

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL
LICENSING AND REGULATORY COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Licensing and Regulatory Committee** held on Tuesday 24 August at 1.30 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor I Hutchinson
(Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

J Beynon
D Ferguson
C Hardy
C Humphrey
K Nisbet

K Parry
C Seymour
A Sharp (part)
A Wallace

OFFICERS

H Bowers
T Hardy
N Masson
P Soderquest

Democratic Services Officer
Licensing Manager
Principal Solicitor
Head of Housing and Public
Protection

01. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Membership and Terms of Reference, as agreed by Council at the meeting on 26 May 2021 had been circulated for information.

The Chair welcomed the new members and invited all members and officers to introduce themselves.

RESOLVED that the Licensing & Regulatory membership and terms of reference, as agreed by Council on 26 May 2021, be noted.

02. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cessford and Gallacher.

Ch.'s Initials.....

03. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee held on Wednesday 11 February 2021, as circulated be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

With reference to page 4, second last paragraph of the minutes. A member requested that details of the number of electric or hybrid licensed vehicles be circulated to the new members of the committee.

04. SUBCOMMITTEE MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Subcommittee Minutes of the Licensing and Regulatory Subcommittee held on 1 July 2021 be received for information.

REPORTS OF THE HEAD OF HOUSING AND PUBLIC PROTECTION

05. HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING

Phil Soderquest, Head of Housing and Public Protection informed members that the purpose of the report was to update members and seek approval for consultation with the relevant bodies and licensed trade in respect of the following areas:-

- Review of the Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy, including the Government's statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards and vehicle emissions.
- Hackney Carriage Zones
- Hackney Carriage Tariff

Mr Soderquest reminded members that they should not express any views or otherwise prior to the consultation and that members would be able to make comment post consultation.

(Councillor Sharp joined the meeting at 1.34 pm).

Review of the Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy

For the benefit of new members, it was explained that a policy had been in place for a number of years, which consisted of the policies of 6 district council's following Local Government Organisation. The Government had issued statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards to licensing authorities outlining how they should carry out their licensing function.

There was an expectation that those recommendations were implemented by local authorities unless there was a compelling local reason not to.

Licensing Officers had reviewed the standards (Mr Soderquest conveyed his thanks for this) and where the Council's policy did not already contain those elements, it was proposed to consult the trade on the implementation. (Table on pages 15-23 of the report).

(Councillor Foster joined the meeting at 1.37pm).

The purpose of the standards was to protect children and vulnerable people from harm, eg child sexual exploitation. Many of the proposals were already embedded within the Council's policy.

One of the standards related to adequate member training and further training would be provided on Sexual Exploitation and progressed with all licensing and regulatory members, to ensure that they were more informed.

The Council already had a robust approach and as Head of Service, Mr Soderquest was able to act on any matters of urgency through delegation and in consultation with the Chair of Licensing and Regulatory.

Mr Soderquest informed members that there had to be serious and compelling reasons why the statutory guidance as set out, should not be followed. A member queried the timescale for self-reporting of incidents. It was advised that the Council worked in partnership with Northumbria Police in matters of emergency as well as the Council's 24 out of hours response.

Vehicle Emissions

The North East Strategic Licensing Group (NESLEG) had been asked to develop a set of standards for vehicles used as Hackney Carriages or Private Hire vehicles. There had been no consistency across the polices which had been adopted. Some authorities had not set emissions or age standards; however, Northumberland had used the European Standards.

Hackney Carriage Zones

The Local Government Reorganisation in 2009 had created 6 hackney carriage zones which had replaced the former district boundaries. A hackney carriage licensed to ply for hire in one zone could not ply for hire in another zone. The options available to the Council at the time were to retain the zones or remove them all.

A review of Taxi and Private Hire Services in 2012 by the Law Commission recommended that Councils had the ability to determine different zones should they wish to but the Council's zones had remained the same. The recommendation of the Law Commission was never brought forward and it was now appropriate to revisit the zones.

The following information was provided in response to questions from Members:

- All taxi licensing providers would be consulted and some local consultation may be carried out.
- There was nothing in the policy that would restrict the number of accessible vehicles which could also be used by anyone.
- The Committee may decide to link emission matters and meaningful journeys, and discuss after the consultation. The ambition of the Council was to reduce emissions and increase in electric vehicles.
- The number of licensed vehicles, drivers and how many licences belonged to traders would be included in the next report
- The Council was actively looking at how the infrastructure could be improved for charging stations and create capacity. This could be discussed with Matt Baker, Improvement and Innovation Service Director from a climate change perspective.

Hackney Carriage Tariff

The Authority was responsible for setting the hackney carriage tariff which was set as a maximum tariff. This sometimes created local problems, some businesses did apply the maximum tariff rigidly while others were flexible.

The tariff was being reviewed and would also be consulted on.

It was hoped to report back to the December meeting.

RESOLVED that the contents of the report be noted and the consultation with the relevant bodies and licensed trade in respect of the following areas be agreed:-

1. Review of the government's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy, including Government's statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards.
2. Hackney Carriage Zones
3. Hackney Carriage Tariff

06. FUTURE MEETINGS

RESOLVED that the future meetings be noted.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____