

<b>General Licensing Committee Meeting</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	21st January 2021
<b>Report Title</b>	Review of Taxi Tariff
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Cllr Richard Palmer, Cabinet Member for Communities
<b>SMT Lead</b>	Nick Vickers, Chief Financial Officer
<b>Head of Service</b>	Della Fackrell, Resilience & Licensing Manager
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Christina Hills, Licensing Officer
<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Classification</b>	<b>Open</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That Members determine whether they wish officers to proceed with the process to amend the current maximum scale of fares for licensed hackney carriages operating within the borough (taxi tariff)</li> <li>2. If Members determine that the taxi tariff is to be amended that officers return to a future meeting of the General Licensing Committee so that Members can approve the proposals prior to formal consultation</li> </ol>

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This reports requests Members to consider whether they wish to instruct officers to proceed with the process of proposing amendments to the taxi tariff after taking into account responses received from an initial consultation with the taxi trade to gauge whether there was any support for a change to taxi fares.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 It is at the discretion of the Council as licensing authority to set a meter tariff for licensed hackney carriages if it chooses to do so.
- 2.2 Councils are not obliged to set a maximum fare for their area, they could decide instead to rely on market forces to establish the going rate and at the same time promote competition.
- 2.3 In the past Swale BC has chosen to set a tariff which represents the maximum fee that can be charged. The current tariff became effective on 11<sup>th</sup> August 2018 and is attached as **Appendix I**.

- 2.4 At a meeting of the General Licensing Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2018 when the latest taxi tariff was approved, there was a commitment that Members would review the timescale for future taxi tariff reviews every two years.
- 2.5 The setting of fares applies only to hackney carriages and not to private hire drivers who can charge their own rates as statute allows.
- 2.6 Any driver has the option of charging less than any tariff that is set, as the tariff is the maximum that can be charged but is not obligatory.
- 2.7 Private Hire and Taxi magazine, a monthly magazine for the trade and licensing authorities, regularly publishes a 'league table' of tariffs set by licensing authorities (including Transport for London in relation to "Black Cabs") from the highest to lowest based on the cost of a 2 mile journey. To assist Members the latest figures published on October 2020 relating to all Kent authorities is attached as **Appendix II**.

### **3 Proposals**

- 3.1 Following a consultation with the taxi trade i.e. drivers and operators, there is a need to determine what changes, if any, should be made to the existing taxi tariff.
- 3.2 If Members decide that the current taxi tariff is to be amended, officers will set about the process of revising the fares taking into account the legal requirements in setting a taxi tariff and present their proposals to a future meeting of the General Licensing Committee.

### **4 Alternative Options**

- 4.1 Members could decide that the current taxi tariff is fair and reasonable and to leave it as it is.
- 4.2 Members could decide that the current taxi tariff should be amended.
- 4.3 Members could decide not to set a taxi tariff at all and let hackney carriage drivers set their own fares.

### **5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed**

- 5.1 A consultation exercise of 3 weeks was undertaken with the taxi trade that ran between 13<sup>th</sup> October 2020 and 31<sup>st</sup> October 2020.
- 5.2 The consultation was conducted by providing the taxi trade with a link to a Survey Monkey. The question asked was:
  - Do you think that the taxi tariff should be increased at this time:

- Yes
  - No
- 5.3 The method of consultation was via a Taxi newsletter sent electronically through our database and for those individuals without an email address, by post. In total 350 drivers and operators were notified of this consultation.
- 5.4 A total of 33 responses were received via Survey Monkey, of these the responses were:
- Taxi tariff to be increased – 11  
Leave taxi tariff as it is – 22
- There was also 1 postal vote received that was in favour of an increase to the taxi tariff.
- 5.5 This means that 90% of the taxi trade did not respond.

## 6 Implications

Issue	Implications
Corporate Plan	The service is an important regulatory function undertaken to ensure the safety of the private hire and hackney carriage vehicles used in the Borough and supports the achievement of corporate priorities, including “A council to be proud of”
Financial, Resource and Property	Should Members decide that the taxi tariff should be amended there would be the need for public consultation on the proposals which would be met from within existing licensing budgets.  The cost of re-calibrating individual meters would be met by licensed drivers and operators.
Legal and Statutory	The authority for the Council to fix fares for hackney carriages is given under Section 65 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976. When a Council makes or varies a table of fares (Which may be by time and/or distance) it must publish in one local newspaper a notice setting out the table of fares, or variations to the table, specifying the period (not less than 14 days) within which objections to the table or variations can be made.  A copy of the proposed tariff must be available at the Council’s offices for the public to inspect, free of charge, at all reasonable hours.

	<p>If there are no objections the amended fares come in to effect as specified in the Notice.</p> <p>If there are objections the Council must set a further date, within two months after the first date specified, on which the table is to come into force with or without modification, as decided. Any such modification would be dealt with by the Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities and the Chair of the General Licensing Committee.</p>
Crime and Disorder	There are obvious links to community safety in ensuring an adequate supply of properly licensed taxis as a safe mode of transport for the public, particularly when other public transport is unavailable.
Environmental Sustainability	None identified
Health and Wellbeing	None identified
Risk Management and Health and Safety	An unreasonable increase in the level of fares could be a source of resentment amongst the travelling public. Equally an unreasonably low increase or no increase could be a source of resentment amongst the trade. The current Coronavirus pandemic could enhance these feelings
Equality and Diversity	None identified
Privacy and Data Protection	None identified

## 7 Appendices

7.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix I: Current Swale taxi tariff
- Appendix II: Benchmarking of taxi tariffs within Kent

## 8 Background Papers

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.