

# Somerset West and Taunton Council

## Executive – 19 January 2022

### Proposal to increase the maximum hackney carriage fares

This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Andrew Sully

Report Author: John Rendell, Licensing Manager

#### 1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 Section 65 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 gives the Council the power to fix the fares that hackney carriage vehicles (more commonly referred to as taxis) may charge for distance and time within the district.
- 1.2 Objections have been received from members of the public in relation to a proposal to introduce a new 'table' of taxi fares, which would see the price of taxi journeys increase for the first time in over nine years. The Executive must consider whether to adopt the proposed table of fares, with or without modifications.

#### 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Executive adopt the table of proposed fares attached at **Appendix 1**, with or without modifications, so that they may come into effect on the 6<sup>th</sup> of February 2022.

#### 3 Risk Assessment

- 3.1 The contents of this report do not relate to any of the risks identified in the Corporate Risk Register.

#### 4 Background and Full details of the Report

- 4.1 The cost of using a 'taxi' generally depends on when and how far a person travels. The total cost of using a taxi is referred to as a 'fare' and is calculated on an electronic meter installed in the vehicle where it can be easily seen by passengers.
- 4.2 A taxi driver can charge anything up to, but not more than, the maximum fares set by a council. Taxi drivers licensed by Somerset West and Taunton (SWT) must, as a condition of their licence, use their taxi meter for every journey to help demonstrate that the correct fares are being charged, which is especially important when a customer has asked for and agreed a fare upfront.

4.3 Since its formation, SWT has not yet created a single table of fares. There are two tables of fares currently in operation which apply to the two former districts of Taunton Deane and West Somerset. These tables have not changed since 2010 and 2011 respectively. They are shown in **Appendix 2**.

4.4 As of the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2021, the Taunton Deane fares were ranked 151<sup>st</sup> out of 364 in the [‘league table’ of UK hackney carriage fares](#) published by trade magazine Private Hire and Taxi Monthly, with the West Somerset fares being rated at 237<sup>th</sup>. The league table is ranked using the cost of a two mile journey and is updated monthly. Here is how the Somerset District Councils compare according to the magazine league table, ranked from most expensive to cheapest:

	<b>Authority</b>	<b>Price of a 2-mile journey</b>	<b>Last increase</b>	<b>League table position</b>
1.	Mendip	£6.80	Jan 2019	49
2.	Sedgemoor	£6.80	Nov 2019	52
3.	South Somerset	£6.50	2016	88
4.	SWT – Taunton Deane	£6.20	Nov 2010	151
5.	SWT – West Somerset	£5.80	Dec 2011	237

4.5 The current proposal to vary the existing table of fares, attached at **Appendix 1**, came from a formal request made by a local taxi business on the 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2021. The reasons for the request given were:

- Inflation/cost increases.
- VAT increase, from 17.5% to 20% in 2011.
- Lack of drivers entering the trade.
- Minimum wage in 2010 was £5.93, whereas the minimum living wage is currently £8.91 (an increase of 50%).
- As a rural area and, unlike cities and large towns, there is more ‘dead mileage’ i.e. the driver is statistically less likely to pick up another fare nearby in sparsely populated areas.

4.6 According to [charts published by the RAC Foundation](#), using data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the cost of living has increased by 30.82% in the last 10 years. General motoring costs have risen by 22.59%.

4.7 [The RAC has also charted fuel prices](#) over the last 10 years. The price has fluctuated but as of October 2021, was at a record high, with unleaded 147.90 pence per litre and diesel 144.17p.

4.8 Were the table of fares proposed at Appendix 1 to be adopted, SWT would become the most expensive district in Somerset:

	<b>Authority</b>	<b>Price of a 2 mile journey</b>	<b>League table position</b>
1.	SWT	£7.20	Between 17 and 22
2.	Mendip	£6.80	49
3.	Sedgemoor	£6.80	52
4.	South Somerset	£6.50	88

4.9 Naturally, those rankings are subject to change and it should be noted that Mendip District Council have proposed a further increase to their current fares. Adopting the proposed fares would see SWT on a par with Bath & North East Somerset.

4.10 Attached at **Appendix 3** is a table showing some examples of typical journeys, with the current cost and cost if the table of fares was increased. Please note that these fares do not include any waiting time.

4.11 To fulfil the Council's obligations under Section 65 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, a public consultation was carried out between the 18<sup>th</sup> of November and 6<sup>th</sup> of December, slightly more than the minimum 14 days required. Notice of the consultation was dutifully published in the Somerset County Gazette and the West Somerset Free press, as well as displayed at Deane House and West Somerset House. Beyond that, details of the consultation were also published on the Council's website, along with the facility to submit objections electronically.

4.12 Advanced notice of the proposal was sent via email to all hackney carriage and private hire driver, vehicle and operator licence holders on the 16<sup>th</sup> of November.

4.13 8 objections were received during the consultation; see **Appendix 4**. The majority of objections raise concerns about the impact on the public in the former West Somerset district area in particular (where the increase would effectively be greater), given the rural nature of the area and limited access to other forms of public transport.

## **5 Links to Corporate Strategy**

5.1 One of the objectives in the Council's Corporate Strategy is to 'Support the delivery of strong sustainable transport infrastructure links including greater provision of public transport across the district, as well as solutions which remove barriers to people using public transport to access work, training and leisure opportunities.'

5.2 The Council has a certain balance to strike if it fixes the fares that hackney carriages charge. If those fares are set too high, then it is no longer affordable for many of the people who rely on them in some way or another. If those fares are set too low, drivers and operators will struggle which, in turn, would eventually negatively impact on the availability of taxis in the local area.

## **6 Finance / Resource Implications**

6.1 There are no finance or resource implications.

## **7 Legal Implications**

- 7.1 The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 requires that a council considers any objections against a proposed table of taxi fares and, within two months from the end of the consultation period, sets a date by which the table of fares will come into effect, with or without modifications.
- 7.2 If the council is to adopt the proposed table of fares, or modify it, it must decide and set a date by which they are to come into effect that is no later than the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 2022.

## **8 Climate and Sustainability Implications**

- 8.1 There are no climate and sustainability implications.

## **9 Safeguarding and/or Community Safety Implications**

- 9.1 Taxis play a vital role in the night-time economy by helping people to get home safely. A reduction in the availability of taxis in the local area would be particularly harmful to the safety of the public during the hours that the night time economy is active.

## **10 Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 10.1 There are a number of protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act 2010, which are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and members need to demonstrate that they have consciously thought about the three aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty as part of the decision-making process. The three aims the authority must have due regard for are:
- The eliminate of discrimination, harassment, victimisation.
  - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share them.
  - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share them.

- 10.2 An equality impact assessment has been carried out; attached as **Appendix 5**.

- 10.3 The assessment identified that the proposal to increase taxi fares could have a negative impact on protected characteristic groups identified the Equality Act and a mixture of negative and neutral impacts on protected characteristics which have been adopted locally. Failure to adopt the proposed table of fares (or modify it) may ultimately lead to a reduction in the availability of taxis which, in turn, would have a negative impact on protected groups.

## **11 Social Value Implications**

- 11.1 As this report does not relate to the procurement of any services or products, no social value implications were identified.

## 12 Partnership Implications

12.1 No partnership implications were identified.

## 13 Health and Wellbeing Implications

13.1 Through effective regulation, confidence in licensed premises and activities can be maintained, helping communities to thrive.

## 14 Asset Management Implications

14.1 No asset management implications were identified.

## 15 Data Protection Implications

15.1 No data protection implications were identified.

## 16 Consultation Implications

16.1 A public consultation was carried out and advertised in accordance with legislative requirements. Furthermore, advanced notice was given to all relevant licence holders.

## 17 Scrutiny Comments / Recommendation(s)

17.1 As this is a report for the Executive, there are no scrutiny comments or recommendations.

### Democratic Path:

- **Scrutiny / Corporate Governance or Audit Committees – No**
- **Cabinet/Executive – Yes**
- **Full Council – No**

Reporting Frequency:  Once only

### List of Appendices

Appendix 1	Proposed table of hackney carriage fares
Appendix 2	Current tables of hackney carriage fares
Appendix 3	Comparison of current and proposed fares
Appendix 4	Objections
Appendix 5	Equality impact assessment

### Contact Officers

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