

# STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

## GENERAL PURPOSES MINUTES

**Date: Wednesday 11 March 2009**

**Time: 6.00 p.m.**

**Place: Autun Room, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage**

**Present:** P Kissane (Chair), L Knight, J Lloyd CC, L  
Martin-Haugh, M Notley, J Pickersgill, L  
Strange and P Stuart

Agenda Item:

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**In Attendance:** Eight members of the public

**Start/End Time:** Start Time: 6.00 pm  
End Time: 7.26 pm

### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors M Cherney-Craw, P Gallagher, C Latif, J Thomas and B Underwood.

There were no declarations of interest.

### **2 MINUTES - 20 JANUARY 2009**

The Chair noted that the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 14 January 2009 had been circulated as a supplementary agenda, having been omitted in error from the main agenda. Both sets of Minutes would be considered together.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 20 January 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.
2. That the Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 14 January 2009 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

### **3 ADOPTION OF POLICY AND CONDITIONS FOR HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING**

The Chair outlined the procedure to be following for the meeting, explaining that he would permit some of the respondents to the consultation to speak. There was no legal requirement for this, but it was considered that, in the interests of fairness, the respondents should be permitted to clarify and expand on their representations. However, the Chair emphasised that no new material could be introduced, as the consultation period had ended in October 2008.

At the Chair's invitation, the Licensing Manager introduced the report. The Council's Policy and Conditions for the licensing of Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles (PHVs) had been updated during 2008 to reflect changes in best practice and legislation, and to enhance the Council's enforcement process. As required by legislation, a formal consultation on the revised Policy had been undertaken from 1 August 2008 to 31 October 2008, with copies sent to all relevant parties, as listed at paragraph 3 of the report.

Several responses had been received in relation to the consultation, and these were set out at Appendix 8. Officers had considered each of the comments received, and Appendix 1 set out a list of recommended revisions to the draft policy in light of the representations. Updated, large-print copies of this document were tabled for ease of reference.

The Chair invited the following members of the public to speak in support of the representations which they had submitted in relation to the consultation: Colin Hunt, Deanne Baser, Kevin Ward and Barry Milne. The speakers raised the following points:

- The requirement for operators to ensure that at least one Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (WAV) was available at all times, was excessively onerous, particularly on smaller operators who may only have one vehicle. In addition, the requirement for side-loading WAVs only, restricted the choice of vehicle. Rear-loading WAVs should also be permitted.
- The inclusion of full names on driver licences was unnecessary and could lead to health and safety issues for the drivers. Historically, only the licence number was displayed on drivers' badges.
- In relation to the new arrangements for livery, the proposed new sticky label would not be convenient for some drivers who undertook executive work without overt PHV identification on the vehicle. In addition, there was a safety issue as the labels clearly identified the vehicles as PHVs making them a potential target for crime.

At the Chair's invitation, the officers responded to the comments raised, and took the Committee through the amendments which were recommended to address some of the issues raised during the consultation:

- In relation to the issues over WAVs, it had been recommended that the draft policy be amended to require operators of ten or more vehicles to arrange between them for the provision of at least one WAV at all times. This would allow the flexibility requested by the operators. However, it was recommended that the requirement for WAVs to be side-loading be retained, as current best practice indicated that rear-loading WAVs were significantly more dangerous.
- It was acknowledged that, previously, drivers' badges only included a licence number. However, the new requirement for full names on badges was intended to prevent fraud and to offer a safety measure. There was no evidence that the inclusion of full names could be a safety issue for drivers.
- In relation to livery and the proposed sticky signs, officers noted that the alternative magnetic signs were prone to falling off at high speed, and could easily be removed and stolen. The proposed adhesive signs were intended as a safety measure for members of the public using PHVs and Hackney Carriages, to ensure that the users could verify that a vehicle was genuine.

A vote was taken on each of the recommended changes set out in Appendix 1, and it was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the comments received from the consultation exercise be noted.
2. That the draft Policy and Conditions, as set out in Appendix 9 to the report, be approved, as amended by the suggested revisions in Appendix 1, subject to the following:
  - In relation to the suggestion amendment for page 4, amend to option 1; and
  - In relation to the amendment for page 26, make no amendment.
3. The final wording of the revisions made under resolution 2. above be delegated to the Head of Environmental Health and Licensing in consultation with the Chair of the Committee.

#### **4 HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE FEES AND CHARGES**

The Head of Environmental Health and Licensing introduced the report which detailed the results of the consultation on the revised scheme of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licence fees as agreed by the Committee at its meeting on 20 January 2009.

It was reported that the Council was permitted to recover certain costs associated with providing the licensing function. A detailed review of the budget for the licensing service had been undertaken, and the revised fee structure had been designed to ensure the Council met the relevant costs. It was also noted that there had been no increase in the fees since 2004/05 for some elements and since 2000 for others.

The Committee was referred to the results of the consultation and the officers responses which were set out in the report.

The Chair invited Colin Hunt, of Stevenage Cab Trade Association, to speak in support of the representations which he had submitted in relation to the consultation. Mr Hunt raised concerns that the increased fees would be used to subsidise other elements of the licensing function. Officers responded that the accounts set out in the report were the Council's audited accounts, and that the new fees structure would be used only to meet the costs of licensing Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles.

Following debate, it was **RESOLVED**:

1. That the objections received during the consultation period be noted.
2. That the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licence fee structure be confirmed as publicised in the consultation and as set out at Appendix 2 to the report.
3. That the revised fee structure be implemented from 1 April 2009.

#### **5 URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

None.

## **6 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

It was **RESOLVED** that, under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 - 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

## **7 URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.