Status: For consideration and decision

Key Decision: Yes

Portfolio Holder: Cllr. Margot McArthur

Contact Officer: Sharon Bamborough Ext. 7325

Recommendation to Licensing Committee:

1. To determine whether or not to increase to the fees and charges in regard to taxi/private hire licensing.

Option 1: to leave fees unchanged (current fees set out at Appendix A)

Option 2: to increase the fees by 5% (a table showing the current and increased fees is attached at Appendix B)

It is the recommendation of the Service that fees should remain at their current levels and not be increased at this time (Option 1).

2. Subject to the decision made above, that the Licensing Committee recommend that the fee levels as set out in Appendix A to the report remain unchanged for 2023/24 or that the fees set out at Appendix B (which have the increase) are appropriate for consultation with the taxi trade.

If, following consultation, (note consultation would only be required if members choose Option 2) there are no adverse comments to the proposed levels the recommendation is that the proposed fees and charges are implemented from 1st April 2023

Reason for recommendation:

- To ensure that the Council complies with its statutory duty and ensure that the 'taxi licensing' service remains self-financing, in accordance with the Council's Service and Budget Plan.
- To allow a longer period of time to assess whether the current fees have achieved the required budgetary income for the current year

Introduction and Background

- 1 The taxi licensing service is required to be self-financing. Fees were substantially reviewed last year and instead of a simply inflationary increase, they were completely re-worked and the increases to fees were substantially more than inflation in several areas. They were based around assumptions of number of applications received.
- 2 Monitoring of income and expenditure has been carried out since the new fees came into effect in April 2022, but it is too soon to establish whether the fees introduced will deliver the desired outcome of delivering the service within budget - in some areas we are achieving the budgeted income but in others we are not. This may fluctuate and change during the remainder of this financial year.
- 3 As we are not in a position to establish whether or not the previous revision of fees has delivered the desired outcome, the service is recommending that the fees remain unchanged for 2023/24 for now. Analysis will be carried out in April 2023 to ascertain whether the 2022/23 fees delivered the budgeted income.
- 4 If however, the committee are of the mind that regardless of the current status a fee increase should be considered as all costs are increasing (due to inflation) - a proposed table of fees which incorporates a 5% increase to the current fees has been produced for the purposes of consultation with the trade.
- 5 All Vehicle Proprietors, Private Hire Operators and Drivers would be emailed to advise them of the proposed fees (or in the case where emails are not available or fail to send, letters will be sent) giving licence holders the opportunity to lodge any comments or objections in writing.
- 6 A notice would be published in a local newspaper, on the Sevenoaks District Council website, and at the Council Offices. This notice will state where objections should be addressed and the end date of the consultation period.
- 7 A consultation period of 28 days from the date on which the notice is published would be held.
- 8 Once the consultation period had expired, if there have been no objections received or those received have subsequently been withdrawn, then the *new* fee structure will take effect from 1st April 2023.
- 9 If objections are received during the consultation period and not withdrawn then this matter, including the objections received, will be brought back before the Licensing Committee for consideration in January 2023.

Other options Considered and/or rejected

If the Licensing Committee were minded not to approve these fees the Council would not be able to meet the Council's Service and Budget Plan or ensure the Taxi Licensing Service was self-financing.

Key Implications

Financial

The cost of licence fees takes into account the need to maintain a ‘self-financing’ position for the service.

Legal Implications and Risk Assessment Statement

Should parts of industry believe the authority’s fees are at a level which is greater than the costs of the statutory functions then it would be open to them to undertake a ‘judicial review proceeding’. Should this arise, the authority would need to evidence how it arrived at the fee levels to demonstrate that they have been calculated on a cost recovery basis only.

Equality Assessment

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

Net Zero Implications

The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the council’s ambition to be Net Zero by 2030. There is no perceived impact regarding either an increase or decrease in carbon emissions in the district, or supporting the resilience of the natural environment.

Appendices

Appendix A - Table of current 2022-2023 fees

Appendix B - Table of possible increased fees for 2023-2024

Background Papers

None

Richard Morris
Chief Officer Planning and Regulatory Services