

## **6Minutes of the Meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 14 February 2018 at 7.00 pm**

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- Present:** Councillors Ben Maney (Chair), Roy Jones (Vice-Chair), Chris Baker, Gary Collins, Graham Hamilton, Martin Kerin, Steve Liddiard, Joycelyn Redsell and Graham Snell
- Apologies:** Councillors Colin Churchman, Angela Sheridan, Pauline Tolson and Aaron Watkins
- In attendance:** Paul Adams, Principal Licensing Officer  
Chima Obichukwu, Litigation Solicitor  
Simon Scrowther, Litigation Solicitor  
Kenna-Victoria Martin, Senior Democratic Services Officer
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Before the start of the Meeting, all present were advised that the meeting may be filmed and was being recorded, with the audio recording to be made available on the Council's website.

### **18. Minutes**

The minutes of the Licensing Committee meeting held on 4 October 2017 were approved as a correct record.

### **19. Items of Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent Business.

### **20. Declaration of Interests**

There were no interests declared.

### **21. Operator Supported Private Hire Driver Application**

The Principal Licensing Officer presented the report to Members which asked them to support an application scheme for new private hire drivers, by Thurrock Licensed Private Hire Operators, which allows for supported on the job training for new applicants.

He continued to advise Members the Council had set out requirements for applicants to demonstrate their suitability as fit and proper persons to hold a private hire drivers licence, these included:

- be aged 21 or over
- have held a UK or EU licence for at least 3 years

- have no relevant convictions or have been determined by the Licensing Committee
- pass a knowledge test including places of interest in Thurrock
- undertake the Councils Taxi CSE/Safeguarding training
- pass a Passenger Assistant Training Scheme (PATS) course

The Committee heard that to permit Operators to mentor new drivers, it had been proposed that the scheme be open to drivers that were employed by Operators of a sufficient size and capacity to provide daily support. Therefore Only Operators who complied with the enhanced standards were allowed to mentor drivers up to 10% of the maximum vehicles operated under their Operators Licence.

It was discussed that a mentored driver would be required to meet certain criteria on application for a one-year licence to be processed. Once the applicant had met the necessary criteria their licence would be granted for an initial 6-month period. Within which they would have to pass a knowledge test including places of interest in Thurrock, undertake the Councils Taxi CSE/Safeguarding training and pass a PATS course. All of which would be conditions of the licence.

Members were notified any driver who had not successfully completed the required criteria would not have their licence extended after the 6-month period and would not be eligible for the mentoring scheme again.

The Committee during their discussions enquired the following:

- Whether the scheme was like an apprenticeship for those drivers struggling to complete the required tests to become a taxi driver, in line with the Councils policy. It was sought as to who would be effected by the scheme. Officers informed that 10 of the bigger taxi companies had already shown an interest into accessing the scheme.
- How the scheme and those in taking part were to be monitored. It was explained officers were limited in the amount of monitoring they could undertake, however the scheme was under review and annual DVLA checks would be completed along with other checks which were in place.
- As to whether the drivers would be permitted to complete school contract runs. Members heard that all drivers would be CSE trained and the school contracts were the same each day, which meant that less knowledge of the area would be required. It was commented that the drivers who undertook these contracts, would often do so at short notice.
- If there were any restrictions in place, such as working hours. Officers notified the Committee there were none as presented, however they were in discussions with the trade.

It was raised as to how the mentoring part of the scheme would be completed. Officers clarified that drivers would be paired together with another driver, like

a 'buddy scheme'. This would give the drivers someone to discuss the knowledge test with and be able ask any questions on a daily basis.

Councillor Snell commented that he did not feel comfortable with the scheme. He continued that it could only really work with the bigger companies who had a fleet of drivers and this would allow inexperienced drivers to be working with members of the public.

The Principal Licensing Officer addressed the Committee informing them there was generally a shortage of taxi drivers, not just within Thurrock but also within other Local Authorities in Essex. He continued to explain the mentoring was not to do with a driver's, driving ability it was to assist with the knowledge test and the do's and don'ts within the councils policy.

It was commented that companies were facing challenges of work being given out of the borough. Members further heard that Castle Point had removed the knowledge test from their policy for licensing drivers and this was supported by the taxi trade. Clarification was given to the Committee that such drivers would be Private Hire drivers, this meant that taxis were to be booked in advance, meaning a job could be given to driver who knew the area and if they didn't then assistance could be sought from the operator.

Members sought as to whether the use of technology such as SatNavs made a difference as drivers would not need local area knowledge. Officers agreed that the use of technology meant that drivers were less reliant on what they knew, however the policy also included them to have an understanding of the law, conditions of their license and Health and Safety.

The Chair of the Committee queried if a private hire trade meeting had been requested. The Principal Licensing Officer confirmed a meeting had been held with those taxi companies with more than one Vehicle and they all had similar comments.

It was remarked by the Chair that he didn't want any operators to be disadvantaged by the recommendation to Full Council. Officers suggested they could write to all taxi companies in the borough, to consult with them on the scheme. The Chair further suggested a trail period of 9/12 months be undertaken to see how successful the scheme could be before rolling it out on a permanent basis. This was agreed by all Members.

The Committee then amended the recommendation as follows:

*That all taxi operators are consultation on the Operator Supported Private Hire Driver Application scheme;*

*Following a pilot scheme of the Operator Supported Private Hire Driver Application, which is to be reviewed after 12 months, the committee recommend to Full Council the amendment of the Private Hire Driver pre application requirements, to allow Operator Supported applications as per the scheme proposed in this report.*

The Principal Licensing Officer sought if Members wished to see a further report following the consultation before it be presented to Full Council for final consideration. The Chair asked that the Committee receive an email of the general overview of the consultation response; Members could then see if there were any significant objections to the scheme.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1. That all taxi operators are consultation on the Operator Supported Private Hire Driver Application scheme;**
- 2. Following a pilot scheme of the Operator Supported Private Hire Driver Application, which is to be reviewed after 12 months, the committee recommend to Full Council the amendment of the Private Hire Driver pre application requirements, to allow Operator Supported applications as per the scheme proposed in this report.**

**22. Applications Received**

The Chair introduced the report explaining it was a summary of applications received under the Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Act 2005 for the period of the 1 June 2017 to 31 December 2017.

**RESOLVED:**

**That the Licensing Committee noted the contents of the report.**

**The meeting finished at 7.45 pm**

Approved as a true and correct record

**CHAIR**

**DATE**

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Democratic Services at [Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk](mailto:Direct.Democracy@thurrock.gov.uk)**