

GENERAL LICENSING COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 10 November 2020

PRESENT – Councillors B Jones (Chair), Clarke, Crumbie, Donoghue, Dulston, Haszeldine, C L B Hughes, Lee, Newall, K Nicholson, A J Scott and Snedker

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE – Bethany Symonds (Lawyer), Allison Hill (Democratic Officer), Graham Hall (Head of Community Safety), Brian Murray (Assistant Licensing Manager) and Colin Dobson (Licensing Manager)

LG10 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest reported at the meeting.

LG11 REVIEW OF POLICIES AND CONDITIONS RELATING TO HACKNEY CARRIAGES, PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES AND THEIR DRIVERS AND OPERATORS

The Director of Economic Growth submitted a report (previously circulated) for Members to give consideration to and approval of the final draft of the Council's revised policy document in respect of Hackney Carriages and Private Hire vehicles, their drivers and Operators, which is due to take effect from 01 January 2021.

The submitted report included the proposed changes following the consultation exercise which was held between 21 August and 2 October 2020; and a draft of the policy which reflected legislative changes relating to licensing and included the latest government and professional body guidelines, along with new statutory standards introduced by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to protect children and vulnerable adults.

It was reported that at the time of writing the report, Darlington Council had 161 licensed Hackney Carriage vehicles and 90 licensed private hire vehicles and of these 12 were wheelchair accessible; in addition there were also 166 hackney carriage drivers, 163 private hire drivers and 106 combined hackney carriage and private hire licensed drivers.

The submitted report also outlined key changes from the Department of Transport in relation to DBS checks; the National Register and previous convictions and outlined the proposed local changes. The proposed local changes were in relation to the colour of vehicles; the introduction of an age policy for emissions; window tints to reduce light transmission; specific locations on vehicles for advertising; removal of the requirement to carry a spare wheel; insurance write offs to allow Category N; on-line payments only; reducing application process time; and disability awareness. It was also noted that although inward CCTV was not mandated by the Department of Transport this was being encouraged and supported locally and will be considered for further review.

Discussion ensued on the draft policy and proposed changes and Members referred in particular to the specific shade of red permitted for vehicles which Members felt was too restrictive and it was agreed that the Licensing Manager would amend the

draft policy to include a less restrictive colour shading.

With regard to the licensing incentive of a 25 per cent reduction in licensing fees offered for fuel efficient vehicles, a Member questioned what was being done to encourage more of these vehicles within the trade. The Licensing Manager confirmed that he would like to see more emission free vehicles, however advised that there was still a reluctance from the taxi trade, mainly due to the increased cost of purchasing these vehicles and the lack of high speed charging points, especially for longer journeys. The Chair confirmed that this was an area to keep under review and for the Licensing Team to continue to campaign for driver to reduce emissions.

A further question was raised by a Member regarding the wearing of face coverings in taxis by both the driver and the passengers and why this had not formed part of the consultation with the trade. The Licensing Manager advised Members that there was ongoing national work regarding face coverings and the majority of authorities agreed that at the time current legislation and guidance was sufficient however did agree that a condition could be included in the Code of Conduct for drivers to adhere to public health guidance.

RESOLVED – That, taking into consideration the amendments proposed by this Committee, Members approve the draft of the Taxi Licensing Policy prior to approval by Full Council and to be applied to all Licences from 1 January 2021