

## TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE FEE CONSULTATION MEETING HELD ON TEAMS 18<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER AT 11AM

Present: Tony Cobden  
Jamie Livermore  
Carolyn Forster  
Brian Stuart  
Representative from Audley End Chauffeurs (AEC)  
Representative from 24 x 7 Ltd (24x7)  
Angela Chapman

**TC** welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the agenda. It was explained that the meeting followed submission to the L&EH Committee requesting approval for proposed fees to go to public consultation. The agreed consultation ran for 4 weeks and concluded on 5<sup>th</sup> December. This meeting while falling outside of the formal consultation period had been offered to provide opportunity for face to face discussion as it was essential that any engagement is meaningful. It was stated that any issues raised would still be captured and included as an item for Member information in the final report to be submitted on 21 January 25.

**BS** outlined that a review of tasks had taken place for the processing and issuing of licences and related compliance and that the team had been asked to do timings for tasks undertaken and then an average of those timings was used. The costs are the made up of staff hourly rate, pension/NI, management time plus overheads (ICT/HR). The labour costs and materials (plate/bracket etc) are added together to reach the final fee cost.

**JL** added further explanation of how the timings were gathered and confirmed that a vehicle renewal process has been proposed which attracts a lower fee because brackets and door signs are not going to be issued on renewal. JL also advised that the cost of a vehicle transfer has had a significant decrease due to a likely previous underappreciation on the true costing of the process, and that a small number of around 20-30 transfer applications had been identified over the past few years as possibly being overcharged. He confirmed that refunds will be issued to anyone affected.

**AEC** asked about the fare tariff increase proposal.

**TC** explained that this is a separate procedure from the purposes of this meeting, and JL summarised that this would be going to Committee in January. JL will issue correspondence to the taxi trade regarding the consultation process.

**24x7** expressed dissatisfaction with the report and claims that it is not transparent enough, and referred to the expectation of a full breakdown of accounts as per previously agreed by the Council following the successful challenge a number of years ago.

**BS** explained that the issue was from around 8 years ago and the Council disclosed full account breakdown in the future as a result, however the process has now been simplified and the report showed detailed information.

**24x7** asked for sight of the accounts and claims that what was promised previously has not been delivered and that transparency has been lost.

**TC** explained that the agreement related to a previous administration, and he had never been sighted on what had been formally agreed. His understanding though was that it had been a mechanism to provide reassurance to the trade following a successful challenge to the historic fee setting process. He requested AM put in writing the specific areas that the information was lacking which could then be considered by officers.

**CF** explained that the audit procedure has been updated and that the change reflected what the external auditors expect. CF went on to name a few fees which have gone down and only a few have increased.

**24x7** felt that there was no transparency and that the trade felt 'ripped off'. He requested a breakdown of all the figures and referred to the costs for a man at the dump previously being hidden in the licence fees.

**TC** reassured him that there is nothing like that included in the fees now and confirmed that he was unaware of any formal commitment to go through the accounts in fine detail in perpetuity. If the trade wish to raise a specific challenge, then we would provide information in response.

**CF** mentioned that staff retention and more efficiency has helped decrease the fees.

**AEC** asked for clarification of the refunds being issued against the vehicle transfers.

**TC** explained that there had been an overestimation of the costs involved in a minor area of licensing involving a small number of applications but having been identified as part of the 25/26 fee setting process it was correct to issue refunds to the small number of people affected.

**24x7** claimed money 'stolen' from the trade amounted to over £1m and stated if this matter was not resolved he would consider moving his company from Uttlesford and or seeking legal advice.

**TC** explained that his reasons for not agreeing to the request was based on whether such detail was necessary when the historic shortcomings had been addressed. The fee setting process was in his opinion was already sufficiently open and transparent and an agreement to provide additional significant officer time to support such a presentation, with the trade meeting with the accountant and senior officers to go through line by line, would only serve to add additional recoverable cost and increase the fees unnecessarily.

**TC** stated to progress this matter it would be best for AM to put in writing his precise concerns which would be considered by officers and then presented to Councillors for a decision on what format fee presentation to the Trade should take. This would create a formally agreed framework which would be adhered to in the future and minimise the need for repeated discussions on this issue.

**CF** asked if there was a formal trade association.

**TC** clarified that while ULODA is in existence, it isn't currently operational due to the personal circumstances of members.

**TC** added that he does understand the situation and that a point of reference is required to move forward. TC thanked everyone for attending.

**CF** thanked the trade for their feedback.

**TC** summarised actions arising

**JL** will submit a formal request for HC fee review and wait for the consultation.

**24x7** to liaise with JL and provide his written request detailing specific reprints of concern which will then be presented to Councillors for future consideration.

Meeting ended at 11.40am.