

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Licensing and Enforcement Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 3 June 2025

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 1.02 pm and ended at 2.22 pm

1 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 April 2025 were agreed and signed as a true record.

2 Declarations of interest

Minute 6. Hackney carriage fare setting procedure.

Councillor Steve Gazzard, Affects Non-registerable Interest, The Councillor is a regular taxi user.

Minute 6. Hackney carriage fare setting procedure.

Councillor Tony McCollum, Affects Non-registerable Interest, The Councillor is a member of Honiton Town Council and a Honiton taxi proprietor was present at the meeting.

3 Public Speaking

The Licensing Manager read out a statement on behalf of Mr Adrian Phillips, proprietor of Millstream Taxis, Honiton, who was present at the meeting.

The statement began by thanking all those in attendance. Mr Phillips advised that the Exmouth area is very different from Honiton as it includes Sandy Bay Holiday Park, 33% of East Devon's population and has a lot less dead mileage compared with Honiton. It was noted that the survey had received a poor return as people do not want to share personal details. Following recent wage increases, Mr Phillips had to find approximately £200 a week more as garages have also increased their labour charges and Millstream Taxis does not have its own mechanic. 27 years ago, UK wages were at £3.25 per hour, now £12.21 per hour, an increase of £8.96 per hour.

In 1998 the fare tariff started at £1.40 and is now £4.40, an increase of £3.00, so the wages and fare tariffs do not compare fairly. As a company, Millstream Taxis pays 20% VAT, whereas a sole trading taxi driver has a VAT threshold of £90,000.

Mr Phillips invited any member of the Committee to spend time with his company to see the service provided. If there was no increase in the fare tariff as soon as possible, the business would have to close. For some elderly customers, the taxi drivers were the only people they see once a week. Mr Phillips, suffering ill-health through stress, wished to continue to serve the Honiton community where he has lived and worked all his life.

4 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

5 **Confidential/exempt item(s)**

There were no confidential / exempt items.

6 **Hackney carriage fare setting procedure**

The Licensing Officer presented the report which set out the results of a consultation with East Devon hackney carriage proprietors and drivers about the costs of running a hackney carriage vehicle in the district. The Committee was asked to determine the next steps to be taken in the review of the hackney carriage fare setting procedure.

The Licensing Officer set out the various ways in which Officers had tried to increase participation in the consultation, however, only six responses had been received from the approximately 135 hackney carriage proprietors and drivers in the District. The report set out the responses to the survey and additional feedback received either verbally, or by email.

In response to a question on Local Government Reorganisation, the Licensing Officer advised that the Government would be consulting on making local transport authorities responsible for taxi licensing. The consultation had not yet been launched and it was unclear at this stage what the potential changes would mean for the Council.

The Committee thanked the Officers for their hard work in undertaking the fare setting procedure consultation and noted the disappointing level of response. Discussion and responses to questions from Councillors included the following points:

- Councillors had also been involved in speaking to taxi drivers and handing out paper copies of the consultation in order to encourage participation and make it easier for drivers to respond.
- The survey could be made live again so as to continue to collect the data needed, however, providing data on running costs could not be made a mandatory requirement for the granting of a taxi licence.
- A lot of work had gone into producing the survey which was based on the tried and tested Guildford methodology. Changing or simplifying the data requested was not an option as this would depart from the methodology and so would not have been tested through the legal system.
- Should the Committee decide not to proceed with the Guildford method, it would need to decide whether or not to review the fare tariff in the current year.
- The taxi trade was aware that they did not have to charge the maximum fare tariffs, however, Officers advised that feedback from the trade showed that it would be difficult to charge lower fares as this would lead to inconsistency and confusion.
- Officers advised that it would be possible to use national average data for previous years for the Guildford method, but a very small change could drastically impact the resulting figures. The amount of dead mileage across the District varied hugely between urban and rural areas, and using national average data would only result in very rough estimates which did not reflect the situation in East Devon.
- It was suggested that taxi fares could be reviewed every 3 years and increased in line with inflation.
- Increases in line with inflation would not result in accurate figures and would not necessarily be relevant to the taxi trade.
- There was discussion as to whether the data for the East Devon taxi trade could be obtained from other sources such as HMRC. Officers would look into whether this would be possible.
- Officers had tried to provide reassurance that the figures would only be used for the survey and would be completely anonymous.

- Officers advised that a significant proportion of the taxi trade was content with the current level of fare tariffs and did not want an increase.
- With regard to the original implementation of the method by Guildford Borough Council, it was noted that the Judge in the Judicial Review had been satisfied that the Council had used its best endeavours to obtain the necessary data, despite the low response. The Guildford method was therefore now a tried and tested, clear and transparent methodology.
- Past East Devon fare increases had been driven by requests from the taxi trade, with the previous increase coming into effect in June 2024. The possible introduction of the Guildford Method aimed to achieve a more regular and proactive review, rather than a reactive review.
- A review using the current method could be undertaken this year. This would take into account the Consumer Prices Index, fuel costs and increase in national minimum wage. Options could be brought to a future Committee meeting. The taxi trade would then have the cost of travelling to the meter fitters and recalibrating meters.
- It was noted that the Committee had sought to introduce an accurate and consistent method of reviewing taxi fares but that the taxi trade had not responded.

IT WAS RESOLVED

To proceed no further with the drafting of a hackney carriage fare setting procedure and review the hackney carriage table of maximum fares for 2025 using existing methodology, but with a concerted effort to continue to collect trade data over the next twelve months, with a view to further discussion of the Guildford method by the Committee in twelve months' time.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

B Bailey
I Barlow
K Bloxham (Vice-Chair)
M Chapman
O Davey
T Dumper
S Gazzard
Y Levine
T McCollum
C Nicholas
M Rixson
S Westerman
J Whibley (Chair)

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

Officers in attendance:

Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Phillippa Norsworthy, Licensing Manager
Giles Salter, Solicitor
Emily Westlake, Licensing Officer

Councillor apologies:

P Fernley

Chair

Date: