

Minutes of a meeting of the **LICENSING COMMITTEE** held in the Meeting Room 1, Council Offices, Priory Road, Spalding, on Wednesday, 1 November 2023 at 6.30pm.

**PRESENT**

A Harrison (Chairman)  
J Tyrrell (Vice-Chairman)

D Ashby  
A C Beal  
M D Booth  
A Casson

N Chapman  
M Geaney  
R A Gibson  
I Sheard

A Spencer  
J Whitbourn

In Attendance: The Public Protection Manager and the Democratic Services Officer

Apologies for absence were received from or on behalf of Councillors H J W Bingham and J L King.

1. **MINUTES**

Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held on 15 March 2023.

Members noted that there was a contradiction in the wording on minute number 14 which would be amended.

**AGREED:**

That the minutes of the meeting be signed as a correct record.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none

3. **TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING POLICY**

Consideration was given to the report of the Assistant Director – Regulatory which sought approval and adoption of the Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Policy.

The Public Protection Manager introduced the report, and highlighted the following points:

- The current policy was at end of its cycle and a review had been going on for some time. Most of the policy had remained the same, with changes incorporated from the new Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards, which focussed mainly on safeguarding (referred to as the National Standards).
- The revision of the policy had been delayed due to other legislative changes coming into force following the adoption of the national standards.

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- The new draft policy had been considered earlier in the year and had been out for a 3-month consultation period.
- A small number of responses had been received to the consultation, but the responses received did represent a large proportion of the industry in the area. The responses covered the following areas:
  - Proposal to extend vehicle age limits to private hire vehicles to the same as those currently in place for hackney carriages.
    - Responders commented that the impact of doing that would present difficulties in maintaining the same size fleet due to additional costs. A reduction in the number of vehicles would also have a negative effect on the number of drivers required.
    - Officers were recommending that an exercise be undertaken before the next review of the policy to work with the trade on this issue and come up with a solution that suited all parties.
  - Proposed English Language test
    - Responders were worried about the financial burden of this test.
    - Officers needed to decide what model would be used to deliver this testing, whether that be providing an in-house test, a test provided by a third party or an online test.
    - It was noted that drivers were not required as part of the National Standards to speak fluent English but needed to demonstrate they could communicate essential information to the customer.
  - Concern raised in relation to the turn around time for applications.
    - Officers noted that the checks required once an application was received did take time. Often, applications are submitted without the full information that is required and therefore took longer to process.

Members made the following comments:

- Members asked what sorts of costs would be involved in providing the English test in house versus via a third party online.
  - Officer responded that in-house tests would likely be within the range of £15 to £20, while an online test would likely be around £25, however these were estimated costs and would need to be confirmed.
- Members expressed that an English test was essential for prospective drivers.
- Members were concerned that the requirement for English would only suit English-speaking customers and did not take into account the many other languages that people within the District spoke.
  - Officers responded that the English requirement had come from the Department for Transport's National Standards, which the Licensing Committee had already previously agreed to adopt.
- Members asked how an online English test would be monitored to ensure that the correct person was taking the test.
  - Officers confirmed that any online option taken forward would need to have a mechanism in place that checked the identity of the person taking the test.
- Members queried how foreign qualifications would be checked for authenticity.

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- Officers responded that the National Standards had outlined options that Licensing Authorities could use to get assurance that prospective drivers could speak English at a certain level.
- Members asked if knowledge of the Highway Code was a requirement for a taxi driving licence.
  - Officers confirmed that this did not need to be independently verified as part of the application process.
- Members queried whether the particular information required was highlighted at the top of the taxi driver licence application form.
  - Officers confirmed that they were and that applications were not processed until all of the relevant information had been received. This information was also published on the Council's website.
- Members commented in relation to the vehicle age requirement that they were happy for this to be looked at in time for the next review, given the Government had recently extended the deadline for the sale of petrol cars to 2035.
- Members suggested some minor wording changes within various sections of the policy.
  - Officers agreed to make the suggested wording changes.

**AGREED:**

1. That the revised policy be approved and adopted. The policy will come into effect in a staged manner:
  - Matters that implement the revised National Standards for Safeguarding will come into force immediately.
  - The remainder of the policy be implemented from 1 April 2024.
2. That the Public Protection Manager and Licensing Team Leader, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder and Chair of Licensing Committee, be authorised to make detail and layout changes between policy reviews, to ensure that the policy reflects legislative and statutory guidance changes, as well as ensuring that it reflects any changing corporate standards and accessibility requirements.

4. **ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN DECIDES ARE URGENT.**

Members commented that the payment system for any type of licensing application was very difficult to navigate and asked whether anything could be done to improve this.

- Officers responded that the payment system used was the corporate one and therefore could not be changed. However, work was currently being undertaken to build a new customer portal for online licensing applications which would connect to the Capita system for payments.

The Chairman noted that the next meeting would take place on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> February rather than the scheduled date of Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> February.

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(The meeting ended at 7.19 pm)

(End of minutes)