

Minutes



OF A MEETING OF THE

Listening Learning Leading

General Licensing Committee

HELD AT 2.00PM ON THURSDAY 4 OCTOBER 2012

AT ABBEY HOUSE, ABINGDON

Present:

Mr M Leonard (Chairman)

Ms J Bland, Mrs P Dawe, Mrs E Gillespie, Mrs P Slatter, Mrs M Turner, Mr D Turner, Mr M Welply

Apologies

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Mrs A Midwinter and Mrs A Purse

Officers

Mr S Culliford, Mr R Draper, Mrs L Hayden, and Mrs M Reed

In attendance

Vale of White Horse District Councillors observing: Councillors Mr J Amys, Mr M Badcock, Mrs M Badcock, Ms C Dickson, Mr A Hayward, Mr D Hoddinott, Mr B Johnston, Mr R Mansfield, Ms J Mayhew-Archer, G Morgan, and Mrs M Tilley

10 members of the public

3. Minutes, 17 May 2012

RESOLVED: To adopt the minutes of the committee meeting held on 17 May 2012 as a correct record and agree that the chairman signs them.

4. Joint licensing policy for hackney carriage and private hire – public participation

Two members of the public had given notice that they wished to address the committee.

Mr David Pryor of Pryor's Taxis in Didcot made a statement generally in support of the proposed policy with the exception of the proposal to introduce a maximum tariff for hackney carriage fees and charges. He believed that taxi proprietors should not

have a tariff imposed on them; they should be able to set their own tariff and display this inside the taxi, and lodge the tariff with the council. Taxi proprietors should be able to charge less than the displayed tariff but not more. The proprietors could be required to give one month's notice before changing their tariff and should have a tariff in place for at least three consecutive months. This would ensure public protection and a free market. He reported that this view was supported by 24 proprietors in the South Oxfordshire district. He believed the consultation feedback was misleading. He was also concerned that since the consultation had closed he had been unable to discuss the emerging draft policy with the officers.

Mr Raleigh Hullock spoke on behalf of the South Oxfordshire Taxi Drivers' Association. He reported that he had only found out about this meeting on 3 October. Generally, he supported the proposed policy but agreed with Mr Pryor's suggestion for proprietors to set their own tariff.

5. Adjournment of the meeting for a joint briefing and discussion with the Vale of White Horse District Council General Licensing Committee.

RESOLVED: To adjourn the meeting to allow the committee to discuss the draft licensing policy for hackney carriage and private hire and accompanying report in conjunction with Vale of White Horse District Council's General Licensing Committee, and appoint Councillor Melinda Tilley, Chairman of that committee, to facilitate those discussions, before reconvening to consider this committee's recommendations.

The meeting was adjourned to allow the two committees to meet together.. The notes of the discussion are appended to these minutes.

6. Joint licensing policy for hackney carriage and private hire

On reconvening, the committee considered the report of the head of legal and democratic services. This set out consultation responses to the draft policy for hackney carriages and private hire, options for various elements of the policy, and a draft policy. The committee was asked to recommend Council to adopt the policy.

The committee accepted almost every recommendation contained in the options paper, except the recommendation to introduce a maximum tariff for hackney carriages. The committee concluded that there should be no maximum tariff for hackney carriages in South Oxfordshire district but that all hackney carriages should be fitted with a meter. Having no maximum tariff would allow open competition and installing meters would allow the public to monitor fares during their journey. The officers asked that the committee set a reasonable timescale to allow proprietors to install meters in their taxis. The committee agreed that meters should be installed in all taxis by 31 July 2013.

RESOLVED: to

- (a) confirm agreement to the recommended actions detailed in the options paper set out in the report, subject to there being no maximum tariff for hackney carriages in South Oxfordshire district but all hackney carriages in the district be fitted with a meter by 31 July 2013;
- (b) authorise the head of legal of democratic services to incorporate the agreed actions within the joint licensing policy for hackney carriage and private hire for recommendation to Council;
- (c) **recommend** Council to
 - (i) adopt the licensing policy for hackney carriage and private hire to come into force on 1 January 2013; and
 - (ii) authorise the head of legal and democratic services in consultation with the chairmen of the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils' General Licensing Committees to make minor administrative amendments to the policy where necessary.

The meeting closed at 4.50pm

Chairman _____

Date

Notes of the informal meeting between the General Licensing Committees of South Oxfordshire District Council and the Vale of White Horse District Council – 4 October 2012

In attendance:

South Oxfordshire District Councillors: Joan Bland, Pat Dawe, Elizabeth Gillespie, Malcolm Leonard, Pearl Slatter, Margaret Turner, and Mike Welply,
Substitute: Councillor David Turner for Councillor Anne Purse

Vale of White Horse District Councillors: Melinda Tilley (Chairman of this informal joint meeting), John Amys, Marilyn Badcock, Mike Badcock, Charlotte Dickson, Anthony Hayward, Dudley Hoddinott, Bob Johnston, Ron Mansfield, Julie Mayhew-Archer, and Gill Morgan.

Officers: Steve Culliford, Robert Draper, Liz Hayden, and Margaret Reed

10 members of the public

Joint licensing policy for hackney carriage and private hire

Councillors from the General Licensing Committees of South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse District Council met informally to discuss the draft policy for hackney carriage and private hire. Councillor Melinda Tilley, chairman of the Vale's committee, chaired the meeting.

Councillors noted that there had been 114 consultation responses to draft policy. These had been analysed and an options paper prepared for councillors to debate the policy elements. In answer to questions from councillors, the officers reported that they had informed consultation respondents of the date, time, and venue of this meeting by email on 27 September.

Councillors considered the options paper, set out in appendix 2 to the committee report. This set out in detail the issues raised in the consultation and made a recommendation on each issue. Councillors supported almost all of the recommendations bar one, that relating to the proposal to introduce a maximum tariff for hackney carriages in South Oxfordshire and retain the tariff system in the Vale.

Officers explained that they recommended introducing a tariff across both districts for public safety reasons. They gave an example of the public disorder problems that occurred at Henley Regatta when the public were trying to hire taxi cabs. This would be overcome by introducing a tariff system that set a maximum fee proprietors could charge. In the Vale, the tariff was displayed in every taxi and was checked when the vehicles were tested.

Over 360 councils across the country operated a hackney carriage tariff scheme. The Vale's existing scheme had a basic two-rate structure (one tariff for daytime, another for the night) but the tariff was in need of review to give more flexibility. Any changes to the tariff would have to be advertised by law and consultation responses sought from the public and the taxi trade. Changes to the tariff would be a cabinet decision, not a decision for the General Licensing Committee. Despite consulting on whether to review the tariff, there had been no changes for four years, even though there had been significant increases in fuel costs.

Some councillors queried the need for a maximum tariff in South Oxfordshire. In answer to a question from a councillor, the officer reported that he had no evidence that a price-fixing cartel existed in the district. Some councillors suggested the council should adopt a scheme similar to the one suggested by Mr Pryor, with proprietors setting their own tariff. However, the officers expressed caution, believing that this would be difficult for the council to manage and enforce, and would result in the need for additional resources. There were over 400 hackney carriages registered in South Oxfordshire.

Some councillors were uneasy about setting a tariff for hackney carriages in South Oxfordshire, believing it would curb free enterprise and would cost the council to administer the scheme.

Vale councillors generally believed that the tariff should be retained in their district but it should be restructured to make it more flexible. However, they did not rule out the possibility of the council removing the tariff following a further consultation.

After a short adjournment, the informal joint meeting continued. Councillors continued to review the other policy options. Councillors agreed with the remaining recommendations but asked that the spoken English test was introduced as soon as possible.

Councillors from the two councils agreed that there was only one area where opinions differed, that relating to hackney carriage tariffs. Councillors agreed to the remaining policy recommendations set out in the options paper.

Councillor Melinda Tilley then closed the informal meeting.