

PETITION – TAXI LICENSING ARRANGEMENTS

Executive Summary

The Council has received a petition which asks the Council to *“Implement a system wherein a licensed taxi driver has the opportunity to appear before a committee and to make necessary adjustments for drivers due to the COVID pandemic.”*

In accordance with the Council’s arrangements for petitions, the matter has been referred for consideration by Full Council.

Recommendations

The Council is requested to consider the petition and determine accordingly.

Background Papers: None.

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 A petition has been received which asks the Council to *“Implement a system wherein a licensed taxi driver has the opportunity to appear before a committee and to make necessary adjustments for drivers due to the COVID pandemic.”* The petition has been received through the Council’s online e-petition scheme and contains 438 confirmed signatories and 66 unconfirmed signatories.
- 1.2 The number of signatures exceeds the threshold required for a petition to be referred to a meeting of Full Council and accordingly the Petitioner or their nominee has been invited to present the petition at Council.
- 1.3 The petition has been submitted in the following terms:

“Implement a system wherein a licensed taxi driver has the opportunity to appear before a committee and to make necessary adjustments for drivers due to the COVID pandemic.”

At the last full council meeting, the comments from the legal and democratic services manager may have given the impression to council members that drivers do not want a committee-based system and would prefer the current system in place. We, the undersigned, would like to reaffirm our preference for a system where a driver has the opportunity to appear before the licensing committee and we would fully support a change in WBC licensing policy and scheme of delegation of authorities to allow it. Furthermore, the taxi trade has suffered greatly due to COVID-19 and while we fully appreciate the steps Licensing took during these times, we would also like to request two more changes. Taking the BTEC exam is an additional cost. Many drivers are not working at the moment and their careers remains uncertain. Thus we are petitioning WBC to grant an extension to the BTEC deadline. Secondly, some drivers have been issued licenses for six months due to their MOT, and although the government has granted MOT extensions, drivers have not been given extra time on their license. We request that licenses should be issued for a year, as is normally done, and not six months.”

- 1.4 The on-line petition went live on 4 December 2020 and ended on 21 January 2021.

2.0 Petitions Scheme

- 2.1 As the number of signatories exceeds 400, the petition falls to be debated at Full Council. In accordance with the Council’s scheme for dealing with petitions, the petitioner has been invited to attend the meeting and present the petition. The presentation of a petition is limited to not more than three minutes, and should be confined to reading out, or summarising, the purpose of the petition, indicating the number and description of signatories, and making supporting remarks relevant to the petition.
- 2.2 Following the presentation, Members will have the opportunity to ask questions of the petitioner. Thereafter, the Council will discuss the petition and determine what action, if any, is to be taken.

3.0 Officer Comments

- 3.1 A report proposing changes to licensing delegations was due to be considered at the Licensing Committee on 19 January 2021. This item was deferred by the Licensing Committee, and will now be considered at the next Licensing Committee meeting on 9 March 2021. The report takes account of discussions on this matter at the Licensing Committee on 6 October 2020 and Council on 15 October 2020. It recommends changes to the licensing delegations so that certain applications are reported to the Taxi Licensing Sub-Committee for determination.

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- 3.2 The Petition asks the Council to extend the deadline by which drivers should have completed a BTEC on the role of the professional taxi and private hire driver. The deadline previously agreed by Council for this was 31 March 2021. However, as result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Licensing Committee (at its meeting on 19 January 2021) extended the deadline until 31 March 2023.
- 3.3 The Petition also asks that licences should be issued for a year, not six months. As a result of remote working during periods of lockdown, the standard licence plates and badges are not issued when a licence is renewed. Instead, letters are sent which extend the “expired” licence by six months. When the lockdown ends, standard licence plates and badges are issued in the usual way. These replace the letters and run for the normal twelve months. Currently, there are approximately 30-40 licences subject to this procedure. These will be dealt with as a priority when the lockdown ends.

4.0 Implications

Financial

- 4.1 None

Human Resource/Training and Development

- 4.2 None

Community Safety

- 4.3 None

Risk Management

- 4.4 None

Sustainability

- 4.5 None

Equalities

- 4.6 None

Safeguarding

- 4.7 None

5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 The outstanding issue raised in the petition is the extent to which applications are determined under delegated authority. This is due to be considered by the Licensing Committee on 9 March 2021, with any recommended changes being reported to Council on 8 April 2021. The views expressed in the petition can be considered as part of this process.

REPORT ENDS