

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

LICENSING COMMITTEE – 11 JULY 2013

REPORT BY DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

8. TAXI DRIVER ACCREDITATION SCHEME: IDEAS FOR DISCUSSION FOLLOWING SUGGESTIONS FROM COMMUNITY SCRUTINY TO RAISE STANDARDS AMONG THE LICENSED TAXI TRADE

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report:

- This report presents for further discussion, ideas aimed at raising standards among the licensed taxi trade.

<u>RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSING COMMITTEE: that</u>	
(A)	The report be received;
(B)	Joint working with Broxbourne and East Herts CVS, with a view to establishing a driver assessment for use as part of a driver accreditation scheme, be approved.

1.0 Background

1.1 Licensing Committee in March agreed to consider recommendations of Community Scrutiny and further proposals for amendment from officers, for incorporation in the Taxi Licensing policy, subject to consultation with the licensed taxi trade and further consideration of consultation responses.

1.2 Scrutiny Committee recommended that officers should further explore the idea of having a 'gold standard' driver scheme (an accreditation scheme), to generally raise and maintain high local standards.

1.3 A number of drivers have approached the council to enquire whether there is any way to restrict driver numbers, as there is a reduced amount of work for them at present. This has resulted in individual taxi drivers working longer hours, resulting in the impression that there is a large increase in the number of licensed

taxis. In fact as of 1 April 2013, there had been a net increase of 1 taxi vehicle, compared to the previous year.

- 1.4 There is no mechanism whereby the council can restrict the number of licensed drivers, however raising driver standards may, in addition to achieving the aim for high local standards, have the side effect of reducing ease of access to the trade.
- 1.5 There is a mechanism whereby the council may restrict the number of Hackney Carriage (but not Private Hire) vehicles, subject to the findings of an unmet demand survey indicating there is no unmet demand.
- 1.6 Current Government thinking is that the numbers of taxi vehicles should be left to the free market economy in the provision of taxi services.

2.0 Report

- 2.1 Licensing Committee is invited to consider whether raising the standards for taxi drivers by way of an accreditation scheme, in addition to offering a better service to the travelling public, may have the side benefit of restricting entry to the trade, and helping to keep the level of provision of taxi services closer to the current level of demand.
- 2.2 An accreditation scheme might have a number of elements, and taxi drivers could achieve accreditation by fulfilling a number of different criteria.
- 2.3 The criteria could include a pass in a specified modules of the CQF qualification in road passenger driving for hackney carriage and private hire drivers. A number of drivers have already voluntarily taken and passed the full CQF qualification, or the equivalent, the NVQ.
- 2.4 New applicants are presently encouraged to consider volunteering for Broxbourne and East Herts Community Volunteer Service (CVS) Community Car Scheme. The CVS provides some basic training and assessment to its volunteers.
- 2.5 Discussions have taken place with a CQF training organisation, who have indicated that the CVS training and assessment, with some adjustments, may be mapped to a CQF module concerned with customer care and driving vulnerable passengers. This

would mean that new applicants that completed the training and assessment with CVS would gain an exemption in a CQF module.

- 2.6 By way of raising standards, one of the features of an East Herts accreditation scheme could be a pass in the CQF module indicated above, for all new applicants. Existing taxi drivers could be given a period of time in which to obtain the module. Existing holders of the CQF/NVQ, having already obtained the full qualification, would not need to re-take that module.
- 2.7 Other features of an accreditation scheme that have been suggested, have been:
- 2.7.1 Sign up to a uniform dress standard;
 - 2.7.2 Installation of in car security camera;
 - 2.7.3 Training in provision of leaflet information from other voluntary organisations concerned with community safety, to passengers in appropriate cases;
 - 2.7.4 No more than a specified number of Licensing Record Points;
 - 2.7.5 No criminal record.

This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and Members may have their own suggestions.

- 2.8 The accreditation could be at more than one level, e.g. bronze, silver and gold, with achievers in all categories being accredited in the highest category.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

- 3.1 Any adoption of an accreditation scheme would require a further change to the Taxi Licensing Policy, and the licensed taxi trade will need to be consulted on any proposals arising from discussion of this report.

- 3.2 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

Taxi Licensing Policy 2011 (supplied with separate report to this committee).

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