

Runnymede Borough CouncilRegulatory CommitteeWednesday, 4 January 2023 at 7.30 pm

Members of the Committee present: Councillors E Gill (Vice-Chairman), J Broadhead, S Saise-Marshall and V Cunningham (In place of J Wilson).

Members of the Committee absent: Councillors J Wilson (Chairman) and T Burton.

410 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2022 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

411 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor T Burton.

412 Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

413 Disability Awareness Training - Outcome of Consultation

The Committee received the results of a recent consultation on disability awareness training and was asked to approve an amendment to the Council's policy on Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing.

The issue of whether to make disability awareness training mandatory for all drivers and operators was discussed at the meeting of the Committee on 27 September 2022. Members had approved that a public consultation be carried out to survey the trade, public and other stakeholders.

Officers reported that 67 people had responded to the consultation. The majority of the Trade considered mandatory training should not be introduced, whilst the majority of others responding thought that it should.

The survey contained a section for comments and the Committee considered these carefully. A number of the trade considered training was unnecessary. Comments suggested this was because they felt well informed already and that a lot of such awareness was common sense.

One of the public objectors mentioned cost; this concern was echoed by Members of the Committee. Officers confirmed that the cost of undergoing on-line training was in the region of £40 but assured Members that this was a one-off fee to be borne by the drivers and operators.

Those responding to the survey who were in favour of mandatory training gave reasons including the need to be fully informed and up to date with rules and regulations. From the public side, some had experienced difficulty as disabled people and others felt training was long overdue. It was mentioned that on-line training would be sufficient and should be cost effective.

In the absence of current guidance on disability awareness training, Officers had

considered the draft, revised Best Practice Guidance from the Department for Transport which Officers felt was likely to be introduced. This strongly encouraged disability awareness training. In addition, the Local Government Association urged licensing authorities to go beyond the legal requirements.

Members noted that firms operating school transport services under contract with Surrey County Council did undertake disability training specific to issues arising from home to school transport, but this did not cover the new duties required of drivers and operators under the amended Equality Act.

The Committee was advised that three other local licensing authorities in Surrey mandated disability awareness training. Examples of three providers were noted, although Officers did not intend to recommend one to the trade. This meant that no procurement route need be taken.

The Committee was mindful of the need to attract new drivers, the number of licensed drivers was approximately 96. Some Members considered that the cost of the training might be prohibitive in the current climate. Officers confirmed that on-line training was much cheaper than in person learning. Unfortunately, the Council did not have sufficient funds in the Taxi Licensing budget to pay for the training, even for existing drivers.

Officers were asked to consider whether the number of medicals required could be reviewed and other ways to increase the number of new drivers. It was also noted that there were currently only 5 fully accessible licensed vehicles in the borough because they were very expensive.

Members agreed that, on the whole, introducing mandatory training was proportionate, appropriate and necessary to demonstrate a commitment to ensure the safe travel of disabled people and compliance with the Council's Public Sector Equality Duty.

Officers tabled suggested wording to amend the policy which was approved. The Committee was keen for the requirement to be implemented swiftly. It was agreed that giving all drivers and operators 6 months from when the policy changed to complete training and provide a certificate issued by the training company was reasonable.

Officers confirmed that the importance of doing training for their own benefit would be stressed to the trade and that carrying the certificate would be publicised as a positive selling point for using locally licensed drivers and operators. The training would be highlighted on the Council's social media, at the next taxi forum in March 2023. Members asked whether it was possible to include an article in the next Borough Magazine. Officers agreed to raise this with the Communications and Marketing team.

RESOLVED that –

- i) Mandatory disability awareness training for all drivers and operators should become a requirement of licensing for drivers and operators; and**
- ii) the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing conditions be amended as set out in section 11 of the tabled document, as resolved and approved**

414 Exclusion of Press and Public

There were no exempt or confidential items on the agenda.

(The meeting ended at 8.30 pm.)

Chairman