

Runnymede Borough CouncilREGULATORY COMMITTEE2 June 2016 at 4.22pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors Mrs J Gracey (Chairman), D W Parr (Vice-Chairman), Mrs D V Clarke, R J Edis and Mrs M T Harnden

Members of the Committee absent: None

42 FIRE PRECAUTIONS

The Committee noted the Fire Precautions.

43 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 November 2015 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

44 2016 ANNUAL REPORT – HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING

The Committee received for information the third annual report on matters relating to the administration of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing.

Members were given statistical data to illustrate the type of work dealt with by the team and although other figures remained stable it was noted that the number of Private Hire Drivers and vehicles had reduced slightly, which was perhaps attributable to the increasing number of 'app' based operators, of which UBER was one.

The Committee noted information regarding the age and mileage of vehicles licensed in Runnymede, what the Licensing section did to assist drivers with keeping their records up to date. This included encouraging drivers to subscribe to the DBS on-line checking service as a manual check by the DBS usually introduced a delay in the process. Officers were pleased to report that 85 drivers now subscribed, compared with just 19 in 2014.

Officers confirmed that since the Knowledge Test had been re-vamped in 2013 it was proving to be a fair and effective way of ensuring drivers could operate efficiently in the borough. In addition, drivers were given a guide to assist them to prepare for the locations part of the test which helped keep standards high.

Members were pleased that only 4 drivers had been suspended in 2015/16 and that Officers had been able to deal with these and other matters under delegated authority which meant there were fewer cases being considered by the Committee, thus saving time and money for the authority.

Officers kept drivers informed by various different means with news regarding changes in legislation and other important issues and appreciated the feedback received at the taxi forums which were held three times a year. It was noted that attendance figures at the forums were low. However, the web pages for drivers and operators were well visited which indicated they were worthwhile.

Officers advised that despite very limited resources there had been enforcement activity throughout the year, some jointly with the police. Seven complaints about drivers had been received but it was acknowledged that a lack of evidence often meant that no stringent action could be taken.

The Committee discussed the various app based booking companies. Officers confirmed that there was very little the Council could do as their practice of parking up in various locations and waiting on bookings was quite legal. It was noted that no app based companies had been licensed by Runnymede but that a neighbouring authority had granted them a licence.

Members noted that taxi related fees and fares would be reviewed in November. There had been no increases for 2016/17 to allow the new fee setting process to settle and for Officers to assess it properly at a later date.

With regard to new and proposed legislation, the Government was still considering the Law Commission's report on taxi and private hire reform. In the meantime the Deregulation Act 2015 had introduced a standard duration for drivers and operators licences of 3 and 5 years respectively. In the absence of guidance, Officers considered requests for licences of a shorter duration on a case by case basis.

Officers would submit reports to future meetings regarding areas for further consideration such as the application process, training for drivers and operators on recognising Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and disability awareness and exploration of emission controls limits for taxi and private hire vehicles. There would also be implications for taxi licensing as a result of the Immigration Act concerning eligibility to work in the UK.

Officers had undertaken a major review of the taxi licensing terms and conditions and this was the subject of the next item of business.

45 DRAFT HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

The Committee considered a comprehensive review of the Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy and Guidance which Officers had undertaken in the absence of progress from central Government with the draft bill arising from the Law Commission's report on the subject which had begun in 2011.

Officers had produced a more detailed document which sought to explain why each part of the policy was there; the overarching objectives being to protect the public and inform the taxi trade of the Council's requirements and expectations with regard to standards.

Officers highlighted the major revisions to the policy and guidance. These could be summarised as introducing more effective means of ensuring that drivers were fit and proper, that they conducted business in a lawful, efficient and safe way and that their vehicles were of as high a standard as possible. It was noted that a full table of changes would be set out when the policy was presented to full Council following the Consultation period and consideration of feedback that produced.

Officers were very keen to engage with as many people as possible during the consultation period, which had been set at 12 weeks to give sufficient time for responses. Officers were asked to email all Councillors for their suggestions for reaching a wide audience for consultation on the draft policy. It was noted that the draft policy would be publicised on the Council's website as well as being distributed to local businesses, GP surgeries and similar.

In addition, Officers would consider including the Focus Group set up by the Head of Strategy in the consultation and any residents' groups newsletters for example as suggested by Councillors at the meeting.

Members agreed with the ethos of the policy to protect the public and maintain a balance between regulation and freedom.

RESOLVED that –

- i) the draft taxi licensing policy be approved for public consultation; and**
- ii) the results of the consultation be brought back for further discussion and approval on 15 November 2016 prior to adoption by the full Council on 8 December 2016.**

Chairman

(The meeting ended at 4.51 pm)