

To: LICENSING AND SAFETY COMMITTEE
20 OCTOBER 2022

HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE TRADE MEETING UPDATE (Public Protection Manager)

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To summarise the work of the Taxi Trade Group since the last Licensing and Safety Committee, inform Members about any matters raised and where appropriate agree a way forward on queries raised at the meeting.

2 Recommendations

That the Committee:

- i) **NOTES** the content of the report and;
- ii) **NOTES** the positive ongoing dialogue between the trade and the Council.

3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The Group has been set up to provide an opportunity for the Taxi Trade, Members and Officers to meet to discuss a range of topics of common interest, to provide a forum to resolve issues and foster closer working relationships, to undertake informal consultation and then report back to the Licensing and Safety Committee with any recommendations for alterations to the existing or proposed licences, policies, tariffs and fees etc.
- 3.2 It is the intention that going forward we will hold two scheduled meetings a year. One in January to discuss, amongst other things, the outcome of the annual fees and charges statutory consultation and to hold initial discussions about any changes to the tariff scheme to be consulted on and if appropriate implemented later during that year. The second meeting, which will usually be held in October would include a discussion on the fees and charges pertaining to the trade before the formal consultation process is started and to provide feedback on the tariff consultation. Ad hoc meetings can be arranged to discuss any matters of concern or interest during the year.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 None - the meetings are seen as a good opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue with the trade in an attempt to reach agreement on a wide number manner of topics affecting them.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 Since the Licensing and Safety Committee meeting on the 23 June 2022 three liaison meetings with various parts of the taxi trade have been held. These meetings took place on the:
- 25 July 2022
 - 08 August 2022
 - 03 October 2022.

5.2 The main focus of these meetings has been to receive feedback on the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy (2022 – 2027) (“the policy”) which was the subject of a public consultation run from the 08 July to 30 September 2022. The outcome of that consultation is included on a separate report at this meeting.

5.3 Attendance at the 25 July meeting was disappointing with only one member of the trade in attendance. This meeting was, however, an opportunity to have a detailed discussion with a chauffeur driver in relation to the policy. A summary of the discussion is as follows:

- The attendee understood the need to drive up standards and the requirements to ensure public safety but they were concerned about the additional restrictions arising from the revised policy.
- The draft policy stated that vehicles must meet the Euro 5 or Euro 6 emissions standards if they are being submitted for grant or renewal of a licence which would reduce the current age of vehicle limits.
- They were supportive of the requirement of licensees having to sign up to the [DBS update service](#) to enable the Council to make periodic checks. They had already signed up to the service and it worked well.
- The speed of processing applications remained a concern. Consolidating and condensing the training programme, bringing the training back in house or extending the number of providers and making use of online training for refresher courses would help to expedite the process.
- Officers confirmed that some of the training was already being delivered in-house which meant that it could be more tailored and held at times better suited to the trade. Once this was embedded the PPP would look to deliver online refresher courses.
- Officers were also looking at ways to streamline the knowledge test. Identifying certified external instructors to do driving tests on behalf of the authority would also speed up the applications process if this could be accommodated.

5.4 A meeting was arranged for the 08 August 2022 to facilitate a discussion with the home to school transport providers and officers about the policy. This meeting was attended by three representatives of this sector as well as the council’s Transport and Support Services Manager. Additional detail of that discussion is considered in the separate report about the consultation. In summary:

- Officers were concerned that the draft policy would have a detrimental financial impact on the current providers which would in turn have a negative impact on the council’s ability to provide a statutory service.
- The trade commented that the costs of replacing their fleet would render their businesses unviable which would mean that they would either have to stop provision or pass on additional costs to the council. If public safety was the

driver for the changes they would be willing to have additional checks put into the policy rather than changing the age of vehicles.

- A staggered approach to replacing the fleet could be considered albeit that this would still generate additional costs which would have to be passed on to the council. The trade believed that any phasing, if implemented, should be linked to the tendering cycle for the provision of this service.
- The trade noted, however, that their vehicles were currently subjected to two MOT inspections per year and they were therefore confident that the vehicles were fit for purpose. It was noted that the Transport Service undertook sporadic checks of these vehicles with colleagues in Thames Valley Police. The only vehicles that had ever been subjected to prohibition notices were from out of borough contractors.
- It was becoming increasingly difficult to recruit drivers. They tended to rely on older drivers that considered the home to school transport badge an attractive option. Removing this option would decrease the number of drivers they could employ.
- Speeding up the applications process was needed as it took too long to employ new drivers and could be a considerable wait before they could start earning money. This could be supported by extending the range of providers that could undertake the training.

5.5 The scheduled October Taxi Trade Meeting took place on the 03 October 2022 with six members of the trade in attendance. A minutes' silence was held at the start of the meeting to remember William Lacximicant, a local taxi driver who had sadly recently passed away.

5.6 Officers outlined the outcome of the consultation on the policy and explained that a detailed report would be brought to this meeting where Members would be asked to agree a way forward based on the comments received.

5.7 Officers presented the fees and charges for 2023/24 that would be discussed at the Joint Public Protection Committee on the 05 October 2022. The fees and charges are also the subject of a separate paper included on the agenda for this meeting.

5.8 The trade commented that:

- The cost of the DBS checks should be revisited.
- The trade had not as yet recovered from the pandemic and they could not absorb higher fees. Footfall was negligible and a lot of drivers were now undertaking other types of work.
- The Trade were heavily reliant on income from home to school transport.
- They would look through all of the fees and respond to either the statutory consultation on the private hire operator, and hackney carriage and private hire vehicle licence fees or the budget consultation on the wider fee set being undertaken on behalf of the Executive.

- 5.9 The trade were informed that the Licensing Liaison Officer (LLOs) roles had been funded by Covid grant money. This funding had now ceased and as a result it had become necessary to end their contracts. The model had however been successful and officers were looking at ways to restructure the team so that this type of role could be included on the establishment as a permanent role.
- 5.10 The PPP had also successfully recruited two new apprentices who would be joining the team by mid-November. The apprentices would be working towards the Regulatory Compliance Officer qualifications and as part of their training would be able to undertake some of the lower level inspection work done by the LLOs.
- 5.11 Members, the trade and officers continue to build on the good relationships being developed at these meetings. The next meeting would take place on the 16 January 2023. This meeting would focus on the outcome of the statutory fee consultation. It would also be an opportunity to start discussions on what the trade envisaged around fares for the forthcoming year. If any modifications were proposed they would be the subject of a public consultation later in the calendar year.

Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 6.1 None

Financial Advice

- 6.2 None

Other Consultation Responses

- 6.3 Not applicable

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.4 Not applicable

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.5 Not applicable

Climate Change Implications

Contact for further information

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