

GENERAL LICENSING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the General Licensing Committee of the Bolsover District Council held in the Council Chamber, The Arc, Clowne on Thursday, 13th March 2025 at 10:00 hours.

PRESENT:-

Members:-

Councillor Emma Stevenson in the Chair

Councillors Amanda Davis (Vice-Chair), David Bennett, Mary Dooley, Jeanne Raspin and Rita Turner.

Officers:- Jim Fieldsend (Director of Governance and Legal Services & Monitoring Officer), Ken Eastwood (Joint Assistant Director of Environmental Health), Charmaine Terry (Environmental Health Team Manager (Licensing)), Angelika Kaufhold (Governance and Civic Manager) and Matthew Kerry (Governance and Civic Officer).

Also in attendance at the meeting, observing, were Councillors Rob Hiney-Saunders, Portfolio Holder for the Environment, and Cathy Jeffery, Junior Portfolio Holder for Partnerships, Health and Wellbeing.

GLC11-24/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors Anne Clarke, Will Fletcher and Ashley Taylor.

GLC12-24/25 URGENT ITEMS OF BUSINESS

There were no urgent items of business to be considered.

GLC13-24/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

GLC14-24/25 REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S TAXI LICENSING FEES UNDER THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT 1976

The Committee was adjourned at 10:02 hours for Members to review the supplementary agenda. The Committee was reconvened at 10:08 hours.

The Environmental Health Team Manager presented the report to the Committee.

The following items were discussed:

- the number of drivers licenced by North East Derbyshire District Council (fluctuated regularly – currently 190);

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- the number of drivers licenced by the Council (same applied – currently 100);
- the calculation of fees (the employed methodology was complex but widely used – it had been approved by the Council's Section 151 Officer);
- the possibility of the Council's own fees diverging with those of North East Derbyshire District Council's (the cost to the Council's licenced drivers would increase – Officers confirmed the Council's licenced drivers were not subsidising those licenced by North East Derbyshire District Council);
- the number of licenced drivers who had left after the introduction of the CCTV Policy (the number of drivers had reduced, but the impact of COVID-19 on the sector and drivers choosing not to renew licences meant the number of licenced drivers leaving due to the CCTV Policy was not known);
- Licensing would work with other departments to advertise / promote the service (to increase licenced driver numbers);
- the CCTV Policy at North East Derbyshire District Council (both authorities had the same policy);
- the possible 20% VAT on private hire driver following the legislative change in London (an increase outside the capital could take place from summer 2025 – a review of fees may be needed to ensure affordability);
- the option of creating taxi ranks in urban areas (there was no demand from the sector, the rural nature of the District did not suit taxi ranks, it would prevent private hire pickups, and there was free parking across the District);
- the Officer time for handling work (the time it took to handle certain work had been conservatively worked out, resulting in the proposed fees to avoid Council tax payers subsidising licenced drivers);
- the ability of licenced drivers to apply for a licence at another local authority but continue to operate in the District (the Taxi Licensing: Deregulation Act 2015 permitted this, leading to Wolverhampton City Council having 20% of all taxi licensing business);
- the option of advertising a true breakdown of fees in comparison with Wolverhampton City Council (the Council's fees covered multiple services in one payment while Wolverhampton City Council charged extra 'hidden' services, e.g., an extra £125 for a Right to Work check – the Licensing Team would investigate advertising true fee comparisons);
- the current annual deficit of running the service offset by Council tax payers (the average annual deficit was approximately £27,957);
- the support the sector received during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic (the Business Grants provided by the UK National Government);
- the continual efficiency savings made by the Licensing Team;
- the availability of Licensing Officers at The Arc, Clowne (Officers were present at times on site for 1-2 days a week, and while also attending North East Derbyshire District Council, site inspections, operator visits, and / or working from home – it was stressed Officers remained contactable via phone / email during work hours and an introduction session could be provided for Members to meet the Officers);
- the requirement of 6 month vehicle inspections (the last set of inspections resulted in a 10% vehicle failure rate);
- the deficit to the Council with the gradual increase of proposed fees (£4,366.50 for financial year 2025/26, £960.52 for financial year 2026/27);

Members expressed concern on the lack of public transport in the District and the need to maintain and grow the number of licenced drivers, along with keeping fares affordable.

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Officers would provide the full methodology used to calculate fees and explain it to Members post meeting.

Moved by Councillor Amanda Davis and seconded by Councillor David Bennett

RESOLVED that the: 1) Committee considers the responses to the consultation and the Officer comments and explanations;

- 2) Committee approves the fees as advertised subject to an incremental implementation for any increased fees (applying a 66.66% (two thirds) reduction to the increase in the financial year 2025/26, and a 33.33% (one third) reduction to the increase in 2026/27, subject to further review).

The Chair thanked all in attendance for their time and for the Licensing Officers in providing answers to Members' questions.

A Member echoed these sentiments and thanked the Chair, Vice Chair and all Officers present for the constructive meeting.

The meeting concluded at 11:44 hours.