

# Agenda Item 19.

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Feedback Report to the Licensing and Appeals Committee from the Task and Finish Group on Taxi Licensing Matters</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Licensing and Appeals Committee 1 October 2019
<b>WARD</b>	Non-specific
<b>DIRECTOR</b>	Sean Murphy - Public Protection Manager

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

A Task and Finish Group to look at a range of Taxi licensing matters was set up and required to report back to the Licensing and Appeals Committee on the findings which are contained in this report together with a number of recommendations.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

1. That the Committee NOTES the content of this report which contains the main points from the two meetings held of the Task and Finish group and the minutes as Appendices
2. The Task and Finish Group be made a semi-permanent liaison group of Members, Officers and the trade (To include Hackney Carriage, Private Hire, School vehicles and drivers and Private Hire Operators) having recognised the benefit of face to face discussions- to meet as often as required
3. That the TFG initially looks at vehicle ages, height standards and tariffs as representations have been received from the Wokingham Hackney Carriage Association and makes any recommendations to the following meeting of the Licensing and Appeals Committee.

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

To summarise the work of the Task and Finish Group set up by the Licensing and Appeals Committee and advise on a way forward for issues raised by the trade at the last meeting.

## Background

At the June 25<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Licensing and Appeals Committee it was agreed that a Task and Finish Group of Members, Officers and the Trade be set up to address the concerns raised at that meeting by the trade.

**RESOLVED** That:

1) A Task and Finish Group will be set up, as soon as possible, with representatives from the Taxi Trade, Members of the Committee and Licensing Officers;

2) The Task and Finish Group would review:

I. the fees and tariffs for next year

II. possibly adjust this year's fees and tariffs

III. the age of vehicles

IV. out of area operators

V. disability training

3) The Task and Finish Group will bring a proposal to the Committee.

Prior to the Task and Finish Meeting of 23 July Members received and reviewed a number of written comments from trade members, outlining concerns with the current licence arrangements and taxi licensing policies.

These were summarised

- Illuminated "Taxis 24/7" Signage
- Henley Regatta/Festival, what would Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) be doing to assist drivers in the future? Could signage be installed to assist at HRR?
- What improvements were being made to the complaints procedure and general levels of communication between members of the trade and Officers?
- What was being done to address the increase to the drivers vehicle licence charges?
- Were there plans to raise the fare tariff as this had not been done for many years?
- Were there plans to review the age limit of Hackney Carriage (HCVs) and Private Hire vehicles (PHVs), in addition to the imposed 54 inch height of HCVs?
- What was being done with regards to online hailing companies?
- What was the current situation with regards to the bus lane from Cemetery Junction to Kings Road Reading?
- Was there any possibility of an additional taxi rank in Denmark/Peach Street, or a new one near the new cinema to replace the lost Elms Road rank?
- Could a Wokingham taxi rank be installed near the Wokingham train station? Was the road owned by WBC or was all of the surrounding land owned by the station?

Answers to the queries are included in Appendix A sent out with the minutes in some cases and followed up at the next meeting in the remainder.

**The meeting of 23 July 2019 RESOLVED That:**

- 1) Officers ask internal audit to look at the methodology behind calculating the hourly rate and the rate per vehicle;
- 2) Officers look into the financial implications on WBC of phasing in the increased charges to the Driver Badge 3 Year Licence, on a 3 year basis and report back the findings to the T&F group;
- 3) Officers await receipt of any business cases submitted by the trade relating to fares, age and height of vehicles, with a view to write a covering report and present them to the full Licensing Committee.

A further meeting of the Task and Finish Group was held on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2019. Notes are attached as Appendix 2

Items on the agenda were:

**Internal Audit Report**

**RESOLVED** That a full review of the fees and officer time allocation will be carried out and brought back to the Task and Finish Group for further discussion

**The financial implications on WBC of phasing in the increased charges to the vehicle licence fee, on a 3 year basis**

**RESOLVED** That the discussion and decision around phasing out the increase in charges and possibly subsidising vehicle licence fees be put on hold until the full review of fees becomes available.

**Over issuing of hackney licences in Wokingham Borough Council:**

Members considered that due to the falling numbers of hackney carriage licences, there was no justification to impose a limit. They agreed to re-visit the Local Authority's position if this situation changed.

**Update on Reading bus lane restrictions:**

Officers stated that this was an experimental traffic order restriction which was going to last 6 months, after which a consultation would be carried out. He stated that Wokingham could send their comments to this consultation.

Officers also stated that he had been unable to find the papers containing the decision to restrict bus lanes in Reading.

The T&F Group agreed that this restriction was discriminatory and unfair on Wokingham taxi drivers. It was agreed that the Council would write to Reading Borough Council to find out the reason for this and express the

views of the T&F Group. It was suggested this should come from the Executive Member for PPP

#### **New taxi ranks:**

Officers stated that they had spoken to Highways and the response was in the notes of the previous meeting.

#### **Part-time weekend late hour ranks at Denmark Street and Peach Street:**

Officers stated that they had spoken to Highways and the response was in the notes of the previous meeting.

#### **Council's ranks at rail station Oxford Road and opposite the Station Tap lay-by:**

Officers stated that the land referred to at the rail station was privately owned, therefore the Council could not intervene.

Officers stated that they had contacted the rail station manager and arranged for a meeting on 26 September at 11am to talk about this issue. The officer invited the members of the Association present to attend the meeting and put forward their views.

#### **Ranks for Henley festivals to be organised so that other boroughs are excluded, especially during the Rewind and Henley festivals**

Officers stated that this related to private land and that the Local Authority could not impose any rules. However, there was going to be a meeting with highways to discuss getting a designated lay-by.

Officers agreed to ask the organisers to give preference in the queue to Wokingham drivers.

#### **Administrative changes – confirmation of receipt of documents (the issue of the disappearance of documents from the letter box is still a big issue to drivers); transfer of ownership to be made possible after 5 years (this has been controversial in the past)**

Officers stated that they had raised this issue with officers and was reassured that they were monitoring the box for correspondence.

#### **Illuminated taxi sign update**

Representatives from the Wokingham Hackney Carriage Association complained about the situation in relation to the 'Illuminated' signage and how they were unfairly approaching their customers.

Lindsay Ferris stated that this was in a conservation area and therefore required planning which they did not have. He informed that the Planning Enforcement Officers had been advised of this issue.

**RESOLVED** That:

- 1) Wokingham would not impose a limit on the number of hackney carriage licences, but would review this decision if there was sudden rise in demand;
- 2) Wokingham Borough Council would write to Reading Borough Council to find out the rationale for the bus lane restrictions and make a representation in favour to Wokingham drivers; and
- 3) Officers would ask the organisers of Henley Regatta and Henley Festival to give preference to Wokingham drivers in the queue.

At the end of the meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> a document was given to officers by the Wokingham Borough Hackney Carriage Association which comprised representations for further discussion on the following:

1. the 54 inch height requirement for Hackney Carriage vehicles be reduced,
2. that the vehicle licensing age be changed to not older than 7 years on first registration (currently 5) and 18 years as a maximum for both Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicles (currently 10 and 8 respectively)
3. A tariff fare increase rise of 20%, an extra tariff for festivals be introduced and the 6 seater additional fares be reinstated

It is proposed these be considered at a further meeting of the Task and Finish/Liaison Group. These Notes from the T&F Meetings

Documents received from Wokingham Borough Hackney Carriage Association are attached to the report as Appendix 3.

### **Analysis of Issues**

There are no implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

## **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION**

***The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	No impact	N/A	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	No impact	N/A	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	No impact	N/A	N/A

<b>Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision</b>
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None
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<b>Cross-Council Implications</b> (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)
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There are no implications arising from the recommendation in this report.
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<b>List of Background Papers</b>
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Notes from the T&F Meetings
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Representations received from the Wokingham Borough Hackney Carriage Association
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<b>Date</b> 17 September 2019
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