
**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE LICENSING AND REGISTRATION COMMITTEE
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 5 OCTOBER 2016 AT 7.30 P.M. IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WEELEY**

Present: Councillors Cossens (Chairman), Amos, Bray, B E Brown, M Brown, Bucke, V E Guglielmi, J Henderson, Watson, White (except items 10 – 13 (part)) and Whitmore

In Attendance: Licensing Manager (Simon Harvey), Senior Solicitor (Litigation and Governance) (Linda Trembath), Committee Services Manager (Ian Ford) and Licensing Assistant (Michael Cook)

10. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Callender, Porter, Raby (with Councillor Bray substituting) and M J Skeels.

11. MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE

The minutes of the special meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday 28 September 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

13. CESSATION OF THE DRIVER AND VEHICLE STANDARDS AGENCY (DVSA) TAXI DRIVER ASSESSMENTS AND HOW THIS WILL AFFECT APPLICANTS FOR NEW HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE DRIVERS' LICENCES IN TENDRING

The Committee had before it a report which sought its agreement for the Licensing Section to find suitable alternative providers to carry out an equivalent to the Driver, Vehicle and Standards Agency (DVSA) Taxi Driver Assessment course which was to cease as of 31 December 2016.

The Committee recalled that, at its meeting held on 16 December 2014, it had reaffirmed the Council's policy requirement that all new applicants for a Hackney Carriage/Private Hire Driver's Licence must pass a DVSA Taxi Drivers Assessment. This was one of a number of prerequisites for the grant of such a licence including the Passenger Assisted Training and driver suitability and knowledge tests.

The Committee, in consultation with the local taxi and private hire trades, had introduced all of those prerequisites in order to maintain and improve the standards of driver and passenger safety and encourage applicants to regard taxi driving as a professional long-term occupation in Tendring.

It was felt that this ethos could be put in jeopardy by the DVSA's announcement on 31 August 2016 that they would be ceasing all Taxi Driver Assessments as from 31 December 2016 as the demand for those tests was outstripping the DVSA's capacity to meet that demand. The DVSA had advised Licensing Authorities, in a letter dated 31 August 2016, that they did not have enough test examiners and needed to prioritise their resources to

reduce waiting times for those waiting to take ordinary driver's licence tests. Indeed, the Licensing Manager reported anecdotal evidence that many DVSA test centres had already stopped taking any new bookings for taxi driver assessments.

In an effort to enable the Council to continue with its policy of a mandatory taxi drivers assessment the Licensing Manager had sought out alternative service providers. Three alternative companies/organisations had so far come to light namely:

- (i) The Blue Lamp Trust;
- (ii) Diamond Advanced Motorists; and
- (iii) Green Penny.

It was the view of the Licensing Manager that The Blue Lamp Trust best offered a reasonable equivalent service and assessment to the current DVSA taxi driver assessment and was also an organisation accredited by the DVSA. Members expressed their preference that new applicants were given a choice of taxi driver test providers so that they had flexibility on price and availability but that they must be accredited by the DVSA and that the test was the same or at an equivalent level. The Licensing Manager concurred and stated that he was aware of a number of such companies/organisations.

Having considered all of the information and advice given by the Licensing Manager both in his written report and orally at the meeting, it was moved by Councillor V E Guglielmi, seconded by Councillor Bray and:-

RESOLVED that the Committee agrees the following actions namely to:

- (a) continue requiring all new applicants for Tendring District hackney carriage and private hire drivers' licences to take and pass a Taxi Drivers Assessment equivalent to the standard required by the DVSA Taxi Drivers Assessment and with an accredited company or organisation
- (b) allow new applicants for Tendring District hackney carriage and private hire drivers' licences the flexibility to choose the service provider for a DVSA standard taxi driver assessment that suits their needs on locality and price of the test; and
- (c) continue to reserve the right to require existing Tendring District licensed hackney carriage and private hire drivers to take and pass a DVSA Taxi Drivers Assessment should it be deemed necessary by the Committee to do so for education and/or remedial purposes.

13. CHANGE OF SUPPLIER FOR HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE LICENCE BRACKETS AND PLATES AND OTHER MISCELLANEOUS RELATED VEHICLE AND DRIVER SUPPLIES

The Committee was aware that Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles were required to display vehicle licence plates as part of the legislation that controlled the licensing of those vehicles and also the conditions of the vehicle licence. Those plates had to have the license expiry date printed on them, together with the make, model and colour of the vehicle and the number of passengers it was licensed to carry. The plates and holding brackets were paid for as part of the Council's vehicle licence fees.

Members were informed that the Council had used the same bracket and licence plate supplier for a number of years but currently the plates could wear quite badly and the poly carbon material used to make the plates was of a flimsy quality which had often allowed dirt to seep through the protective cover to the plate itself.

The Licensing Manager was therefore proposing a change of supplier as it was felt to be imperative for passenger safety that the expiry date along with all of the other details on the plate were clear and easily readable so that passengers could be assured that they were getting into a legitimately licensed vehicle and that the Police and other enforcement agencies knew that the vehicle was bona fide.

The Licensing Manager had therefore sourced an alternative provider, MOGO, whose plates were cheaper and much sharper, clearer and distinctive by design. They were also considered to be harder wearing and could also be printed to include the Council's corporate colour scheme which would help distinguish the vehicle as a Tendring District Taxi and would also carry a distinctive hologram which would make plate falsification impossible. Other councils in Essex (such as Thurrock and Brentwood) had already moved over to MOGO as their supplier.

The Committee was advised that the ongoing savings made after the first year's purchase of brackets and plates which, whilst not in any way significant at around £400 in total, would nevertheless assist the Council in minimising its overall costs passed down to the taxi and private hire trades with respect to vehicle licence fees.

The Committee was shown, and was impressed by, examples of the proposed new style and design of bracket and plate (including a hologram which made falsification/copying of a plate impossible) which it was satisfied would enhance passenger safety and enforcement.

Having discussed the matter, it was moved by Councillor Bray, seconded by Councillor V E Guglielmi and:-

RESOLVED that the Committee agrees to the following action namely that the Council's Licensing Section change its supplier for hackney carriage and private hire vehicle licence plates and brackets and other miscellaneous related vehicle and driver suppliers to MOGO (with the preferred design being that which incorporated the Tendring District Council Name and Logo) once existing plate supplies have been used, or from 1 January 2017, whichever is the earlier.

The meeting was declared closed at 8.02 p.m.

Chairman