

Crawley Borough Council

Minutes of Licensing Committee Wednesday 5th November 2008 at 7.38 pm

Present:

Councillor J A Singh (Vice-Chair: *In the Chair*)

Councillors B K Blake, B J Burgess, ALI Burke, L Gilroy, D P Kavanagh,
B McCrow, C J Redmayne, L A Seekings and D J Shreeves.

Officers Present:

Tony Baldock	Group Manager for Food, Licensing and Occupational Health
Dave Packham	Licensing Officer
Chris Pedlow	Democratic Services Officer
Astrid Williams	Lawyer

Also in Attendance:

Mr. M Ali	Vice-Chairman of Crawley Hackney Association
Mr. M Khan	Chairman of Crawley Hackney Association

Apologies for Absence:

Councillors B M Brockwell (Chair), A G Brown, R J Hull, S Kaur and B J Quinn

10. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3rd September 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

11. Members' Disclosure of Interests

The following disclosures of interests were made by Members:-

No disclosures of interests were made.

12. Hackney Carriage Fares, 2008 – 2009.

The Committee considered report ES/206 of the Head of Environmental Services. The Licensing Officer highlighted the key aspects of the report. The Committee were informed of the differences between the two proposed options as defined within the recommendations. The first proposal 2.1.1, as suggested by the Crawley Hackney Association, was to increase the hiring fee to £3.20 from £3.00 for the first 1,759 yards. Then at 1,760 the fee would increase to £3.40, and by 20p per 167 yards, compare to the current 20p per 176 yards.

The alternative proposal, by the Council's Accountancy Services Section, was that the hiring fee also increase to £3.20 from £3.00 for the first 1,759 yards. Then at 1,760 the fee would increase to £3.40, but rather than reducing the yardage it would remain at 176 yards, but the cost per 176 would be 21p from 20p. The Committee were informed that both options before them did equate to the same price increase for the passenger. It was also noted that both proposals (2.1.1. and 2.1.2) before the Committee, had proposed that no increase be made to the 'waiting time', or to the tariff 2 (time and a half) and tariff 3 (double time) respectively.

Councillor Singh then invited the representatives from Crawley Hackney Association to comment on the report. Mr Ali informed the Members that as part of the consultation for the CHA's proposals, the CHA had asked individually each of their Members which they felt was a realistic change to the tariffs. The overall view was that a slight increase to the initial hiring fee and a change to the basic tariff were required, by reducing the yardage distance per meter drop. However the CHA Members also felt that they did not require an increase to tariff 2 (time and a half) and tariff 3 (double time) or the 'waiting time' price. Mr Ali emphasised that the CHA proposals were not the Drivers being 'greedy', but were instead realistic alterations that were required to keep the Drivers in business. It was noted that the Committee were pleased that CHA had sought the views of their Drivers, which the Committee felt had not always occurred previously.

The Committee debated the two options before them, and with both equating to the same rise in cost per journey for the customer, the Committee confirmed that this was a suitable rise. However the Committee was divided over the manner in which the change to the fares should occur. A vote on the options took place and by five to four and one abstention, the Committee agreed recommendation 2.1.1 as the Hackney Carriage Fares 2008-2009.

The Licensing Officer informed the Committee that they also needed to consider recommendation 2.1.3, which proposed the introduction of an emergency fuel surcharge should pump prices reach specified levels. These pump price levels and the level of any surcharge charge would be set by the Committee, if they felt it was necessary. It was noted that an example of a similar scheme, that have been devised by Mid Sussex District Council had been included as Appendix D to the report.

The Committee asked that the Officers to provide them with a brief guide to how in practice a surcharge would be installed, if they did decide upon that option. The Licensing Officer informed Members that the first option would be at the conclusion of the journey; the Driver would be able charge their passenger an additional fee, to that stated on the meter. This would be explained by the Driver showing their passenger a copy of the table of fares which would state the level of the said additional fee. An alternative option would be to have three additional tariffs onto the Hackney carriages meters, which would be possible. If petrol prices rose past the set level, the Drivers would then use those increased tariffs, rather than the basic tariffs. It was noted that the National Price Index would provide the standard as to petrol prices.

Councillor Singh again asked whether the CHA, wished to comment on any potential emergency fuel charge. Mr Ali commented that the concept of a Driver having to charge a fee more than was stated on the meter and shown the table of fares, as justification, would be impractical.

Many of the Members commented that they understood the impracticality of this and as potential customers, being charged a charge that was more than that which was shown on the meter, would not be well received. Members also questioned whether Drivers would want to jump between further tariffs, more than the three they currently use. It was also felt that by having a set of increases on the tariffs on the meter, could lead to some Drivers taking increases into their own hands, without the knowledge of the passenger.

The Committee questioned whether it would be possible to change the delegated powers, to allow either the Head of Environmental Services or the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services, in consultation with the Chair of the Licensing Committee, to charge the Hackney Carriage Fares if petrol prices rose dramatically. In response the Committee was informed that any such change to the scheme of delegation and thus the Constitution would not probably be finalised until the Council in February 2009. The Committee felt this processes was too lengthy.

The Committee discussed the benefits and pitfalls of installing an emergency fuel charge and what would be the most appropriate installation option for any such charge. Through their discussions the Committee then formed a collective view, that if petrol prices rose to a level which the Hackney Carriage Drivers felt required an increase to the tariffs or a surcharge, a proposal should then be made to the Licensing Officers, to review the Council's tariffs. At this point the Committee would then consider their proposals for increasing the tariffs or installing an additional surcharge. However, the Committee felt in the current economic climate it was not suitable to set any levels and install any processes for an emergency fuel charge.

Councillor Singh thanked Mr Ali and Mr Khan for attending the Committee and for their insight and contribution to the meeting.

RESOLVED

1. That the initial hiring amount be increased to £3.20 for the first 1,759 yards from £3.00 with the meter showing £3.40 for a distance of 1,760 yards and that the distance travelled for each subsequent increase of 20p be changed from 176 yards to 167 yards.
2. That no increases be raised to :
 - i) the 'waiting time' charge
 - ii) tariff 2 (time and a half) charge,
 - iii) tariff 3 (double time) charge,
 - iv) to any extra charges shown on the table of fares.
3. That the above charges be incorporated into the Hackney Carriages' table of fares 2008/09.
4. That the Committee grants permission to advertise their decision in the local press and following the advertisement the Committee meet to consider any objection that may be lodged within the specified time period: if no objection is received the Committee approve the proposals with an implementation date set for the Monday 1st December 2008

5. That no emergency fuel surcharge be installed at this time.

13. Closure of Meeting

With the business of the Committee concluded, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.25 p.m.

J A Singh
Chair