

# Agenda Item 7.

**TITLE** Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licence Fees Consultation Responses Report

**FOR CONSIDERATION BY** Licensing and Appeals Committee 23 June 2021

**WARD** Non-Specific

**LEAD OFFICER** Sean Murphy, Public Protection Manager

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

To allow Members to continue the discussion on fees and potential subsidies following the 28 day consultation in relation to hackney carriage and private hire licensing fees in light of the information relating to grants received by the trade requested at the 09 March 2021 meeting.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The information presented to the previous Committee in relation to fee setting be considered alongside information pertaining to grants awarded and Members to determine if they wish to recommend a fee subsidy for 2021/22

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

A new set of fees was presented to the Committee at the 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. This information was presented to Members at the 09 March 2021 meeting.

Members agreed at the March meeting that they would postpone a decision in relation to possible subsidies to licence fees until they would consider details of any grants which were given by the Council to help out licensable businesses during the pandemic period;

## **Background**

A new set of fees were presented to the Committee in November 2020, where it was agreed to proceed with the statutory consultation process, with the objections (of which there were three, two from individual drivers and one purporting to be from the remainder of the trade) received to be brought back to the March 2021 meeting for further consideration. The report discussed at the March 2021 meeting is attached at Appendix 1 and 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.

It was noted that the 2020 fees (set out in Appendix A) 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.

At the March 2021 meeting Members raised concerns about the impact that the Covid pandemic had had on the trade. Anecdotal information suggested that they had lost around 75% of their income during the previous financial year. There was still some uncertainty about when the trade would start to recover and how much of the trade would return.

Any assistance to the trade in terms of their fees had to be balanced against the decision made by the Joint Public Protection Committee to set the fees in the context of a full cost recovery model. Members stated that before they could make any decisions about support being offered to the trade in terms of their fees they needed know how much support they had already received from the Council in the form of grants.

The Income Payments and Recovery Team have confirmed that 98 out of the 546 businesses Wokingham Borough Council have paid grants to are from the taxi trade. The payments they would have received related to discretionary grants (Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG)) and were paid in accordance with the Council's agreed policy. The ARG grant was funded by Central Government but administered by WBC. The ARG funding had to be used across Financial Years 2020/21 and 2021/22. Wokingham Borough Council was originally awarded £3.4m and has since been awarded a further £1.5m as an additional ARG top up. The criteria, timescales and level of payments received are set out in Appendix 2 to this report.

Members are also asked to note that the Public Protection Service also engaged, on a temporary basis, two Licensing Liaison Officers to act as conduit between the trade and PPP and they will be providing additional support to the trade during the period of restriction easing. Covid related work will be funded from grant funding. This service was put in place effective from the 1<sup>st</sup> June 2021.

## **Looking Ahead**

With the decision of Wokingham Borough Council to leave the shared service the fee setting process for 2022/23 will be overseen by the Wokingham directly rather than through the Joint Committee process.

## Analysis of Issues

Members will need to consider what subsidies, if any, they are willing to grant to the trade in light of grant funding awarded to them. The ARG grant funding scheme is now closed.

### FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	To be determined dependant on subsidy	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

#### 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. If Members are minded to introduce a subsidy this would have to be met from within existing corporate budgets.

#### Cross-Council Implications

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

#### Public Sector Equality Duty

Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.

None

#### List of Background Papers

Section 70 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

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