

MINUTES  
OF A MEETING OF THE  
**LICENSING COMMITTEE**

held on 23 January 2018

Present:

Cllr D Harlow (Chairman)  
Cllr Mrs H J Addison (Vice-Chair)

Cllr I Eastwood	Cllr R Mohammed
Cllr K Howard	Cllr M Pengelly
Cllr J Kingsbury	Cllr C Rana

Absent: Councillors M Ali and M A Bridgeman

**1. MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Committee held on 10 October 2017 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor R Mohammed declared a disclosable pecuniary interest in minute items 4 – Introduction of BTEC Qualification for Licensing Taxi Drivers and 5 – Surrey-wide Convictions Policy arising from his position as a taxi operator. The interest was such that Councillor Mohammed left the Chamber during consideration of these items.

**3. URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Urgent Business.

**4. INTRODUCTION OF BTEC QUALIFICATION FOR LICENSED TAXI DRIVERS**

Matt Cobb, Senior Licensing Officer, introduced the report which noted that the Licensing Authority was required to ensure the safety of the travelling public and that the Council attracted good and reputable taxi drivers. The report recommended that the Council adopt a BTEC Level 2 Certificate entitled 'Introduction to the Role of the Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver' as a mandatory requirement for all Taxi or Private Hire drivers in Woking, and that drivers would be given three years to complete the qualification.

Councillor Howard advised the Committee that he could not support the proposal for existing drivers to complete the Certificate as there were other requirements which had to be met to work as a driver; there would be little benefit to them; and the cost of the course would be around £300 with loss of earnings.

Councillor Eastwood added that a shorter refresher questionnaire could be sufficient, for example testing drivers' knowledge of the Borough, and that the issue of 'grandfather

rights' had been raised as the largest area of concern by the drivers themselves during the consultation process.

Councillor Addison advised that she agreed that a shorter refresher questionnaire could be a better option for existing drivers, for whom the cost of the course would be a concern.

Matt Cobb advised the Committee that appendix 6 of the report set out a table of complaints received during the 2017 calendar year and there was a relatively even spread across newer and more experienced drivers. It was stated that a qualification could assist with preventing a small minority of drivers from gaining a licence with Woking Borough Council and using the licence to work outside the Borough, and that Guildford Borough Council had recently required its drivers to complete the course. There were a number of educational centres where the qualification could be taken, with a range of dates and times to suit drivers, although the nearest centre was stated to be in Guildford. It was added that the Council could consider a shorter refresher course for existing drivers in the event that the Committee felt it to be more beneficial.

Councillor Kingsbury stated that it was understood completing the qualification could be difficult for some existing drivers, however it was important to raise the standards in the Borough over the forthcoming three years. Following a question about the cost of the course, Joanne McIntosh, Legal Services Manager, advised the Committee that the Council was not intending to contribute towards the cost of the course, noting that the drivers were required to pay for their own DVLA and CRB checks.

Councillor Pengelly advised that it was a sensible option to introduce the qualification to heighten the professionalism of the taxi trade in the Borough, and that a three year timescale would be reasonable. It was added that the Council should be receptive to the cost for the drivers in completing the course.

Councillor Rana stated that passenger safety was an overriding issue for the Council and referred to paragraph 2.6 of the report which stated that in some instances central Government funding would be available to assist drivers. Joanne McIntosh added that the funding related to assisting those applicants who could need help with English language skills.

Councillor Howard reiterated that whilst the safety of the public was paramount, the qualification would not lead to a better standard of taxi service in the Borough and it was difficult to see the benefit to the travelling public or the Council. It was added that the qualification was unpopular in the UK and had received no support from the drivers during the recent consultation process.

Councillor Eastwood referred the Committee to page 12 of the report which set out the tests required as part of the course offered by Guildford College. It was noted that there were a large number of questions to be completed and suggested that a handful could be taken from each section and pulled into a shorter questionnaire, which could ascertain whether further training would be required.

The Committee noted that the Licensing team had limited staff resources and would be unable to provide assessment of drivers in the same manner as could be undertaken by an educational provider. The team was responsible for processing the Knowledge Test which took up a large amount of staff time.

The Chairman asked the Committee to vote on the recommendations to Council in the report. The change in requirements for all new drivers to complete the BTEC Level 2

Certificate was agreed nem con. The change in requirements for all current drivers to complete the BTEC Level 2 Certificate within 3 years was carried by 4 votes to 3 votes.

**RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL**

- That (i) **the change in requirements for all new drivers to complete the BTEC Level 2 Certificate be approved; and**
- (ii) **the change in requirements for all current drivers to complete the BTEC Level 2 Certificate within 3 years be approved.**

**5. SURREY-WIDE CONVICTIONS POLICY**

The Committee received a report which set out the consultation process and responses on the proposed changes to the Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Policy, designed to help prevent the sexual exploitation of vulnerable children and adults by introducing consistent standards towards convictions across Surrey. The Policy was attached at Appendix 3 to the report and Joanne McIntosh advised the Committee that the responses had largely been in favour of the proposals.

The Committee welcomed the report and noted that the Council could provide assistance to any taxi drivers unable to use computers. Councillor Howard stated that a minor point was that the policy appeared to offer varying views over the use of discretion in dealing with convictions.

Councillor Pengelly stated that he supported the proposals contained within the report, particularly the mandatory training on Child Sexual Exploitation.

Following a query by Councillor Eastwood, Joanne McIntosh confirmed that the Council would consider the suspension of a licence if a driver was arrested and charged, until either the outcome of the trial was known or the Police had chosen to no longer pursue the case.

**RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL**

- That (i) **the Surrey-wide Taxi and Private Hire Convictions Policy at appendix 3 to the report be adopted;**
- (ii) **the requirement for all existing taxi and private hire drivers to undertake Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) training by 1 May 2019 be approved; and**
- (iii) **the requirement for all new taxi and private hire drivers to undertake CSE training from 11 April 2018 be approved.**

The meeting commenced at 6.30 pm  
and ended at 7.45 pm

Chairman: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_