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| TITLE | SAFEGUARDING TRAINING FOR HACKNEYCARRIAGE, PRIVATE HIRE AND SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY TRANSPORT VEHICLE DRIVERS |
| FOR CONSIDERATION BY | Licensing and Appeals Committee 3 July 2017 |
| WARD | Non specific |
| LEAD OFFICER | Julia O'Brien – Team Manager - Licensing Paul Anstey – Public Protection Manager |

PURPOSE OF REPORT

Addressing the issue of child sexual exploitation (CSE) has become a priority and a matter of great importance for the community and public authorities. This report seeks approval of the Committee to introduce compulsory safeguarding training for all licensed hackney carriage and private hire vehicle drivers and operators within Wokingham Borough.

OUTCOMES

Protection of the safety of children through appropriate training of taxi drivers and operators.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee agrees

- i) **to the introduction of mandatory safeguarding training for all hackney carriage and private hire vehicle drivers and operators, and**
- ii) **that officers consult with members of the taxi trade upon the introduction of the training and how it can best be delivered.**

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

1 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 1.0 This report sets out information collected over a number of years which evidences that there is an identified serious risk to the safety of children which can be reduced through appropriate training of taxi drivers and operators. The Council has an obligation to take measures to protect the safety of children and the proposal delivers this through the use of legal powers granted to the Council.

2 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 2.1 There have been a number of high profile and significant cases in recent years pertaining to the sexual exploitation of children. The exposure of poorly managed cases

of CSE in Rotherham and also the subsequent enquiries and reports have been a watershed on how society deals with the identification and processing of CSE incidents. Within the report 'Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham (1997 – 2013) Alexis Jay OBE August 2014' the role of taxi drivers in facilitating the abuse of children was identified and highlighted with the following comments made by the author:

“Time and again we read in the files and other documents of children being violently raped, beaten, forced to perform sex acts in taxis and cars when they were being transferred between towns“.

- 2.2 Attached as Annex 1 is a section from the report on Taxis and Licensing and their association with cases of CSE within Rotherham.
- 2.3 When a taxi driver applies for a licence in Wokingham they are required to demonstrate that they are a “fit and proper person”. This includes the submission of an enhanced DBS check at the highest level which includes the right for the Police to provide information which has not been the subject of a criminal prosecution. The Council has approximately 400 licensed drivers.
- 2.4 Officers have prepared a fact sheet for licensed drivers on matters of CSE and human trafficking which is attached as Annex 2. This will be distributed to all licensed drivers and operators and will be included within our new applicant pack. The question is “are we, as a Licensing Authority given the known connections of the taxi trade to CSE, presently doing enough to protect children?”
- 2.5 A more recent case of CSE, centred in Oxfordshire under the name Operation Bullfinch, resulted in 13 convictions for CSE. A report “Child Sexual Exploitation – Making a Difference” was released in June 2015 by Maggie Blyth of Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children’s Board. Attached as Annex 3 are some extracts from that report relating to taxis and their association with CSE. Within the recommendations there are references to:
- (1) Mandatory safeguarding training for taxi drivers, and
 - (2) Robust contracts for the transportation of vulnerable children to school.
- 2.6 Wokingham, as part of its role as a provider for home to school transport, uses a variety of transport methods including a significant number of taxis. It has for the last 2 years been a condition of the service contract that a driver must undertake mandatory safeguarding awareness training, covering areas such as child abuse, neglect and CSE. At present approximately 100 drivers/operators have undertaken the training which is provided by the internal training team in conjunction with the Corporate Transport Unit. The proposed training will ultimately replace the need for drivers to complete this awareness training.
- 2.7 A hackney carriage, private hire or school and community services vehicle driver will often find themselves in a position of transporting children who are either on their own or accompanied by adults. They will have the opportunity of observing behaviour that might be indicative of abuse, CSE or human trafficking. In addition they may find themselves as a potential target for unfounded allegations of CSE or abuse. It is therefore vitally important for drivers to be aware of the signs and know how to react to them, and in doing so safeguard children and themselves.

- 2.8 The recommendation is that the Council should introduce a condition within a driver licence requiring compulsory attendance at safeguarding training approved by the Council. Such measures would it is believed make children much safer and meet our duty under the Care Act 2014 through the implementation of necessary processes and procedures to protect children.
- 2.9 In seeking a training provider for the training Wokingham has had discussions with other local authorities across Berkshire who were also in the process of introducing a similar licence condition in relation to CSE. There is agreement between Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire, Wokingham and Reading to pursue a single training provision. The size of the pool of people requiring training means that we can benefit from economies of scale and deliver more frequent courses which will assist with the processing of new driver applications. Bracknell Forest have taken the lead to secure a training provider.
- 2.10 The supplier selected consists of training officers employed by Bracknell Forest, Reading, Wokingham and West Berkshire and who presently provide CSE training for a range of outside groups including Council staff. Their proposal is to provide training at venues throughout the geographical area that they cover. Applicants and licensed drivers / operators from any of those authorities will be able to select a course at the location and date that best suits their needs. As to the time of the course whilst previous experience has shown a course in the day is more popular consideration will be made of other times should demand be sufficient. The course will also be available to escorts employed in such areas as Home to School transport
- 2.11 The licensing authority will operate upon a cost recovery basis and with present knowledge of likely numbers and patterns of attendance it is recommended that the fee is set initially at £20 per attendee with an annual review of charge to be undertaken to ensure cost recovery
- 2.12 Consultation will take place with all Licence holders and groups working within the CSE field via letter, email or the website and will examine the introduction of the training and how best it can be delivered. The results of the consultation would be brought back to this Committee with recommendations upon how compulsory safeguarding training could and should be delivered.

Corporate Implications (this must include Financial Implications)

The Council as licensing authority has the power to require licensed drivers and operators to undertake safeguarding training including refresher training in accordance with their policy

The Council has a duty to protect children and there is clear evidence that the taxi trade has been implicated in CSE previously. To take no action could be criticised should there be a public enquiry into an incident in Wokingham.

It is intended that the training will be funded through a new charge to be included within the licensing fees.

Reasons for Decision

Protection of the safety of children through appropriate training of taxi drivers and operators

Alternative Options considered, if any

The Council could provide information on safeguarding to taxi drivers and operators and not require attendance at a training session. Evidence from training already conducted for drivers and operators involved in home to school transport is that training is vital for drivers to fully understand the safeguarding implications for children and themselves.

List of Background Papers

Rotherham Report on Taxis and Licensing and their association with cases of CSE, CSE fact sheet, CSE- Making a Difference

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