

Agenda Item 24.

TITLE	Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licence Fees Consultation Responses Report
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Licensing and Appeals Committee 9 March 2021
WARD	Non-specific
DIRECTOR	Sean Murphy - Public Protection Manager

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To allow Members to consider the responses received during the 28 day statutory consultation period concerning the agreed fees in relation to hackney carriage and private hire licensing. The consultation period ended on 25th February 2021 and the report contains all responses received during this period.

RECOMMENDATION

The consultation responses as set out in Appendix B and C be considered and the Licensing Committee determine any further actions.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

A new set of fees were presented to the Committee at their last meeting, in November 2020, where it was agreed to proceed with the statutory consultation process, with any Objections or observations received to be brought back before the Committee for further consideration.

Background

A new set of fees were presented to the Committee at their last meeting, in November 2020, where it was agreed to proceed with the statutory consultation process, with the objections received to be brought back before the Committee for further consideration. This report details the responses received during this consultation period.

The Executive **and Council** agreed these fees as part of the fee setting process however Members wished to see the responses to the consultation so they may consider them.

The existing and proposed fees can be found at **Appendix A**. it should be noted that the 2020 fees were subject to a £40 subsidy on the agreed fee agreed by Members as part of a 2 year support subsidy to the trade on fees.

The legal requirements in relation to amending fees are set out at section 70 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976. A public notice was published in the Wokingham Paper on 28th January 2021. The consultation period ended on 25th February 2021. In addition a letter was sent to all licensed vehicle owners and private hire

operators, comprising 68 Hackney Carriage proprietors, 126 private hire vehicle proprietors and 34 private hire operators advising them of the consultation. A notice was also placed on the main entrance to Shute End Offices and a consultation document on the Public Protection Partnership website inviting comments.

During the period available for making objections (28 January-25th February), 3 responses were received, all of which were objections to a fee increase. Two of these responses were from individual drivers and the other was said to be on behalf of the remaining Hackney Carriage drivers but did not state who these were, as no names or signatures of agreement were provided, or how many drivers this was made up of. These objections raise points such as how the increases can be justified, especially with the impact of Covid on the trade and lack of any work.

The result of the feedback is that people do not want any increase at all. The full list of objections are detailed in **Appendix B** (summary table) and **Appendix C** (individual responses in full).

The impact of Covid on the trade cannot be underestimated. The breadth covers health implications, concern about future trade as well as financial impacts. The Public Protection Service have taken an approach with all fees that as a service these will be charged in accordance with the Councils overall approach to Covid. For Wokingham Council fees have been charged as set and those businesses affected have the ability to apply for grants and other funding streams as well as requests for payment plans or temporary suspensions.

The fees as agreed at the November 2020 meeting were those being put forward to Executive as part of the Councils budget setting process. Officers recommend that the objections are considered, however given the small limited increase (due to the change in the hourly officer rate) and the other support available to the trade to continue operating, that these are not modified. If the Licensing Committee agree to a modification of what was previously agreed then that will need to be offered as some form of subsidy by the Council.

Analysis of Issues

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

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	No impact	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	No impact	N/A	N/A

Following Financial Year (Year 3)	No impact	N/A	N/A
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Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

There will be a financial implication if Members resolve to change the proposed fees. If fees as proposed are not introduced, this will impact the level of service provided in the Wokingham area as a result of the requirement to achieve cost recovery for the licensing function.

Cross-Council Implications

There are no alternative options, as the consideration of the objections and setting of the fees are legal requirements as outlined above.

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

List of Background Papers

None

Contact Julia O'Brien & Sean Murphy	Service Public Protection Service
Telephone No 01635 519849	Email Sean.murphy@westberks.gov.uk Julia.obrien@westberks.gov.uk
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