

MANAGEMENT TEAM

02 December 2020

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR [OPERATIONS AND DELIVERY]

A.3 Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing –

Renewal fee proposal to pay in two instalments

(Report prepared by Karen Townshend)

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

Management Team is asked to consider whether it is reasonable to allow the annual renewal fee of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles to be completed in two instalments, alongside the existing option of paying the renewal with a single payment.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Management Team is asked to consider and determine a request submitted by Mr Colin Bennet, for the Council to consider introducing the option of paying the annual renewal fee in two instalments, alongside the existing option of paying the renewal with a single payment. This is in order to reduce the financial burden that many drivers and operators are facing during the COVID -19 pandemic. It is considered that it would be reasonable for this instalment process to remain in place for a period of one year after the conclusion of the Emergency Period set by Government.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

(a) That an instalment payment process is introduced for the annual renewal fee of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles as set out in this report and with immediate effect

(b) Subject to (a) being approved that the option of instalment payments of the annual renewal fee should continue until one calendar year after the date that the current Emergency period ceases at which point the decision will be reviewed.

PART 2 – IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION

DELIVERING PRIORITIES

The introduction of an instalment payment process for the annual renewal fee of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles, would considerably ease the financial burden that many drivers and operators are currently faced with due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The industry plays an integral part in the running of what is a growing and inclusive economy within the District, as well as being a vital support for those residents requiring transport, particularly vulnerable residents. However, due to the lockdown restrictions of the pandemic that have been in place numerous times since Mar 2020, drivers and operators have seen the requirement of their services decrease significantly, whilst still being required to provide this valuable service. This initiative would support the sustainability and subsequent growth of the taxi trade in the District which as a trade in usual circumstances sustains large direct and indirect employment, and by allowing drivers and/or operators to pay vehicle licence renewal fees in two instalments may go some way to supporting small businesses.

FINANCE, OTHER RESOURCES AND RISK

Finance and other resources

Should a decision be made to allow an instalment payment system, the impact on the Licensing budget is deemed to be low risk. Additional Officer time would be required for the administration, but this can be met within the Hackney Carriage revenue budget for 2020/2021.

Risk

There is a risk that if this proposal is not considered and subsequently agreed, that the District will lose Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles, drivers and operators, as they simply will not be able to meet the renewal fee in a single payment, subsequently imposing a financial pressure upon themselves and their businesses.

LEGAL

The function of considering and determining matters relating to payment plans is delegated to Officers within the constitutions under Para 4.4.1 (8) Part 3.4 – All Assistant Directors, in consultation with the relevant

Portfolio Holder, Management Team Member and the Assistant Director (Finance & IT), are authorised to decide the level of the annual discretionary fees and charges for their service (including any in-year changes that may be required) for inclusion within the Council's corporate schedule of fees and charges.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Consideration has been given to the implications of the proposed decision in respect of the following and any significant issues are set out below.

Crime and Disorder / Equality and Diversity / Consultation/Public Engagement.

CRIME AND DISORDER

The risk of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles not being fully licensed by the second instalment of payment not being met has been considered. To minimise this potential problem, it has been suggested that upon renewal with the first instalment payment, that a licence plate is issued with a three month expiry date. Vehicles must legally be licensed for a period of one year unless a temporary vehicle (insurance vehicle). Therefore drivers and operators will be required to meet the second instalment and will then be issued with a further licence plate for the remainder of the annual licence period.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

There are no Equality and Diversity implications.

AREA/WARDS AFFECTED

All

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT / CONSULTATION

As this is not a change to policy or fees and charges, and simply provides an alternative option for payment, public consultation is not required.

AREA / WARDS AFFECTED

All wards

PART 3 – SUPPORTING INFORMATION

BACKGROUND

The taxi trade, along with many businesses throughout the District and across the country, has found itself a casualty of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting restrictions placed upon people and businesses. This is due to multiple factors, including lockdown measures, which has meant that members of the public have not been able to attend high street shops or access the night time economy including pubs, restaurants, nightclubs and other entertainment venues. This has caused significant financial hardship for the taxi trade despite being an essential transport service for the District and especially essential for vulnerable residents. It is vital that the taxi trade be able to continue to operate, and in order to do so vehicles and drivers must be properly licensed. Without the continuation of the services that the trade offer, many residents would not be able to attend appointments such as medical and welfare appointments, resulting in a very detrimental effect on the health and well-being of our society, along with such basic needs as grocery shopping.

In the future when businesses such as retailers and the night time economy are able to resume normal trading, it is essential that the taxi trade is able to meet the demand of conveying passengers to utilise these businesses in order to support the survival of the District's economy.

If drivers and operators are not able to meet the demand of the annual renewal fee, it would force many into unemployment in an area which already has a high proportion of unemployed people.

Management Team may wish to consider whether it is reasonable to allow the introduction of a instalment payment system, consisting of two payments separated by a three month period, in order to meet the annual renewal fee of £334, resulting in two payments of £167, to start with immediate effect and to remain in place for a period of one year after the conclusion of the Emergency period set by Government.

CURRENT POSITION

There is nothing in the legislation governing the licensing of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles that restricts the introduction of an instalment payment system for a limited period. It is suggested that this period be for twenty four months.

The Town Police Clauses Act 1847 states the following:

Section 43 Licence to be in force for one year only

Every licence so to be granted shall be under the common seal of the commissioners, if incorporated, or, if not incorporated, shall be signed by two or more of the commissioners, and shall not include more than one carriage so licensed, and shall be in force for one year only from the day of the date of such licence, or until the next general licensing meeting, in case any general licensing day be appointed by the commissioners.

The taxi trade are not requesting that the length of licence be lengthened or shortened in any way, just that they have the option of paying in two instalments in order to ease the financial burden of continuing to operate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR THE DECISION

None

APPENDICES

Letter from Mr Colin Bennet