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REGULATORY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Thursday, 23 March 2023

Present: Councillor A Hodson (Chair)

Councillors	C O'Hagan	D Burgess-Joyce
	S Bennett	M Collins
	C Davies	L Fraser
	J Hoey	S Williams
	C Jones	C Cooke
	D Kenny	D Mitchell
	M Booth	K Greaney

30 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and those watching the webcast.

31 APOLOGIES

No apologies for absence had been received.

32 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of the Committee were asked to declare any disclosable pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests in connection with any item on the agenda and state the nature of the interest.

No such declarations were made.

33 PUBLIC AND MEMBER QUESTIONS

The Chair reported that no questions, statements or petitions had been received from members of the public or from any Members.

34 MINUTES

Resolved – That the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2023 be approved.

35 MINUTES OF THE REGULATORY PANEL

Resolved – That the accuracy of the minutes of the meetings of the Regulatory Panel held on 13 January and 2 February 2023 be approved.

36 **AMENDMENT TO HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE LICENCE CONDITIONS**

The Director of Law and Governance submitted a report for the Committee to consider an amendment to the Hackney Carriage Vehicle Licence conditions and the Private Hire Vehicle Licence conditions so that the requirement to display a vehicle identification card within a Hackney Carriage Vehicle or Private Hire Vehicle no longer applies with effect from 27 March 2023.

The Licensing Manager reported that it had been identified that the information on the card was not easily accessible to passengers in the rear of Private Hire Vehicles as it was usually displayed on the dashboard of the vehicle. The Licensing Manager further advised that whilst it may be more visible inside a Hackney Carriage Vehicle, details of the licence number of this type of vehicle is also displayed on a light box inside the vehicle and the information identifying the vehicle is replicated on the light box. Members of the Committee were informed that details of both Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles are also displayed on licence plates attached to the vehicle and details of the driver are on the badge worn by the driver and carried within the vehicle.

The Licensing Manager informed Members of the Committee that should the condition be removed this would result in an approximate saving of £2,722 during the financial year 2023/24 which could be taken into account when determining vehicle licence fees.

In response to questions from Members, the Licensing Manager advised that officers had raised the question regarding the necessity to have the window card and following some deliberation it had been considered that there would be no risk to the public in removing the requirement.

Resolved (by assent) – That the Hackney Carriage Vehicle Licence conditions and the Private Hire Vehicle Licence conditions be amended so that the requirement to display a vehicle identification card within a Hackney Carriage Vehicle or Private Hire Vehicle no longer applies with effect from 27 March 2023.

37 **REVIEW OF LICENCE FEES FOR HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE DRIVERS**

The Director of Law and Governance submitted a report requesting that the Committee consider and approve revised fees in respect of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Driver Licences.

The Licensing Manager reported that a significant gap had been identified between the income received from the licence fees and the costs associated with the provision of these statutory functions.

Members were informed that the review had identified that the current application fee did not take into account the full cost of administering the whole application process for Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Driver licences.

The Licensing Manager reported that the fees for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire licensing functions had previously been reviewed on an annual basis and following a review undertaken in March 2019 it had been identified that there had been no reason to amend the fees as the income received had been sufficient to cover the costs. The Committee had therefore not amended the level of fees since 2018. Following the review undertaken in February 2023 it had been identified that in order to recover the costs there was a need to increase the fees as there had been a projected gap of £56,299.00. It had been calculated that the proposed fees as set out in Appendix 2 to the report could generate sufficient income to recover the costs of administering the functions related to Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Driver Licences.

Members discussed the current fees and proposed fees in respect of change of address and replacement licences and raised concerns regarding the significant increase in the fee for new applicants. In response, the Licensing Manager referred to the increase for renewal which would affect current drivers which was from £132 to £187, replacement licences were not frequently requested and were now emailed, therefore the significant increase was the fee for new applicants which was to cover costs which had not been accounted for previously and in effect there was no increase as they are new applications and this was a one off fee for the application process.

In response to concerns that the increase in fees may discourage new applications for drivers and that current drivers may leave, the Licensing Manager advised that this was a risk and would be kept under review and that there had been a reduction in licensed drivers since 2019. The numbers of current Private Hire drivers and Hackney Carriage Drivers were provided which were 1,150 and 275 respectively and within this figure some Hackney Carriage Drivers also held Private Hire Driver licences. It was hoped that the efficient and effective service provided would encourage applicants to come to Wirral and that the fees would be value for money.

Members queried the numbers of drivers currently and prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Licensing Manager advised that some licensed drivers had left, however the new case management system did not provide previous numbers to make a comparison.

The Licensing Manager further confirmed that the fees would be kept under review.

On a motion by Councillor M Collins and seconded by Councillor D Burgess-Joyce, it was -

Resolved – That the licence fees in respect of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Driver Licences be approved as set out in Appendix 2 attached to the report, subject to the amendment of retaining the current £10 fee for replacement licences with effect from 1 April 2023.

38 **THANKS TO COUNCILLOR DAVE MITCHELL**

The Chair expressed his thanks to Councillor Dave Mitchell for his 40 years' service, having been an excellent Councillor for his ward and for his help and contributions to this Committee and the Council.

Councillor Mitchell expressed his thanks to officers and Members of the Committee.