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# Update Following Discussions at the Taxi and Private Hire West Berkshire Council Liaison Group

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Licensing Committee
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	21 June 2021
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Hilary Cole
<b>Report Author:</b>	Moira Fraser
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	LC4096

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## 1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide the Committee with an update and raise any issues emanating from the Liaison Group meetings.

## 2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Committee notes the report.

## 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. Any follow up actions will be met from within existing resources
<b>Human Resource:</b>	Attendance at these taxi trade meetings and any follow up actions will be met from within existing resources
<b>Legal:</b>	There are no legal implications associated with these meetings. The trade meetings are not a legal requirement but are seen as good practice and allow a meaningful dialogue with the trade in an attempt to reach agreement on a wide number manner of topics affecting them.

<b>Risk Management:</b>	There are no risk management issues associated with this report. A good working relationship with the trade can assist with minimising reputational harm to the Council.			
<b>Property:</b>	None			
<b>Policy:</b>	The trade meetings are an opportunity to discuss policy issues but it is not a decision making forum. Any policy changes would be taken to the Licensing Committee, Joint Public Protection Partnership Committee or Council in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation.			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		The forum is a platform to discuss any policy changes. Equalities Impact Assessments would be undertaken where changes to policies and or procedures were proposed.
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		The trade meetings are not a decision making forum.
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>		X		The trade meetings are not a decision making forum.

<b>Health Impact:</b>		X		The trade meetings are an opportunity to discuss issues of mutual interest and an opportunity for the trade to raise matters directly with the decision makers. It is therefore hoped that they would have a positive outcome for the wellbeing of members of the trade.
<b>ICT Impact:</b>		X		There is no ICT impact albeit that some of the meetings will be conducted via Zoom.
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>		X		None
<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>	X			The provision of a viable taxi trade in the district will support a number of the priorities in the Council Strategy. These meetings in particular are associated with supporting businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire.
<b>Core Business:</b>		X		Providing support to the taxi trade forms part of the business as usual for the Public Protection Partnership.
<b>Data Impact:</b>				The report does not have a significant impact on the rights of data subjects.
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	All Members of the West Berkshire Taxi Trade are invited to attend these meetings. While only a few have opted to attend the notes from the meetings are circulated to all members of the trade. The meeting is also attended by Members of the Licensing Committee.			

## 4 Supporting Information

### Background

- 4.1 Since the February 2021 Licensing Committee meeting two meetings of the Taxi Trade Liaison Group have been held. The first meeting took place on the 24 March 2021 and the second on the 02 June 2021.
- 4.2 The Taxi and Private Hire West Berkshire Council Liaison Group (TTLG) has been set up to provide a forum to meet with and consider comments from representatives of the

taxi trade and seek advice from licensing officers on a range of issues that affect existing and proposed licences, policies, tariffs and fees and other matters of common interest.

- 4.3 The meeting is attended by five Members of the Licensing Committee, representatives of the hackney carriage and private hire trade and relevant Officers and is chaired by the Licensing Committee Chairman. The outgoing Chairman of the Licensing Committee (Councillor James Cole) was thanked for the invaluable contribution he had made to these meetings whilst he chaired the Licensing Committee.
- 4.4 The 24 March 2021 was attended by Councillors Phil Barnett, Graham Bridgman, James Cole, David Marsh and Claire Rowles and the trade were represented by Graham Cox, Peter Chemaly and Walter O' Brien. The 02 June 2021 meeting was attended by Councillors Phil Barnett, Graham Bridgman, Rick Jones and the trade was represented by Graham Cox, Jennie Harrison and Dawn Palmer. Officers were also in attendance to support both meetings.
- 4.5 These two meetings primarily focussed on discussions with the trade about the impact that the Covid pandemic had had on them and what support could be offered to the trade to assist them during this time, fees, tariffs and elements of the Hackney Carriage and Private Policy.
- 4.6 A revised set of terms of reference for the liaison meeting were also agreed at the March 2021 meeting and these can be found at Appendix A to this report.

### **Impact of Covid**

- 4.7 Officers reiterated the view expressed by the Licensing Committee at both meetings that the taxi trade were a very valuable asset to the community especially for the District's more vulnerable residents but that they also serviced the night time economy and assisted other members of the community for example with transporting pupils to schools and business people to and from the airports
- 4.8 It was noted that there had been a significant number of losses out of the fleet arising from the Covid pandemic albeit that the picture in West Berkshire appeared to have stabilised. Officers confirmed (at the March meeting) that 134 of the 153 hackney carriage licences, 135 of the 163 private hire vehicles, 114 of the 130 private hire drivers and 209 of the 247 dual drivers were still registered.
- 4.9 As of the 10 June 2021 there were 136 of the 153 hackney carriage licences, 115 of the 163 private hire vehicles, 129 of the 130 private hire drivers, 54 private hire operators and 192 of the 247 dual drivers were still registered.
- 4.10 Vehicle licences were issued for a three year period and it was therefore difficult to ascertain if all of the registered drivers were still active. The trade would be impacted by the wider hospitality industry as well as the travel sector and how quickly they were able to recover once lockdown restrictions were eased.
- 4.11 Anecdotal information from the trade at these meetings was that their income had been reduced by around 75% over the last financial year. Many of the drivers had had to take on other temporary roles to generate any income or sign up for Universal Credit. The private hire sector were reliant on airport runs for the business sector and corporate

events and this work had dried up. The nature of their business meant that that they were unable to pick up some of the local work such as transporting school pupils, or runs to shops, doctor surgeries, hospitals and vaccination centres. The trade did not believe that this sector was going to bounce back very quickly. The trade were also concerned that the pandemic would have led to the closure of some of the district's public houses which would also have a knock on effect for the hackney carriage drivers and operators.

- 4.12 Information about what grants could be accessed by the trade were identified and discussed at the meeting and this information, the criteria and information requirements were circulated to the wider trade after the March meeting. It was reported at the Executive meeting on the 10 June that the Council had paid out £24,000 to taxi companies and was in the process of reviewing a further 23 applications for the Additional Restrictions Grant from local taxis companies where evidence from applicants was awaited.
- 4.13 Officers noted that a large number of applications had come in for events being held across the District and hoped that this would assist with the recovery for this sector. Two Licensing Liaison Officers had been appointed to assist the trade and act as a conduit between the Council and the trade to further improve communications. The Council was listening to the concerns raised by the trade and efforts were being made to assist them in the recovery process.

## **Fees**

- 4.14 The trade raised a number of concerns about the fees, how they were calculated and highlighted some discrepancies in the fees charged across the three authorities. It was noted that the Council's fee setting process would mean that the proposed fees for 2022/23 would be presented to the Joint Public Protection Committee on the 13 September 2021 and the 08 November 2021 Licensing Committee meeting. They would then be subject to a statutory consultation period and if any objections were raised would be discussed again at the 31 January 2022. A recommendation would then be made to the Executive and Full Council.
- 4.15 It was agreed that it would be useful to start consulting the trade as early in the process as possible and therefore a discussion on fees was included on the 02 June 2021 agenda. A further discussion would also take place at the 25 October 2021 Taxi Trade Liaison Group meeting.
- 4.16 It was noted at the June meeting that the fees were based on a full cost recovery model. What this meant was that an hourly rate based on a range of costs was calculated. Officers then calculated how long it took to process each of the elements and activities set out in the fees. Each fee then comprised the hourly rate multiplied by the time taken to do the work.
- 4.17 The Council was in the process of implementing a new IT system. The system would allow for applications and payments to be made online. Applicants would also be able to track the progress of their applications using this system. The system would also be able to assist with the renewal process and would generate documents automatically. It was envisaged that this automation would reduce the time taken to process applications which should then result in a commensurate reduction in the fees.

- 4.18 The other issue that had irked drivers was the additional costs that they had to pay in addition to their licence fees. Officers were being trained in order to deliver some of the training, which was previously outsourced and therefore had to be charged for, themselves. It was therefore likely that some of the additional payments would fall away and that the training costs would be included in the licence fees. The exception to this was DBC checked albeit that these were being moved to a national online system too which should help to reduce costs.
- 4.19 The Chairman commented at the June meeting that he hoped that these initiatives showed shown that the Council was listening to the trades' fee concerns and were responding to them.

### **Tariffs**

- 4.20 It was noted that the Licensing Committee, and Councillor Bridgman in particular, had already done a lot of work to streamline and improve the tariff setting process. The proposal made by the Licensing Committee was based on three sets of tariffs, a ratio between the tariffs, a flag cost and unit cost based on a tenth of a mile.
- 4.21 Members asked the trade to consider if the existing three tariffs were needed. The trade representatives at the March 2021 meeting stated that they believed that only two tariffs were needed. One for normal hours and one for unsociable hours. . This view was not universally supported by the wider trade membership though. The trade agreed to look at the tariffs again and come back with a proposal to the June meeting having taken into consideration the tariffs in neighbouring authorities as part of that process. The trade would also take the current economic climate into consideration when making their proposals
- 4.22 The outcome of the discussions on the tariffs have been captured in a separate paper attached to this agenda.

### **Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy Review**

- 4.23 The Licensing Committee had first considered the 'Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards Report' at the 30 November 2020 meeting. The report informed Members of the then recently published 'Statutory Taxi & Private Hire Vehicle Standards' issued by the Department for Transport (DfT) and set out proposals for ensuring that the requirements were met in West Berkshire.
- 4.24 The report would require a new policy to be adopted including changes to the current terms and conditions. Some of these issues were discussed at the 24 March TTLG meeting. It was agreed that an additional meeting should be set up on the 02 June 2021 to discuss the draft policy. Unfortunately the policy, which was being drafted by an external contractor, was not able to be finalised for this meeting and would be disc used at the October 2021 meeting.
- 4.25 In addition to the standards it was noted that West Berkshire Council had declared a Climate Emergency at its Council meeting on the 02 July 2019 and that this would be reflected in the policy too. The Environment Delivery Team had surveyed the taxi trade in April 2021 in order to establish their views regarding the move to low emission vehicles and the issues and concerns that they may have around this and the

government's push to decarbonise The survey received 72 responses and the Council wished to thank all those that had engaged as it has provided some really useful information.

- 4.26 Drivers shared their concerns around going electric and what incentives would encourage them and also where they would like to see charge points installed. A desire was also raised that the Council does not overlook hydrogen fuel.
- 4.27 A summary of some of the survey results is included below with a more detailed report planned to be presented to the Council's Transport Advisory Group in the summer. This will provide suggestions for next steps which are likely to include an invitation for further engagement with the trade to look at the best ways forward based on the information provided.
- 4.28 Over 83% of drivers owned their vehicles, with the remaining drivers leasing. Nearly all drivers have diesel vehicles (nearly 95%), there were no electric vehicles and just one non-plug in hybrid respondent. Around 60% of respondents were intending to change vehicles within the next 3 years. Over 80% of journeys were less than 50 miles, with over 80% of drivers doing less than 200 miles a day. Over 50% would consider an electric vehicle for personal use, for work 30% thought they may purchase/lease one within the next 6 years, of those 20% within the next 3 years.

## **5 Other options considered**

- 5.1 None

## **6 Conclusion**

- 6.1 The TTLG meetings appear to be a valued opportunity for dialogue between elected Members and the trade. It is therefore proposed that at least two meetings will continue to be arranged every year. The next meeting would take place on the 25 October 2021 and this meeting would be an opportunity to discuss the proposed fees prior to the 08 November 2021 Licensing Committee meeting. The review of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy would also be included on the agenda.
- 6.2 The 17 January 2022 meeting would afford an opportunity to comment on the fees as part of the consultation process before the final proposals were presented to the 31 January 2022 Licensing Committee meeting.

## **7 Appendices**

- 7.1 Appendix A – Terms of Reference

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### **Background Papers:**

None

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**Subject to Call-In:**

Yes: ☐ No: ☒

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval ☐

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council ☐

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position ☐

Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months ☐

Item is Urgent Key Decision ☐

Report is to note only ☒

**Wards affected:** All

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