

Runnymede Borough Council

REGULATORY COMMITTEE

29 January 2009 at 7.40 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors D W Parr (Chairman), R J Edis (Vice-Chairman), Mrs P I Broadhead, Mrs M T Harnden and C Knight.

Members of the Committee absent: None.

Councillor Mrs E Gill also attended

461. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 23 September 2008 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

462. REVENUE ESTIMATES 2009/10

Members considered the draft Revenue Estimates for the services which fell under the remit of the Regulatory Committee, namely Taxi Licensing, other licences issued by Environmental Protection and Public Charitable Collections.

Members were aware that the fees and charges were to an extent under their control and the Council's aim was to achieve full cost recovery for the provision of these services. However, they were limited by the stipulation that local authorities could only provide the service on a break even basis and not make a profit. Thus, having regard to the fees and charges in other local authorities it was agreed that the fees and charges would be increased above inflation to generate an additional £5,900 in income.

With the consent of the Chairman, Chris Andrews of Image Cars, was invited to address the meeting. He requested that the Committee give consideration to freezing the fees and charges payable by the taxi trade in line with the proposal to freeze Hackney Carriage Fares, elsewhere on the Agenda.

Mr Andrews, on behalf of the local taxi trade, considered that in the current economic climate, wherein they had experienced a falling off in business, together with increased fuel prices, the same concession being afforded to residents should be applied to them. He also commented that the budget showed a significant increase in the cost of office accommodation on previous years which he felt was being passed on to the taxi trade.

The Committee reflected on the cost of the new Civic Centre, noting increased capital charges and a higher savings target which was difficult to achieve in Regulatory services.

Officers confirmed that the figure given for the cost of office accommodation appeared artificially low in 2007/08, and was significantly less than its original budget. With the move to the new Civic Centre, accommodation costs had increased and were now based on desk space rather than cellular and team offices, which accounted for the increase in this area.

Officers asserted that the service should be breaking even financially, but that currently it ran at a significant deficit which had to be addressed by higher than inflationary increases in fees and charges. The Committee concurred with this view whilst expressing sympathy for the taxi trade.

The Committee acknowledged that new ways of working had to be given time to settle, but that if concerns were raised in this regard at a forthcoming meeting of the Drivers' Forum they would be considered. Efforts to encourage as many drivers to attend the forum as possible were to be made by both Officers and the trade.

**RESOLVED that –**

- i) the draft Revenue Estimates for 2009/10 be approved as submitted; and**
- ii) the proposed schedules of charges for 2009/10 be approved to be effective either from the first week of April 2009 or 1 April 2009 as appropriate.**

463. HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARE INCREASE 2009 – LOCAL GOVERNMENT (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT 1976

(Ref: Minutes of the Regulatory Committee, January 2008, page 695, para 493)

Members considered a proposal to defer an increase in the fares charged by Hackney Carriage drivers, and Private Hire vehicles fitted with a taxi meter.

Officers had consulted members of the taxi trade in November 2008, and the response then had been that fares should be re-structured and increased. However, at a recent Drivers' Forum, attended by a small number of drivers, a request to freeze the fares had been received and it had been agreed this would be considered by the Committee.

Members recalled that hackney carriage fares were increased on 1 April 2007 by 10%, taking into account the new additional rate of 1¼ for Sundays and late evenings between 2200 hours and midnight, and increased again in April 2008 by 5.5%.

Officers explained that a new structure for Hackney Carriage fares had been welcomed by the taxi trade. This comprised no increase to the initial 'pull off' or 'flag' charge of £3.20, but instead an increase of 5% on subsequent miles travelled from £2 to £2.10 by decreasing the distance covered for each 20p from 161m to approximately 153.3m.

Officers also proposed a similar adjustment to the 'waiting time' charge by increasing the hourly rate from £19.20 to £20.40 or 34p per minute and decreasing the time allowed for each 20p from 37.5 to approximately 35.3 seconds. This equated to an increase of 6.2%.

The Committee agreed that the proposed revised structure for fares was sensible, but that in view of the current economic situation it would be prudent to defer its introduction and any increase in fares until April 2010, subject to further representations being received during 2009/10.

Members commented on the need for the taxi trade to consider having a trade organisation so as to be well represented at the Drivers Forum.

The Committee wished to retain the flexibility to review these fares and the structure during the year, so that changes could be introduced before April 2010 if appropriate.

**RESOLVED that –**

**subject to no further representations being received, the proposed Hackney Carriage Fare Rates as attached at Appendix 'A' be adopted with effect from Thursday 1 April 2010, or an earlier date to be recommended if subsequent representations are received during 2009/10.**

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 8.03 pm)