

**TO: LICENSING AND SAFETY COMMITTEE
7 JANUARY 2016**

**SAFEGUARDING TRAINING FOR HACKNEY CARRIAGE
AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE DRIVERS**

Chief Officer: Environment and Public Protection

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Addressing the issue of child sexual exploitation (CSE) has become a priority and a matter of great importance for the community and public authorities. This report seeks approval of the Committee to introduce compulsory safeguarding training for all licensed hackney carriage and private hire vehicle drivers and operators within Bracknell Forest.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Committee agrees

- i) to the introduction of mandatory safeguarding training for all hackney carriage and private hire vehicle drivers and operators, and**
- ii) that the trade and the general public be consulted on the content and extent of any training provision prior to implementation.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 This report sets out information collected over a number of years which evidences that there is an identified serious risk to the safety of children which can be reduced through appropriate training of taxi drivers and operators. The Council has an obligation to take measures to protect the safety of children and the proposal delivers this through the use of legal powers granted to the Council.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Council could provide information on safeguarding to taxi drivers and operators and not require attendance at a training session. Evidence from training already conducted for drivers and operators involved in home to school transport is that training is vital for drivers to fully understand the safeguarding implications for children and themselves.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 There have been a number of high profile and significant cases in recent years pertaining to the sexual exploitation of children. The exposure of poorly managed cases of CSE in Rotherham and also the subsequent enquiries and reports have been a watershed on how society deals with the identification and processing of CSE incidents. Within the report 'Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham (1997 – 2013) Alexis Jay OBE August 2014' the role of taxi drivers in facilitating the abuse of children was identified and highlighted with the following comments made by the author:

"Time and again we read in the files and other documents of children being violently raped, beaten, forced to perform sex acts in taxis and cars when they were being transferred between towns".

- 5.2 Attached as Annex 1 is a section from the report on Taxis and Licensing and their association with cases of CSE within Rotherham.
- 5.3 When a taxi driver applies for a licence in Bracknell Forest they are required to demonstrate that they are a “fit and proper person”. This includes the submission of an enhanced DBS check at the highest level which includes the right for the Police to provide information which has not been the subject of a criminal prosecution. The Council has approximately 350 licensed drivers and within the last four years two taxi drivers have had their licences revoked following accusations of CSE related behaviour.
- 5.4 Officers have prepared a fact sheet for licensed drivers on matters of CSE and human trafficking which is attached as Annex 2. This will be distributed to all licensed drivers and operators and will be included within our guidance book at its next re-print in 2016. The question is “are we, as a Licensing Authority given the known connections of the taxi trade to CSE, presently doing enough to protect children?”
- 5.5 A more recent case of CSE, centred in Oxfordshire under the name Operation Bullfinch, resulted in 13 convictions for CSE. A report “Child Sexual Exploitation – Making a Difference” was released in June 2015 by Maggie Blyth of Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children’s Board. Attached as Annex 3 are some extracts from that report relating to taxis and their association with CSE. Within the recommendations there are references to:
- (1) Mandatory safeguarding training for taxi drivers, and
 - (2) Robust contracts for the transportation of vulnerable children to school.
- 5.6 Bracknell Forest, as part of its role as a provider for home to school transport, uses a variety of transport methods including a significant number of taxis. It has for the last 2 years been a condition of the service contract that a driver must undertake mandatory safeguarding training, covering areas such as child abuse, neglect and CSE. At present approximately 70 drivers/operators have undertaken the training which is provided by BFC at the Commercial Centre and is completed within 2 hours. It is anticipated that the cost based upon this arrangement is likely to be in the region of £20-25 per person and that it will be funded through a charge upon applicants for licences.
- 5.7 A hackney carriage or private hire vehicle driver will often find themselves in a position of transporting children who are either on their own or accompanied by adults. They will have the opportunity of observing behaviour that might be indicative of abuse, CSE or human trafficking. In addition they may find themselves as a potential target for unfounded allegations of CSE or abuse. It is therefore vitally important for drivers to be aware of the signs and know how to react to them, and in doing so safeguard children and themselves.
- 5.8 The recommendation is that the Council should introduce a condition within a driver licence requiring compulsory attendance at safeguarding training approved by the Council. Such measures would it is believed make children much safer and meet our duty under the Care Act 2014 through the implementation of necessary processes and procedures to protect children.
- 5.9 Prior to the implementation of any measures consultation will be carried out with the general public and the taxi trade. The consultation will examine options for the

subject areas, how training could be delivered including costs and how it would be implemented with both existing licence holders and new applicants. The results of the consultation would be brought back to this Committee with recommendations upon how compulsory safeguarding training could and should be delivered.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 The Council as licensing authority has the power to require licensed drivers and operators to undertake safeguarding training including refresher training in accordance with their policy.

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 It is intended that the training will be funded through a new charge to be included within the licensing fees.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 There are no implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 The Council has a duty to protect children and there is clear evidence that the taxi trade has been implicated in CSE previously. To take no action could be criticised should there be a public enquiry into an incident in Bracknell Forest.

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

- 7.1 No consultation carried out at the time of writing this report.

Method of Consultation

- 7.2 Not applicable.

Representations Received

- 7.3 Not applicable.

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

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