

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

LICENSING COMMITTEE

18TH SEPTEMBER, 2014

A MEETING of the LICENSING COMMITTEE was held at the CIVIC OFFICE, WATERDALE, DONCASTER on THURSDAY, 18TH SEPTEMBER, 2014 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT:

Chair – Councillor Ken Keegan

Councillors Iris Beech, Paul Coddington, James Hart, Deborah Hutchinson, Sue McGuinness, Patricia Schofield and Paul Wray.

APOLOGIES:

Apologies for absence were received from the Vice-Chair, Councillor Linda Curran, Elsie Butler, Neil Gethin, Susan Phillips and Austen White.

6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

7. MINUTES OF THE LICENSING COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 26TH JUNE, 2014

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Licensing Committee meeting held on 26th June, 2014, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

8. MINUTES OF THE LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEE 'A' MEETINGS HELD ON 9TH JUNE, 2014 AND 18TH JULY, 2014

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Licensing Sub-Committee 'A' meetings held on 9th June, 2014 and 18th July, 2014, be noted.

9. HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING POLICY – AMENDMENT TO SECTION 3.13 DURATION OF DRIVERS' LICENCES (Licensing Committee - Minute No. 14 – 19th December, 2013)

Further to the above Minute, the Committee considered a report which sought approval to amend Section 3.13 of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy, entitled 'Duration of Drivers' Licences to take effect from 1st January, 2015.

The Licensing Manager referred to the main points contained within the report and explained the changes that had arisen since the Policy was last revised by the Licensing Committee on 19th December, 2013.

It was reported that the Doncaster Council Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy (HC & PH Licensing Policy) currently restricted all licensed drivers to a 1 year duration licence on initial application and, thereafter, giving all licence holders the option of a 1 or 3 year duration licence.

Members were informed that whilst there were no proposed changes to the suitability test for licensed drivers, it was proposed that the Policy be amended to reflect that every licence granted to any person to drive a private hire and or hackney carriage vehicle should remain in force for 3 years from the date of issue. Furthermore, the application fee for new private hire and/or hackney carriage drivers, applying for the first time, was to be increased to reflect the increase in duration of the licence from 1 year to 3 years. However, it was noted that the 3 year renewal licence fee would remain the same, subject to approval by the Chief Financial Officer.

Members noted that implementation of the proposed changes would be less burdensome on both the licence holder and the Council, which would lead to increased value for money and help to keep licensing costs to a minimum. It was proposed that in future all licences be issued for the maximum duration of 3 years and the option for a 1 year duration licence be removed. Members were pleased to note that the suitability test for all drivers remained unchanged and would continue to be routinely checked.

Discussion followed the presentation of the report, during which Members referred to the recent problems in Rotherham concerning the safeguarding of children, particularly in relation to the taxi firms and individuals involved and asked Officers as to whether they had some involvement in this respect and had Officers been closely monitoring the situation. The Business and Safety Licensing Manager informed Members that following the recent developments in Rotherham and further to discussions with colleagues in the Licensing department at Rotherham Council, the individuals involved were not known to Doncaster. Members were reassured that the Council had systems and processes in place to deal with such issues. The Business and Safety Licensing Manager explained that individual drivers were required to have a Criminal records check and that Officers focused their particular attention in this area.

In light of the seriousness of this issue, Members expressed the view that any individual applying for a taxi licence, particularly those drivers that transported children to school, should be required to undertake mandatory training on child protection. Members were informed that a number of taxi drivers had previously attended training provided by the Child Protection Group. Officers had looked to provide further training to drivers prior to the issues highlighted in Rotherham however, training had not yet been put in place. The Licensing Officer explained that child protection training was not mandatory and therefore could not be enforced. Whilst such training was currently undertaken on a voluntary basis, it was not clear at this stage whether new legislation was to be enacted.

Following a further question from Members as to whether the Council carried

out rigorous maintenance checks regarding the condition of taxi vehicles, the Business and Safety Licensing Manager confirmed that the Council did carry out spot checks, but they had not done so recently. He explained to Members the requirements for the maintenance and testing of vehicles and stated that prior to the issuing of a taxi licence, each vehicle must have a current MOT certificate. In addition to the MOT requirements, licensed vehicles were required to be tested at the Council's approved testing centre and that all vehicles were subject to an annual vehicle test, and dependent on the age of the vehicle, were also subject to interim tests.

Members discussed as to whether or not those Hackney Carriage drivers licensed outside of the Borough, when operating in the Doncaster area, could be required to undertake a typographical knowledge test. Councillor Wray reported that Wakefield Council were looking at taking measures in this regard and undertook to provide the Business and Licensing Safety Manager with the contact details of the Officers involved. The Business and Safety Licensing Manager commented that he would be very interested to receive the details. Members were informed that it was anticipated that there were proposals in the near future for taxi licensing to change, which would allow taxi drivers to work anywhere in the country.

#### RESOLVED

- (1) that Section 3.13 of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy, entitled 'Duration of Drivers' Licences', be amended to be replaced with the following to take effect from 1st January 2015:-

##### **3.13 Duration of Drivers' Licences**

*Every licence granted to any person to drive a private hire and or hackney carriage vehicle shall remain in force for 3 years from the date of issue.*

*On renewal, all licences granted shall remain in force for 3 years.*

- (2) to note that the application fee for new private hire and / or hackney carriage drivers, applying for the first time, was to be increased from £80 to £130 to reflect the increase in duration of the licence from 1 year to 3 years (the 3 year renewal licence fee will remain the same), subject to approval by the Chief Financial Officer.