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## Taxi Liaison Meeting Update

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Licensing and Appeals Committee
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	20 October 2021
<b>Chair of Committee:</b>	Councillor Barrie Patman
<b>Report Author:</b>	Karen Court/ Moira Fraser
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	N/a

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### 1. Purpose of the Briefing

- 1.1 To provide an update on the discussion at the July 2021 Taxi Trade Liaison meeting.
- 1.2 To consider if the age limit of vehicles should be suspended for a further one year period.
- 1.3 To consider what action could be taken in respect of lobbying Reading Borough Council about granting permission for Wokingham Drivers to use the bus lanes in Reading.
- 1.4 To consider the impact that Uber was having on the local trade and what measures could be introduced to support the trade.

### 2. Background

- 2.1 The virtual meeting held on the 21 July 2021 was attended by four Members (Councillors Chris Bowring, Rachel Burgess, Lindsay Ferris and Barrie Patman) and five representatives of the trade (Sandeep Hampal, Tahir Hammad, Roxy Dragana, Nadeem Safdar, Muhammad Usman). It was noted that the number of trade representatives attending these meetings had increased. The trade were being encouraged to attend on the basis that this was an open forum and a good opportunity to liaise with Members and Officers directly about issues that were important to them.
- 2.2 The trade had raised a number of queries relating to matters of policy and enforcement.

#### *Age of Vehicles*

- 2.3 Members of the trade asked that consideration be given to extending the age limit of vehicles to between 10 and 15 years as it was very expensive to buy new ones. They commented that the pandemic had exacerbated their financial predicament and that during the pandemic vehicles had not accumulated much mileage and were in good condition. They also requested that the policies across the three authorities covered by the Public Protection Partnership be aligned. It was explained that each of the authorities signed off their own policies and that the policies would reflect local need and strategic direction and therefore they could not be aligned in all facets.
- 2.4 Members explained that the current policy allowed for vehicles to continue with their licences, provided they were in good condition and that they passed the RAC check. It was accepted that the RAC check was expensive and that this requirement could be reviewed as part of the review of the policy as a whole. Members were also mindful of the fact that older vehicles were more polluting to the environment, and this needed to

be considered in line with the climate emergency measures being adopted by the Council.

- 2.5 Members acknowledged the loss of income and difficulties faced by the trade during this period. As such, after much discussion, it was agreed that this Group would recommend to the Licensing and Appeals Committee that the age limit be suspended for a further one year period.
- 2.6 The issue of RAC checks, training and other requirements around licensing of taxis would be discussed as part of the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy that would be coming to the 26 January 2022 report.

#### *Use of Bus Lanes in Reading*

- 2.7 Members of the trade raised concerns that Reading Borough Council did not permit them to use their bus lanes and urged Members and Officers to intervene and write to Reading asking for permission on their behalf.
- 2.8 It was noted that Officers had contacted RBC about this issue. RBC had confirmed that they were prepared to consider individual requests for the use of bus lanes. Drivers had to write directly to Reading Borough Council asking for permission to use their bus lanes and would then be informed which bus lanes they could use. The contact details had been circulated to the trade in the minutes of the meeting.
- 2.9 Members sympathised with the difficulties caused to Wokingham drivers in respect of the use of Reading bus lanes. It was decided that lobbying at a higher level was needed to help to persuade Reading to give permission to Wokingham drivers.

#### *Uber*

- 2.10 The trade noted the impact that Uber was having on their business. Officers explained that they had written to TfL regarding the issues raised by the trade. It should however be noted that Uber were licensed to operate in Wokingham. Enforcement action could only be taken where they were not complying with the law by, for example, plying for hire or parking illegally.

#### *Ranks*

- 2.11 The trade were informed that colleagues in the Highways Team were undertaking a consultation on ranks and they were urged to submit their views by the 11<sup>th</sup> September 2021. The outcome of the consultation would be reported back at the next Trade meeting.

#### *Date of the Next Meeting*

- 2.12 It was noted that the next Trade meeting would take place on the 03 November 2021.