

PETITION – TAXI LICENSING ARRANGEMENTS

Executive Summary

At its meeting on 11 February 2021, the Council received a report regarding a petition which had 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.”

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

An extract from the draft minutes of Council is set out below:

“6. PETITION - TAXI LICENSING ARRANGEMENTS - APPEARANCES BEFORE THE LICENSING COMMITTEE AND EXTENSION TO THE BTEC DEADLINE WBC21-007.

The Council received a report on a petition seeking the Borough 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 had been signed by 438 confirmed signatories and 66 unconfirmed signatories and was presented at the meeting. The Mayor welcomed Antony Schiller, representative for the petitioners, to the meeting.

Mr Schiller spoke in support of the petition, and the request to reduce the extent to which applications for licences were determined under authority delegated to Officers. It was noted that the petition also sought an extension for the deadline given to drivers to take the BTEC exam and an extension for licences from 6 months to one year, noting the MOT extensions awarded by the Government. Members were invited to ask questions of the petitioner before moving to the debate.

The Council was advised that a report proposing changes to the scheme of delegations had been due to be considered by the Licensing Committee in January 2021. The report, which had recommended changes to the scheme of delegations to allow certain applications to be determined by the Taxi Licensing Sub-Committee, had, however, been deferred in light of the petition. In regard to request to extend the deadline for the BTEC qualification, it was noted that the issue had been addressed and that the Licensing Committee had recently agreed to extend the deadline from 31 March 2021 to 31 March 2023. The question of extending the licence period had also been addressed and accordingly the only outstanding issue raised in the petition was the extent of the scheme of delegations, which was scheduled to be determined at the next meeting of the Licensing Committee.

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The Mayor thanked Mr Schiller for attending the meeting on behalf of the Petitioners and advised that, in view of the details set out in the report and the comments of Members of the Council, the Council was being asked to note the comments of Officers and agree that the matter should be referred to the next meeting of the Licensing Committee.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the Officer comments set out in the report be noted; and
- (ii) the points raised by the Petition be referred to the next meeting of the Licensing Committee.”