

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

LICENSING COMMITTEE – 13 MARCH 2014

REPORT BY DIRECTOR NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

8. PROPOSAL FOR ENGAGEMENT WITH THE EAST HERTS LICENSED HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE TRADE

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report:

- To detail a proposed methodology for engaging with the East Herts hackney carriage and private hire, drivers, proprietors and operators.

RECOMMENDATION FOR LICENSING COMMITTEE: that	
(A)	The plan for engagement with the licensed Hackney Carriage and Private Hire trade be approved.

1.0 Background

1.1 Historically regular meeting were held with trade representatives to discuss issues and explore ways to address them but this group is no longer in existence.

1.2 In the absence of any nominated representatives from the trade Brian Simmonds, Head of Community Safety and Health Services, met with a number of licensed drivers during 2013 to gain a better idea of the issues facing the trade. As a result of these meetings a customer feedback form was designed and printed to raise awareness with passengers that they can highlight when drivers are good and complain when standards are not met. This leaflet is currently being distributed to the trade for them to pass to passenger and once responses are received these will be detailed in the quarterly licensing activity reports put before the committee. A copy of the feedback form is attached as **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**.

1.3 This collaboration with just two members of the licensed trade has highlighted the positive outcomes that can be achieved through open discussions but also that engagement with the trade lacking.

- 1.4 In order to address this issue a plan for increasing engagement has been formulated. It is hoped that this can rebuild the relationship and have some positive outcomes for the public, trade and East Herts Council. This process was started when the Chair of the Licensing Committee sat down with a licensed driver to listen to his concerns and it is now for Officers to take it forward.
- 2.0 Report
- 2.1 From the limited discussions that have taken place with trade it is apparent that there is a general feeling that they are not being listened to and that their concerns are being ignored.
- 2.2 A number of issues have been identified by a limited number of drivers. Any decisions regarding changes to policy or procedure based on these very limited talks would be open to challenge which is the reason why Officers are suggesting that meetings be held with the whole licensed trade.
- 2.3 The issues already identified are not detailed in this report as it is felt that it's important that the trade do not feel that the agenda is driven by any one individual from the trade. Engagement can only happen if all parties feel that their opinions are considered.
- 2.4 There are approximately 320 individuals in the licensed trade. These are divided between hackney carriage and private hire, daytime and night time trade, Hertford/Ware and Bishops Stortford. The intention is to hold 26 separate meetings to give everyone an equal opportunity to have their say.
- 2.5 The proposed format for the meetings is to invite approximately 20 individuals to each 2 hour meeting. Three meeting times and two different venues are proposed 10:00-12:00, 13:00-15:00 and 18:30-20:30, split proportionately between Hertford and Bishop's Stortford. This will allow every licence holder the same opportunity to attend.
- 2.6 Each meeting will start with the attendees being asked what they believe the biggest issues are that affect the trade. These issues will be recorded then each individual will be asked to identify the five biggest issues to them. This will be done in an anonymous way so that individuals feel free to give their own opinion without peer influence.

- 2.7 Once the list has been put into an order of importance by the attendees they will be asked for their suggestions regarding the solutions to the issues. Time permitting all of the issues listed will be address during the meeting but it is felt that the top 5 should be looked at as a minimum.
- 2.8 During the meetings attendees will be asked what sort of forum they would like to see going forward so that communication continues to improve. They will also be asked how best they think the representatives from the trade should be selected/nominated or if a regular open meeting is the preferred option.
- 2.9 All suggestions will be recorded and once all the meeting have been concluded a priority list of issues will be compiled with the suggested solutions. These may need to be recorded as three separate lists as there may be issues that only affect the hackney carriage or private hire trade but there are also likely to be issues that affect both. Officers will then look at the practicalities of the suggestions for addressing these issues.
- 2.10 A final meeting will be held to which all previous attendees will be invited and Officers will feedback on the list of issues and the way forward with implementing changes/solutions.
- 2.11 Guidance is sought from the Licensing Committee regarding the approach to be taken when implementing possible solutions. For example if an issue is raised regarding the knowledge test for a dual drivers badge this could be addressed by a procedural change. This would be possible as the Licensing Committee has previously agreed that there should be a knowledge test but has not stipulated the format. Is the Licensing Committee happy for Officers to make these changes based on consultation with the Licensing Chair in order to expedite the outcomes?
- 2.12 Other changes will clearly have to come before the Licensing Committee for consideration as they will be a change of policy. For example the introduction of knowledge tests for private hire drivers. When these changes are bought before the Licensing Committee Members may wish to instruct Officers to carry out wider consultations on some issues if they believe that they would negatively impact on passengers.
- 2.13 There may also be changes that are on the direct control of the East Herts Council which we may not be able to address or require contact with outside agencies. Where this is the case both the trade and the Licensing Committee will be informed.
- 3.0 Implications/Consultations

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

Background Papers

None.

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