

# LICENSING COMMITTEE

## MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 31 JANUARY 2006

**Councillors:** Andrew Rowles (*Chairman*) (P), Peter Argyle (P), Billy Drummond (AP), John Farrin (*Vice-Chairman*) (P), Geoff Findlay (P), Manohar Gopal (P), Sally Hannon (P), Roger Hunneman (P), Owen Jeffery (P), Tony Linden (P), Mrs Irene Neill (P), Alexander Payton (P), Quentin Webb (P)

### PART I

#### 17. APOLOGIES.

Apologies for the inability to attend the meeting were received on behalf of Councillor Billy Drummond.

#### 18. MINUTES.

The Minutes of the meetings held on 1 November 2005 was approved as true and correct records and signed by the Chairman.

#### 19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

None.

#### 20. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES.

Councillor John Farrin asked officers if there were any firmer details available on the costs incurred implementing the new licensing arrangements. John Priest from memory was able to confirm that under the new licensing regime fee income had amounted to £60K so far compared to the budgeted £30k that was raised under the old licensing scheme. Officers were planning to review the fee structure for the next financial year and were also participating in the LGA consultation on fee structures.

#### 21. GUIDANCE NOTES ON THE RELEVANCE OF CRIMINAL RECORDS IN RESPECT OF APPLICANTS FOR A LICENCE TO DRIVE A HACKNEY CARRIAGE OR PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE.

In November the Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 4) concerning a review of the criminal records guidance to Officers used in the determination of fitness of an applicant to drive a taxi. The main body of the text was approved at that meeting but Members requested that a revised paragraph relating to guidance on the relevance of convictions was put out for further consultation. Officers have consulted with the taxi trade and other interested parties. There were no written responses received by Officers. Officers have spoken to the Chair and Vice Chair of the Operators association and they have confirmed their acceptance of the revised guidance. Home to school transport were also consulted and were happy to endorse the revised guidance.

**RESOLVED that** the revised standards, as set out in the report be approved with the revised amendment applied.

Voting was unanimous.

Note: Councillor Alexander Payton stated that in principal he didn't agree with the policy relating to guidance on the relevance of convictions but accepted its lawfulness.

## 22 ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE TAXI TARIFF

Brian Leahy (Senior Licensing Officer) introduced the paper to confirm the Council's position on setting a maximum taxi fare tariff. Councils are not obliged to set a maximum fare for their area but West Berkshire has set a maximum fare in the past. Officers have consulted with the Trade and Police and again there was general support for setting a maximum tariff.

The Officer referred Members to the current maximum fare tariff that was listed in appendix 1 and to the proposed formal response on setting a new tariff rate in appendix 2. The proposed increase equates to a roughly 10% increase.

Note: Councillor Quentin Webb joined the meeting.

At the Chairman's request, standing orders were suspended to allow Judy Beales representative from the West Berkshire Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Operators Association to address the Committee.

Judy Beales made the following comments to members:

- The trade was reluctant to raise the maximum fare tariff but given the substantial increases in both fuel and insurance costs in the last year she felt the trade had no alternative
- The 10% increase requested was required to cover those higher costs
- The trade had not asked for a temporary increase during the current financial year when increased fuel costs were first experienced
- The trade remained in favour of the Council setting a maximum fare tariff.

Standing orders were re-instated.

Note: Councillor Manohar Gopal joined the meeting.

There followed some further discussion by Members.

**RESOLVED** that to approved the recommended tariff.

Voting was unanimous.

## 23. DISABILITY ACCESS AND TRAINING FOR TAXI DRIVERS.

At the last Licensing Committee meeting Officers were commissioned to investigate Disability Access training. Brian Leahy provided statistical details on the current taxi fleet:

- The current taxi fleet stands at 209
- 13 of which were fully wheelchair accessible and
- 49 were fitted with a swivel seat.
- Since 15<sup>th</sup> March 2005, 6 fully wheelchair accessible vehicles have been licensed.

To date a single training module to be supplied by a company called M2 had been assessed. This product carried a high cost of £16k/pa over 3 years to the local authority. It appeared to be a comprehensive training package that would take some considerable time for each taxi driver to complete. Some incentive for the Trade would be required. The Officer was of the opinion more assessment work was required and further liaison with the Trade would be needed and he looked for Member guidance on whether the time consuming exercise should be continued.

Members expressed concern at the costs and the time required by the Trade to take part in the planned M2 training module. Members were of the opinion that a simpler solution should be sought and Officers should continue assessment work. It was requested that disability training use by day care transport should be investigated.

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At the Chairman's request, standing orders were suspended to allow Judy Beales representative from the West Berkshire Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Operators Association to answer questions from the Committee.

Judy Beales was asked if the Trade were aware of any training options:

- Readi-bus used to provide a 2 day certificated course that had been used by Trade members in the past. However, this offering had since been dropped by Readi-bus.

The Committee requested that the Trade should investigate if they were aware of any other training options that were worthy of consideration.

**RESOLVED that** to agree that officers continue to explore the full provision of disability awareness training for taxi drivers.

It was expected that the Government would introduce its new gambling act very shortly and the Council will be required to develop its policy on the act. It was planned to set up a Task Group to address this requirement. It was proposed that the Task Group should consist of Councillors Andrew Rowles, Geoff Findlay, Roger Hunneman and John Farrin. The Task Group was expected to start work shortly with the objective of reporting back to the Licensing Committee in July. Consultation on the policy document would then be scheduled to take place in August with the final policy document being taken to Council by November. It was also noted that the Task Group would also be required to review the current Licensing policy. Work would only start on this action once the national review had taken place and Government guidance had been issued.

Note: The Licensing Committee meeting scheduled for the 21 March 2006 would be cancelled and the next meeting of the Licensing Committee would be called in July 2006 date to be agreed.

*(The meeting commenced at 6.30 p.m. and closed at 7.25 p.m.)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature:** .....