

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Thursday, 14 December 2023

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Claire Parris (Chair), Maureen McKay (Vice-Chair), Michael Downing, Chris Howells, Graham Lawrence CC, Lin Martin-Haugh, Margaret Notley, Graham Snell and Anne Wells.

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm
Time: End Time: 6.36pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Sandra Barr, Nazmin Chowdhury and Mrs Joan Lloyd.

Councillor Chris Howells declared a personal interest in Item 3 – Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy, as he was a Taxi Driver licensed by Transport for London.

2 MINUTES - 30 OCTOBER 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 30 October 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE POLICY

The Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager presented a report seeking approval to a revised Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy.

The Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager advised that the Policy was last reviewed in 2014. The Policy outlined how the Service would administer this statutory duty from receiving applications to enforcing the Policy and conditions contained within it.

The Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager stated that there were fundamental changes from the policies agreed in 2014. Structurally, the Policy outlined arrangements for all strands of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire licensing (drivers, operators and vehicles) in one document. Previously there were three separate policies.

With regard to content, the Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager explained that the Policy attempted to accommodate all aspects of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire licensing, which expanded the document in comparison to

its predecessors. More information was provided about how the Service operated. The Policy aimed to ensure that the Service:

- Met the Statutory Guidance;
- Met Best Practice;
- Was updated in accordance with the introduction of new legislation; and
- Was transparent in its approach to licence holders.

The main changes/updates to the Policy related to:

- Mandatory training for licence holders in safeguarding;
- Mandatory training for licence holders for disability awareness following the amendment to the Equalities Act 2010;
- Introduction of a suitability policy, superseding the current convictions policy for licence holders;
- An updated definition of 'fit and proper';
- Introduction of an enforcement policy outlining how the Service would ensure the Policy conditions and legislative standards were maintained during the life of a licence; and
- Conditions for drivers, operators and vehicles had been revised.

The Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager commented that, in addition, the Policy offered a response to Stevenage Borough Council declared climate emergency by phasing out older cars from the fleet. Following liaison with the Head of Climate Action, the Policy removed Euro 4 vehicles from the fleet – this would provide a reasonable saving on CO2 emissions. Currently, there was no short-term plan to remove the next oldest generation (Euro 5) vehicles from the fleet. However, it would be possible for a review of the Policy, as necessary, in regard to this aspect. This would be seen as a substantial change to Policy, requiring consultation.

The Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager advised that the Policy had been developed following two rounds of consultation, and comments made during this process had formed the Policy position. The first consultation was undertaken in January-February 2023. The Service received a number of responses to this consultation (76). Two responses contained petitions signed by numerous drivers against the age policy for new and existing vehicles, leading to the 162 negative comments being counted for this point. The second consultation spanned September – November 2023 and 2 responses were received. The comments from both consultation exercises were set out in the report and its appendices.

The Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager stated that final proof reading was undertaken and the Policy had been altered accordingly.

The Committee noted that it was anticipated that the Policy would be implemented on 1 April 2024. This was to accommodate changes that licence holders and the Service needed to make. The Service would notify licence holders of their new obligations to meet the Policy in advance of this date.

The Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager recommended that the Committee agree the Policy, reflecting the changes outlined in Appendix D to the report.

At the Chair's invitation, Members asked a number of questions which the Environmental Health Commercial & Licensing Manager, assisted by the Licensing Officer, answered as follows:

- the fee structure for the Licensing Service accommodated a certain element of informal vehicle inspection and enforcement. When formal action was required, the Council would always endeavour to recoup its costs;
- the percentage of wheelchair accessible Hackney Carriage vehicles (30%) was unchanged in the proposed new Policy;
- the training for drivers was a mixture of virtual and in-person sessions. New applicants would be required to complete training prior to receiving their licences, and existing drivers would be required to complete it within 12 months of their licence renewal date after the date of adoption of the new Policy;
- the new penalty points scheme in the Policy was used by other Licensing Authorities. The maximum number of points was 12, over a rolling 18 month period. This was different from the DVLA penalty points system;
- vehicles were inspected and subject to an MOT every 6 months. If repairs were required then the Licensing Team would remove the vehicle from the road until the repairs were undertaken (the Policy had been strengthened to take account of action required by virtue of MOT advisory notes);
- there was a mechanism for reporting issues with licensed vehicles and/or drivers, either on-line through the SBC website, via phone calls or through e-mails;
- the various driver tests were administered under examination conditions – the spoken English test was delivered via a mobile app; the Knowledge test in-person, with one of the Licensing Officers invigilating; and the professional driver test via a third party provider;
- the National Register of Revocations and Suspensions was a mechanism for licensing authorities to share details of individuals who have had a hackney carriage/taxi or private hire driver's licence revoked, suspended or an application for one refused;
- the Policy was supportive of cameras being installed within vehicles, but this was not a mandatory requirement. Full consultation would be needed should

the Licensing Authority wish to mandate the installation of cameras;

- the Policy would be reviewed in full in 5 years' time, but would be developed over that time (including managing the fleet in terms of CO2 emissions); and
- all drivers (both Hackney Carriage and Private Hire) were required to undertake the Knowledge test. If users had any issues with any driver in this regard they were encouraged to report this to the Licensing Team.

The Committee was supportive of the new Policy, and thanked the Licensing Team for the extensive work carried out in its preparation.

It was **RESOLVED** that the proposed Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy, as attached at Appendix A to the report and reflecting the changes outlined in Appendix D, be agreed, with an implementation date of 1 April 2024.

4 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

5 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not required.

6 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR