

To: LICENSING AND SAFETY COMMITTEE
24 OCTOBER 2024

HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE TRADE MEETING UPDATE Executive Director for Communities

1 Purpose of Report

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

2 Recommendations

That the Committee:

- 2.1 **NOTES** the content of the report and;
- 2.2 **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 has previously been agreed that 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. The trade has requested that consideration be given to holding additional meetings but there is currently no resource to support additional meetings.

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 20 June 2024 one liaison meeting has been held. This meeting took place on the 14 October 2024.
- 5.2 The main focus of this meeting was to:
- to discuss the fees and charges for 2025/26.
 - to consider proposals from the trade in respect of changes to the current Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy.
 - to consider other matters raised by the trade.

- to inform the trade about a decision that has been taken by Reading Borough Council to prohibit Hackney Carriages who are not licenced by Reading Borough Council from using the Kings Road Bus Lane.

5.3 There were three members of the trade in attendance at this meeting. A summary of the comments received on the agenda items is set out below.

Fees and Charges 2025/26

- 5.4 The hackney carriage trade representatives commented that any increase in the fees was not sustainable for the trade and was likely to further decrease the number of local drivers and operators. They stated that after reviewing their rosters they were able to ascertain that in the past three years, only two new drivers had joined the hackney carriage fleet.
- 5.5 They were firmly of the opinion that the fees should be frozen at 2024/25 levels to alleviate the financial strain on drivers who were already experiencing a decline in income. They commented that drivers are working long hours just to make a living and many are not even earning the minimum wage that allows them to survive.
- 5.6 The rationale for the increase in fees is set out on a separate report to this committee. It was noted that the operator and vehicle fees would be subjected to a statutory consultation. The trade would have the opportunity to comment on the wider set of fees during any budgetary consultation undertaken by the Council.

Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy

- 5.7 The trade raised a number of areas that they would like to be reconsidered when the policy is reviewed at the special meeting in December 2024. These included:
- a) Age of Vehicles: to permit drivers to purchase Euro 6 vehicles up to nine years old at first registration.
 - b) A review of the requirements around Certificates of Good Conduct specifically in respect of the age applied to the consent which is currently ten years of age.
 - c) Removal of the requirement to undertake the geographical element of the knowledge test every six years.
- 5.8 These matters will be included on the discussion on the policy at the next meeting and officers are not proposing any responses as part of this report.

Additional Matters Raised by the Trade

- 5.9 Tariffs – the trade indicated that at the present time they would not be proposing any changes to the current tariffs. It was noted that any proposed changes to the tariffs would be triggered by the submission of a business case from the trade. Officers would not instigate any changes and any proposals would, in any event, be subjected to a statutory consultation should a business case be submitted.
- 5.10 The trade raised concerns about unauthorised vehicles parking on the Waitrose Taxi ranks. Officers confirmed that it was not permissible to make use of CCTV at the ranks. This calendar year the Civil Enforcement Officers had made, up until the 08 October, 1452 visits to this rank which equates to over 5 visits a day. This is an increase of around 150 visits for the same period the previous year. There was no

additional resource to undertake any more visits than this. They had also issued 40 penalty charge notices to drivers of vehicles parked illegally on this rank.

- 5.11 The trade raised concern about the introduction of free bus services to the Western and Southern Estates from the Station. Officers explained that this was not a Council initiative. It had been set up by the Bracknell BID and was only available to people that worked in the BID area. Any concerns would need to be raised with the BID directly by the trade.
- 5.12 The trade raised some concerns about a number of matters associated with the issuance of licences. It was noted that it was the responsibility of individual drivers and operators to ensure that they were submitting applications in time and with the correct paperwork in place. The service was however now fully staffed and were looking at ways to improve communication with the trade albeit that they would not be issuing reminders about applications that were due to expire.
- 5.13 Officers reported that we have been notified by Reading Borough Council on the 11 November that a decision had been made to prohibit Hackney Carriages who are not licenced by Reading Borough Council from using the Kings Road bus lane.
- 5.15 It was hoped that Members, the trade and officers would continue to build on the good relationships being developed at these meetings. The next meeting would take place on the 13 January 2025. This meeting would focus on the outcome of the statutory fee consultation and any proposals around variations to the fees.

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

6.6 Not applicable

Health & Wellbeing Considerations

6.7 Not applicable

Contact for further information

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