

# General Licensing Committee

**MEMBERS:** Councillor PURCHESE (Chairman) Councillor Mrs HEAPS (Deputy Chairman), Councillors ELKIN, GOODWIN, GOODYEAR, Mrs MADELL, Mrs POOLEY, Mrs SALSBURY, THOMPSON and Miss WOODALL.

(Apologies for absence were reported from Councillors Belsey, Bloom, Mrs Goodall, Ms Hough and Stanley).

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## **8 Minutes.**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2009 were submitted and approved and the Chairman was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

## **9 Declaration of Interests.**

None were received.

## **10 Review of Delimitation of Hackney Carriage Proprietors Licences.**

The Committee considered the report of the Licensing Manager regarding a review of the Council's policy of delimitation in respect of hackney carriage proprietor licences.

The Committee at its meeting on 9 March 2009 had approved a total delimitation of taxi licences subject to a policy which supported quality control mechanisms.

The policy of quality control which had been agreed by the Committee on 21 April 2009 required that new hackney carriage proprietor licences issued would only be released for wheelchair accessible vehicles meeting certain livery, technical, age and safety specifications.

The Committee on 20 July 2009 had agreed that a further review of the delimitation policy should be undertaken after 4 months. A total of 7 hackney carriage proprietor licences had been issued since the decision to delimit to individuals already licensed and operating as private hire drivers or as journeymen. The total number of licences now stood at 97.

The Committee was advised that there were no outstanding applications or enquiries at the current time. The quality control policy and other factors including the capital outlay required to purchase a suitable vehicle, the current economic climate and a recent cap on the number of permits issued to vehicles seeking to operate from the railway station rank had provided a natural mechanism to manage the number of new applicants and licences issued.

The Committee was advised that the levelling out of applications and enquiries mirrored the pattern across Sussex where delimitation had occurred.

Research had been undertaken to provide an overview of the Sussex wide approach and wider CIPFA "Family Group" comparisons in relation to hackney carriage proprietor licensing. The findings which were detailed at Appendix 8 of the report demonstrated an on-going trend towards delimitation. This mirrored the position nationally and followed the recommendations of the Good Practice Guidance from the Department for Transport.

A review group had been established to assess the impact of the delimitation policy comprising members of the hackney carriage and private hire trade, Councillors, Council Officers, and a representative from the Disability Involvement Group. A copy of the minutes relating to both meetings held in September and October 2009 was attached as an appendix to the report and it was noted that the work of the review group was ongoing.

Representations in support of the policy had been received from Sussex Police and Nightwatch on the basis that taxis are an integral part of the transport network in facilitating dispersal late at night. It was recognised that after 11pm, no buses were available and no trains available after 1am. Taxis and private hire vehicles therefore were the only other form of public transport available and therefore integral to the dispersal of patrons from the evening and late night economy.

Inspector R Barrow of Sussex Police addressed the Committee and advised that transport away from the town centre at key times was essential to support the overall objective to reduce violent crime, disorder and nuisance. The policy provided the availability of more taxis and the police were keen to see improved use of existing taxi ranks across the town.

The East Sussex Disability Association and the Disability Involvement Group (DIG) supported the continuation of the policy linked to quality control to improve availability and the accessibility of taxis for disabled people. It was noted that the Licensing Team was working closely with DIG to improve information at various locations to ensure that the public secure the correct vehicle for their needs. The Team were also investigating Disability Awareness Training for all drivers to facilitate the safe transportation of passengers in licensed vehicles.

Mr N Tapp, Deputy Chief Executive of East Sussex Disability Association addressed the Committee and advised of some of the personal experiences and problems encountered by disabled people when making travel arrangements. The lack of access to transport placed a major barrier on the ability to be spontaneous, and was inequitable. The current policy would help to ensure that a greater number of accessible vehicles were available, which were particularly required at the beginning and end of the day when many were currently used for contract work. The importance of maintaining a fleet mix was acknowledged as currently no one vehicle type was accessible to everyone. He supported the need for an extension to disability

awareness training for drivers to ensure the safety of both passengers and drivers.

Letters and evidence had been submitted from Eastbourne and Country Taxis. Mr B Morris (Eastbourne and Country), Mr P Smith and Mr C Islip addressed the Committee against the current policy of delimitation.

Existing drivers continued to face financial hardship in the current climate and the pressure remained to work much longer hours. It was acknowledged that the policy had not led to a high increase in licensed vehicles coming into the trade, but it still represented, in their view, a 10% increase at a time when drivers were experiencing financial hardship. In response to a question from the Committee, Mr Morris stated that in terms of apportioning to what level an increase in licences had impacted on drivers in financial terms against the current economic downturn, this was difficult to assess.

Eastbourne and Country had given examples of two local authorities with a delimitation policy that had subsequently reintroduced a policy of restriction and which highlighted the issues faced by other areas that had adopted a delimitation policy. The Licensing Manager stated that she had researched these and found that they had experienced an average of 60% increase in hackney carriage proprietor licences.

The needs of disabled people were recognised and the 13 new licences issued for wheelchair accessible vehicles should be considered a significant step forward, but the continuation of the policy should be balanced against the current difficulties faced by the trade. The option of managed growth continued to be supported with regular surveys undertaken to assess demand.

Mr P Smith stated that a survey should only be undertaken following the receipt of any further licensing applications. With reference to the view of the police and Nightwatch that more taxis should be encouraged to operate at night he stated that the trade was being penalised for anti-social behaviour problems and that pubs and clubs should be doing more to assist by managing their patrons and by staggering their closing times.

Mr C Islip stated that night time trade had diminished owing to the number of pubs and clubs going out of business. At a time of major recession and the continued pressure on drivers to work longer hours, no further licences should be issued pending a survey to measure unmet demand, which the trade had requested and were prepared to pay for.

The Committee was advised that any decision should primarily take into account the interests of all the travelling public in addition to groups representing disabled people, the business community, the police and the trade. The Committee supported the continuation of the review group and regular updates to members regarding expressions of interest and new licences issued.

**RESOLVED: (Unanimously) (1)** That the delimitation policy linked to a policy of quality control be maintained and a review undertaken in 12 months from the date of this Committee.

**(2)** That the Review Group continues to meet on a quarterly basis to assess the delimitation policy and to inform the Council's future approach to hackney carriage licensing.

**(3)** That the Chairman, Deputy Chairman and opposition spokesperson of this Committee be updated on a monthly basis in respect of expressions of interest and new licences issued.

The meeting closed at 7.15 p.m.

**D Purchase  
(Chairman)**