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

Committee considering report:	Licensing Committee
Date of Committee:	08 November 2021
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Hilary Cole
Report Author:	Moira Fraser
Forward Plan Ref:	N/a

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
Financial:	There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. Any follow up actions will be met from within existing resources.
Human Resource:	Attendance at these taxi trade meetings and any follow up actions will be met from within existing resources.
Legal:	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.

Risk Management:	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.			
Property:	None			
Policy:	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.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A 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 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.
Environmental Impact:		X		The trade meetings are not a decision making forum.

Health Impact:		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.
ICT Impact:		X		There is no ICT impact albeit that some of the meetings will be conducted via Zoom.
Digital Services Impact:		X		None
Council Strategy Priorities:	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.
Core Business:		X		Providing support to the taxi trade forms part of the business as usual for the Public Protection Partnership.
Data Impact:				The report does not have a significant impact on the rights of data subjects.
Consultation and Engagement:	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 June 2021 Licensing Committee meeting one meeting of the Taxi Trade Liaison Group has been held. The meeting took place on the 26 October 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. Discussions are ongoing with the trade as to whether they would prefer future meetings to be face to face or if they should continue to be held remotely.
- 4.4 It is the intention that going forward we will hold two scheduled meetings a year. One in January to discuss, amongst other things, the outcome of the annual fees and charges consultation and to hold initial discussions about any changes to the tariff scheme. Tariff scheme proposed variations would then need to be consulted on and if appropriate implemented during that year. The Chairman requested that consideration be given to finding a simplified methodology to ascertain the views of the trade on any variations.
- 4.5 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. Ad hoc meetings can be arranged to discuss any matters of concern or interest during the year.
- 4.6 The 26 October 2021 was attended by Councillors Rick Jones and the trade were represented by Graham Cox, Peter Chemaly, Walter O'Brien and Richard Brown. The Group all commented that it would be of great benefit to the trade if more attendees were able to come along to the meetings. Any other trade representatives wishing to attend the meetings are asked to notify moira.fraser@westberks.gov.uk and they will be sent the attendance details.
- 4.7 Jenny Graham, the Council's Environment Delivery Manager, attended the meeting to provide feedback on the survey of the Private Hire and Taxi Driver members which sought to understand driver work routines and interest in ultra-low emission vehicles undertaken in April 2021. Officers had been very pleased to received 72 responses to the questionnaire which had provided some really useful information to help inform future projects.
- 4.8 Some of the key highlights of the survey were that:
- Over 83% of the 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 and over 80% of drivers drove less than 200 miles a day.
 - Over 50% would consider an electric vehicle for personal use, of those who would consider an electric vehicle for work, 30% thought they may purchase/lease one within the next 6 years, of those 20% within the next 3 years.
- 4.9 The trade commented that while they applauded the principle of using these vehicles there were barriers in place that prevented them from doing so including the cost of the vehicles, the range they could cover and the lack of infrastructure both locally and nationally to support their use. Officers stated that this was the start of the dialogue and

that they would welcome feedback on issues such as the location of charging points etc.

- 4.10 As part of this work Officers had arranged for the Energy Saving Trust (EST) to deliver an Electric Vehicle demonstration day for approximately 15–20 drivers on the 17 November 2021. The day would comprise an hour long webinar to try and dispel myths and discuss issues experienced by the drivers. A taxi driver who already used an electric vehicle would be present to discuss how it worked from the trade's point of view. It will also be an opportunity to learn more about electric vehicles, models currently available, purchase and running costs, and ask questions of experts.
- 4.11 Attendees will also have an opportunity to test drive a number of electric vehicles suitable for taxi &/or private hire work, during which they will be able to drive different electric vehicles for about 20 minutes each.
- 4.12 The meeting was used as an opportunity to start engaging the trade in the Air Quality and Anti-Idling Campaign. It was noted that the issue of air quality was a high priority on the Government agenda as well as for the Council. The PPP had recently been awarded a grant of £259k to be spent across the three authorities on this area of work. The funding would be used to set up a project which aimed to change the behaviour of the 448,000 residents who drove in the three boroughs by launching an anti-idling campaign.
- 4.13 A lot of the campaign would be based around schools. Officers had selected 42 schools (fourteen from each of the authorities) to focus the project on. The schools were selected based on their proximity to the Air Quality Management Areas in each of the Districts. The project would focus on an education programme in the schools as well as PM_{2.5} and NO₂ monitoring. The monitoring equipment would be rotated around the schools in order to collect data and inform future proposals.
- 4.14 The project would also involve increased presence of anti-idling signage across the boroughs, including at taxi ranks and the trade would be able to assist us as there would be an opportunity for taxis to display anti-idling signage through the acceptance of a bumper sticker. It was explained that the Council would be seeking to educate rather than enforce and there would be an increased officer presence at idling 'hotspots', for example outside schools and at busy taxi rank. Officers will be provided with an anti-idling tool-kit and guidance in order to be able to support drivers.
- 4.15 Taxi drivers, couriers and waste removal drivers are amongst those professional drivers who are exposed to the highest level of air pollution throughout the day. Exposure to air pollution over the long term is linked to various health defects, most often respiratory conditions. The trade noted the comments and stated that they would be supportive of the campaign. There were however practical considerations such as how they would keep their vehicles warm when waiting on the ranks in the winter that would have to be taken into consideration.
- 4.16 A report was presented to the meeting setting out the proposed licensing fees that had been recommended by the Joint Public Protection Committee when they had met on the 13 September 2021. A discussion about the fees is already included on this agenda and Members will have been asked to agree consultation periods etc. It was explained that Officers would be recommending that the 28 day statutory consultation period run

from the 18 November 2021 to 16 December 2021 and the trade would be written to in order to seek their views on the proposals. The comments received during the consultation would then be brought back to the January Trade meeting, before being discussed again by the Licensing Committee and then being agreed by Full Council in March 2022.

- 4.17 It was explained that the vehicle fees being put forward would be around 20% lower than in previous years based on the efficiency gains from the new IT system that is being implemented. The report also proposed that the safeguarding and disability awareness training would be delivered in-house and that this cost be absorbed into the drivers licence fee.
- 4.18 It was noted that the Draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy would be discussed at the 17 January 2022 trade meeting and would then be presented to the Licensing and Safety Committee at the 31 January 2022 meeting. While each policy would be localised it was envisaged that the wish to standardise the reports across the PPP authorities would be adopted in respect of this policy. A formal consultation process would be put in place before the authority was asked to adopt it.
- 4.19 Feedback was also provided on the recent hackney carriage tariff survey as set out in a report on this agenda. The trade were concerned that one member of the trade had submitted an objection and that this would delay the implementation of the variation. They had been subjected to significant rising costs since 2013 and it was difficult for the businesses to remain profitable. They noted that those drivers that did not want to increase tariffs would not have to do so.
- 4.20 It was noted that in future years the discussion on tariffs would be started in January each year. The trade would be canvassed on an annual basis as to whether or not fares should be increased. It was hoped that the process could be streamlined albeit that any variations would have to be subjected to the statutory consultation requirements.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 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 17 January 2022.
- 5.2 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. Variations to tariffs would also be included on this agenda as well as a discussion on the new taxi policy.

6 Appendices

None

Background Papers:

None

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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