

TO: LICENSING AND SAFETY COMMITTEE
3 February 2022

**Fees for Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles and Operators
(Public Protection Manager)**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consider any relevant matters arising from the statutory 28 day consultation period relating to variations to operators and vehicle licence fees and their impact on the proposed fees which will be recommended to full Council for approval.
- 1.2 To inform Members about comments received outside the scope of the consultation and how they would be dealt with.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Licensing and Safety Committee is asked to:

- 2.1 **NOTE** the comments received during the statutory consultation on variations to operators and vehicle licence fees as set out in Annex B to this report.
- 2.2 **CONSIDER** any amendments to the proposed operators and vehicle licence fees, as set out in Annex A, arising from the consultation.
- 2.3 **RECOMMEND** that Full Council adopt the fees, with or without modification, as part of the annual fee setting process and that these fees come into effect as of the 01 April 2022.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 A revised set of fees were presented to the Licensing and Safety Committee at the 21 October 2021 meeting. The Committee agreed that the fees for Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles and Private Hire Operators be subjected to a twenty eight day statutory consultation period. The Committee also agreed that if objections were received they be considered by the Licensing and Safety Committee and any changes be recommended to full Council for approval.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 It is open to Members to propose an alternative approach to fee setting.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 In accordance with Section 70 (1) of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, the Council is required to undertake a statutory 28 day consultation when variations to operators and vehicle licence fees are proposed.
- 5.2 The proposed fees for 2022/23 were discussed at the Joint Public Protection Committee meeting held on the 13th September 2021. The Joint Public Protection Committee (JPPC) is required by the Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA) that set up the Public Protection Partnership (PPP) shared service to recommend a draft set of fees and

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charges to each of the member Councils. The individual authorities are then required to make their own decisions in relation to the fees.

- 5.3 At the meeting of the Joint Public Protection Committee in December 2017 it was agreed that as a matter of principle that all fees and charges should be set on the basis of full cost recovery. For 2021/22 the full cost of the service, including internal support service re-charges and the current establishment lists were updated which resulted in a new rate of £59 p/h. It is proposed that there will be **NO change** in the hourly rate which will be maintained at £59p/h for 2022/23 despite significant increases in the rate of inflation. Each year officers revisit the time taken to process the various activities associated with areas where fees are charged and these are then factored into the fee setting for the following year.
- 5.4 Bracknell Forest Council's Licensing and Safety Committee considered all the draft fees relating to Licensing at a meeting held on the 21 October 2021. The impact of the Covid pandemic on the trade was reflected in the discussions at this meeting and other informal meetings held with the trade in respect of fees. It was therefore welcomed by the Committee that there had been an overall reduction in a number of these fees. This was due to the fact that the new IT system being implemented in 2022 would allow for significant efficiencies to be made in some areas, and these efficiencies would be passed on to the trade. In addition Members of the taxi trade had fed back that they had concerns about the additional cost of mandatory safeguarding and disability training. This training would be delivered by Officers in the 2022/23 year and the cost would therefore be included in the annual fee.
- 5.5 It should be noted that at the October Taxi Liaison meeting the trade stated that there were a number of fees that they would like officers to revisit to ensure that the time allocations were accurate. The detailed information is set out in Annex C. The trade requested that the following be reconsidered:

Other charges	Published 2021/22 Fee	Proposed 2022/23 Fee	Proposal
Transfer of vehicle to new owner	£118	£118	Reduce to £59
Change of vehicle	£74	£74	Retain at £74
Disclosure and Barring Service Check (DBS)	£67	£94	Retain at £94
Change of vehicle registration	£57	£30 + sticker and licence costs	Retain at £30 + sticker and licence costs
Age of vehicle Inspection – initial & renewal	£59	£59	Retain at £59

- 5.6 The Officers' proposals to retain all but the Transfer of Vehicle to New Owner (which was reduced by an hour) was accepted by Members at the October Licensing and Safety Committee.
- 5.7 The Committee agreed that the fees for Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles and Private Hire Operators be subjected to a twenty eight day statutory consultation period. The consultation took place between the 10 November 2021 and the 08 December 2021. A

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notice was placed in the Bracknell News on the 10 November 2021. The consultation was published on the PPP website and a letter was emailed to all hackney carriage and private hire drivers and private hire operators advising them of the consultation.

- 5.8 The statutory public consultation that the PPP undertook pertained to the following fees only:

Hackney carriage vehicle new / renewal
Private hire vehicle new / renewal
Home to School vehicle new / renewal
Private hire vehicle with dispensation / renewal
Temporary Vehicle Licence (issued up to 3 months Maximum)
Private hire operator licence new/renewal

- 5.9 The Council received two individual responses from members of the trade. The comments and objections are detailed in Annex B and are summarised below. In addition we received 54 identical responses all with the same content albeit that some made reference to a 62 mile journey to Newbury and then, following a dialogue with Officers, replaced that with a reference to a 36 mile round trip to Theale.

Response 1

Raising the fees on operators and drivers in this economic climate is not the right thing to do. Most businesses are struggling prices are going through the roof. Many excellent drivers have found other careers and will not return.

People can no longer afford to take taxis and footfall for taxis is down significantly. I can see the future being very bleak for Bracknell taxi trade. If you increase the licensing fees for operators and drivers businesses will suffer they may even close. I take on board that you are consolidating the fees for the taxi Licence's there is an increase which could push some people over the edge.

Response 2

The prices are increasing on the fees that the council are Charging for the operator license & DBS, it is very hard to make a living things are starting to go slow again, there's not much work left & Uber is killing us. If you can't reduce your prices on these fees I strongly urge you not to put these prices up please as we are struggling

- 5.10 As objections have been received, in accordance with the Act the Council is required to consider relevant objections and set a date on which any variation to the fees, with or without modification, shall come into force.
- 5.11 The Licensing and Safety Committee is asked to note that some of the comments received relate to matters which fall outside of the scope of the statutory consultation. The Licensing and Safety Committee has already considered these fees at the October meeting and agreed to recommend them to the Executive.
- 5.12 The Executive discussed the budget proposals at their meeting on the 14 December 2021 and agreed to formally consult on those proposals. All respondents were informed that they needed to direct their comments to this consultation and were told how to do so.

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- 5.13 The Executive consultation ran from the 15 December 2021 to the 25 January 2022. The responses to that consultation will be summarised in a report to the council's Executive on 8 February 2022. Having considered the responses to the consultation, the Executive will recommend a budget package to Full Council, who meet on 23 February 2022 to agree the final budget and council tax for 2022/23.
- 5.14 In order to consider the comments received in relation to the fees set out in paragraph 5.9 Officers believe that Members need to consider the overall context in which they have been proposed. In terms of background the Licensing and Safety Committee will note that the majority (45/73 or **62%**) of the fees are **proposed to decrease** in 2022/23 for the reasons set out in paragraph 5.4. A further 11% (8/73) of the fees are proposed to stay the same. Only 20 of the 73 fees are proposed to increase. A total of 14 of these 20 fees relate to the renewal of eight or more vehicles in respect of the private hire operator fees. This increase ranges from 25p for eight vehicles to £30.25 for twenty or more vehicles.
- 5.15 Members are asked to note that although the cost of a new drivers licence and home to school licence appear to have increased by £30 and £21 respectively these fees now include the cost of the initial test as well as disability awareness (costs £40) and safeguarding training (cost £25). So in effect the overall net effect is that these fees have decreased by the equivalent of just over half an hour.
- 5.16 The other fees that are due to increase marginally are:

Fee	2021/22	2022/23	Increase
Temporary Vehicle Licence	£232	£236	£4
Driver Licence – Renewal	£271	£272	£1
Conversion of driver licence to another type	£80	£89	£9
Advertising on a Hackney carriage - New	£47	£59	£12
Medical Exemption	£22	£30	£8

- 5.17 The cost of DBS checks have also increased as it is operated on a cost recovery model. The PPP is charged £64 for each check and there is a half hour administration time charged for each check totalling £94. Drivers can also sign up to the DBS Update Service where they can register at a cost of £13 per annum. Time Square is currently not open to the public and drivers would need to make an appointment with PPP officers for any checks to be undertaken in Bracknell. The ability to have checks undertaken in Theale remains as an option for drivers.
- 5.18 Officers recommend that the objections and comments received are considered, however given the small limited increase and the other support already made available to the trade to continue operating, that these fees are not modified. If the Licensing and Safety Committee agree to a modification of what was previously agreed then that will need to be offered as some form of subsidy by the authority and not at the cost to the PPP.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 The relevant legal provisions are contained within the body of the report.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 The financial implications are included within the body of the report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

6.3 There are no implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

6.4 There are no implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

7 CONSULTATION

Statutory consultation on Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles and Private Hire Operators was conducted following the decisions of this Committee.

Background Papers

The Consultation Document

Reports and Minutes from the 21 October 2021 Licensing and Safety Committee

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