

At a meeting of the LICENSING AND REGULATORY COMMITTEE held in COMMITTEE ROOM 1 on MONDAY, 28th MARCH, 2022 at 10.00 a.m.

Present:-

Councillor Fletcher in the Chair

Councillors Ali, Crosby, Dodds, P. Gibson, Hartnack, Heron, S. Johnston, D. MacKnight, M. Walker and A. Wood

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted to the meeting on behalf of Councillors Bewick, Leadbitter, D. Snowdon and Wilson.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Committee held on 28th February, 2022 Part I

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 28th February, 2022, Part I (copy circulated) be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

Proposed Draft Statement of Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy

The Executive Director of Neighbourhoods submitted a report (copy circulated) which updated the Committee on the current position regarding the preparation of a Draft Statement of Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy and which sought approval of proposed revised arrangements.

(For copy report – see original minutes)

Mr Steve Wearing, Principal Licensing Officer, presented the report and advised that this matter had previously been brought to the Committee on 28th September 2020 with an intention that the draft policy would be brought to the Committee by 14th December 2020. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 Pandemic there had been delays caused to this due to the increased workload faced by the Licensing Section and also the difficulty in holding group liaison meetings with the trade due to face to face meetings being unable to be held. The DfT had recognised the impact of the Pandemic and had relaxed the requirements for implementation to allow authorities until early 2022 to implement their new policy.

Mr Wearing confirmed that in November 2021 additional funding had been provided to the Council which had enabled the appointment of a new Senior Licensing Officer on a fixed term basis, who would be working on the delivery of the new policy.

Councillor P. Gibson welcomed the report and suggested that it might be useful if some Councillors attended the driver assessment courses, as this would help to let drivers know about the existence of the Committee. It was said that most drivers were not aware of the Committee, or its role.

Councillor A. Wood asked what the assessment course would include. Mr Wearing advised that it was similar to a speed awareness course, in that it tried to educate drivers who had received points on their licence. The scheme was run by Durham County Council and Sunderland was looking at whether to use Durham's scheme, or whether to run a separate course in Sunderland. It was understood that Durham already worked with other authorities. The driver attending the course would be required to pay for their attendance, which was the position if they were attending a speed awareness course.

Councillor A. Wood commented that he did not feel that there need to be any Member attendance at the course. However, he did feel that there needed to be better awareness of what drivers were informed of and asked about the newsletter to drivers. Mr Wearing advised that Members could be included when the newsletter was emailed out to drivers. The previous newsletters were available online. Mr Wearing agreed to provide the link to these. He agreed that it would be sensible to ensure that Members were kept informed of what training was offered to drivers.

Councillor D. MacKnight queried whether there would be anything in the policy to cover guide dogs. Mr Wearing advised that there was already a policy in place which required drivers to carry guide dogs, for no additional charge, unless they had an exemption. Mr Wearing emphasised that should Members hear of any drivers refusing to carry guide dogs then this should be brought to the attention of Officers.

Councillor Crosby asked whether stakeholders, such as TFC and the local hospitals, had been consulted on the draft policy. Mr Wearing advised that they would be, explaining that the draft document was being developed and once this was done then the trade, as well as wider stakeholders, would be consulted with anyone given the opportunity to respond to the consultation.

Mr Thompson advised that the policy document would be a weighty document, since it would pull together a number of existing policies, plus added the national minimum standards to the policies. There would be some notable changes due to the new standards, such as the reduction in the time to declare convictions from 72 hours to 48 hours, plus an increase in the amount of matters that needed to be declared. For example, there would be a requirement for drivers to notify the Council should they be arrested for specified matters. Mr Thompson explained that assistance dogs, (guide dogs), were covered under the policies of the Equality Act 2010 and drivers could claim an exemption from carrying guide dogs on medical grounds.

2. RESOLVED that the content of the report be noted and that approval be given to the revised timetable to allow for the introduction of the intended Statement of Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy, namely that:-

- (a) The draft policy be considered by the Committee at the Meeting to be held on, or about the 4th July 2022, with the Committee putting forward comments and suggested amendments prior to the draft policy being subject to a period of consultation with the required consultees; and
- (b) That the outcome of the consultation process be reported to the Committee at a Meeting to be held on, or about the 3rd October, 2022. Responses and the resultant changes to the draft policy would be identified, with the Committee being asked to approve a final Draft Policy.

Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006

- 3. RESOLVED that, in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded during consideration of the remaining business as it was considered likely to include the disclosure of exempt information relating to an individual and the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the Authority holding that information). (Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A, Part I, Paragraphs 1 and 3).

(Signed) J. Fletcher,
Chairman.

Note:-

The above minutes comprise only those relating to items during which the meeting was open to members of the public.

Additional minutes in respect of further items are included in Part II.