

**LICENSING AND SAFETY COMMITTEE**  
**22 JUNE 2023**  
**7.30 - 8.08 PM**



**Present:**

Councillors Gillbe (Chair), Allen, Bidwell, Cochrane, Frewer, Frost, Gaw, Purnell, Smith and C Thompson

**Apologies for absence were received from:**

Councillors O'Regan, Barnard, Collings and Mossom

**Condolences for Kim Wickens**

The Chairman expressed condolences on behalf of the Committee for the family and friends of Kim Wickens, a member of the local taxi trade who passed away on 28 April 2023.

**4. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**5. Minutes**

**RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meetings held on 2 February 2023 and 24 May 2023 (Annual Meeting) were approved as a correct record.

**6. Urgent Items of Business**

There were no Urgent Items of Business.

**7. Notice of Public Speaking**

There were no applications for public speaking.

**8. Annual Report**

Moira Fraser presented the Annual Report 2022/23.

It was noted that the taxi trade meeting report and its terms of reference differed slightly, and that these would be aligned with the current practice and attendees.

There had been a decline in the number of licences issued over the last few years, and officers were investigating how the resultant funding gap could be addressed.

Due to the installation of a new IT system, some outputs in the Annual Report were missing data.

Arising from questions, the following points were noted:

- Members were disappointed to note that the previous Taxi Trade meeting was in October 2022.

- It had proven difficult to recruit licensing officers, and there had been various issues in the last few recruitment rounds. Another round of advertising was due to start soon, and officers hoped to be successful in this recruitment round. Members recognised that the recruitment challenges were not unique to the Public Protection Partnership.
- The Public Protection Partnership had implemented a Grow Your Own policy which was proving fruitful, with four apprentices on board. The apprentices were rotating through the various services and would then specialise.
- The officer restructure was ongoing in order to align resources with the new case management system. The new system included a front-facing portal which allowed for a more self-help approach, with residents able to input applications directly, and receive automatic notifications and renewals. More generalised training was being organised to allow PPP officers to upskill in broader areas. Some agency staff had been used to fill vacancies within the service.
- The restructure looked to reconnect the application and enforcement sides of the PPP, bringing both teams back together in-house.
- The Joint Management Board was an officer meeting which met every two weeks to review operational issues and successes of the PPP.
- The Licensing & Safety Committee forward plan was intended to be reviewed by members at each meeting but had been omitted from this agenda, and officers agreed to circulate this separately. **(Action: Moira Fraser)**
- Members commented on the high number of service requests, and it was noted that there remained a significant number of service requests around noise and neighbour disputes following COVID and the increase in home working.
- The Chair stressed that he intended to maintain the same successful relationship with the taxi trade.

**RESOLVED** that:

- 1 The content of this report be noted including the work of the Licensing and Safety Committee and Service related activity for 2022/23.
- 2 The funding gap and the work that is being done to mitigate this loss of income be noted.

## 9. **The Future of Knowledge Test**

Moira Fraser presented the Future of Knowledge Test report.

The necessity for a geographical element of the taxi trade knowledge test had been discussed for some time. All applicants were required to undertake the knowledge test to qualify as a taxi driver, which included tests on the Highway Code, the carriage of disabled passengers, driver and condition law in addition to the geographical test. The other elements of the knowledge test were not in question, and the knowledge test was not a statutory requirement.

The trade was divided in its views on the geographical element of the test. Some felt that sat navs meant that the knowledge test was no longer needed, and others felt the test should be retained to continue to provide local knowledge.

It was clarified that the proposed consultation would run from 7 July to 28 July, rather than June as in the report.

Arising from discussion, the following points were noted:

- Members recognised that Uber drivers did not have to undertake this knowledge test.
- There were no costs involved with consultation, as the local authority would use its own electronic consultation portal.
- Officers were not aware of other local authorities who had omitted the knowledge test.
- The consultation would be shared with members of the trade, licensing officers, adult and children's social care, home to school transport providers and any other relevant body. Any interested party could submit a response as the consultation would be publicly accessible.
- The knowledge test included Bracknell Forest addresses only and did not test on neighbouring boroughs. It was not known how many taxi journeys went from Bracknell Forest to a location outside the borough.
- The geographical test was a one-off test on new applications, so would not test on any new developments in the borough.

Members voted on the options included in the report. There was one vote to retain the knowledge test outright, no votes to remove it, and nine to agree to consultation. Following the indicative vote, it was

**RESOLVED that** the future of the geographical aspect of the 'knowledge test' be consulted on, for the matter to be determined at the October 2023 meeting of the Committee having considered any consultation responses.

#### 10. **Update on the NR3S database**

Julia O'Brien presented a report on the National Register of Taxi Licence Revocation, Refusals and Suspensions.

It was now a mandatory requirement for local authorities to enter any revocations, refusals and suspensions on the register. Any new applications would be checked against the register, and if any entry was returned, the circumstances would be checked with the authority in question. Officers would write a determination report based on the evidence collated and would either continue to grant the licence or put the matter to a Licensing Panel meeting for determination.

In response to questions, the following points were noted:

- The check of the register included a cross-check of a driver's date of birth, national insurance and driver licence number so it was not easy to evade the system by changing a name or address. Officers also conducted DBS checks on all drivers, which would give a background to an individual's addresses as well as any convictions.
- There was no current provision for real-time information or checks on existing drivers, however this could be implemented through policy change. The check was currently only for renewal or new driver applications.
- There had been no concern expressed by the trade on the database or the checks.

Members noted the report.

**CHAIRMAN**