

## CHILTERN DISTRICT COUNCIL

### NOTES of the Meeting of the TAXI POLICY TASK AND FINISH GROUP held on 24 JANUARY 2013

**PRESENT:** Councillor P N Shepherd - Chairman

Councillors: N L Brown  
H A Trevette

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE** were received from Councillor D G Meacock

#### 1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor Shepherd was appointed as Chairman.

#### 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 3 CHILTERN HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE POLICY

The Members of the Taxi Policy Task and Finish Group discussed each proposed policy in turn.

Proposed Policy 1 stated that all new and existing drivers would be required to attend a disability awareness training session. It was noted that the drivers thought that this policy was a good idea. It was questioned whether this would take place during the application process or after, and at what intervals the training would need to be repeated. Councillors stated that it should not be repeated too often, as a course may lead to loss of pay for that day. It would need to be required that they attend a recognised training programme to ensure uniformity of training.

Officers stated that the disability awareness training would be part of the application process. An online course, Equo, had been found, which would allow the drivers to complete the course in the Council Offices as they would the knowledge test. This would cost about £15 per person. One Councillor stated that the test would be in English, and this may cause a problem for some drivers. Councillors were advised that taxi and private hire drivers would need a good grasp of the English language. The knowledge test was also in English.

It was stated that three years would be a reasonable amount of time to have lapsed before it would be necessary for the course to be repeated. It was advised that the Officers consulted the County Council about this. It was suggested that existing drivers would be given a year to complete the training, or would have to complete it within three months of the next renewal. All drivers applying for a new badge after January 2014 would have to complete the training.

Councillors stated that disability training that covered how to get people into taxis should also be considered. Introducing passenger assistance training would need to be considered before a large number of specialist vehicles were licensed by the Council.

Proposed Policy 2 recommended that where an existing licensed hackney carriage driver applied to obtain a private hire license, or vice versa, no additional medical would be required. This was agreed by Members.

Proposed Policy 3 proposed that a reduction of 25% on the vehicle license fee for any vehicle that falls within Band A, B, or C for road tax purposes. Councillors were in support for this proposal, and stated that this would also encourage new vehicles to be used.

Addition to the Policy on Advertising – this would ensure that the Chiltern District Council logo would not be able to be used on the Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles (except for council issued door stickers). The Members were advised that this would cover the Council. It was suggested that all advertising should require the approval of the Council, for which a charge may be payable. One Councillor stated that the charge should be £10 for each logo submitted.

Proposed Amendment 4 proposed additional guidelines in relation to the relevance of past convictions to assist in decision making and strengthening the relevance of convictions. It was proposed that an amendment to the application form would question whether the applicant had had their license suspended at any other Council. It was also suggested that the form ask for permission to exchange information with other Councils for the promotions of public safety. Councillors were supportive of this addition.

Proposed revision to the Rehabilitation Periods for Convictions – it was suggested that the wording of the policy be changed from convictions to offenses, which would therefore include action for people who were dishonest on their application forms. It was stated that the wording of the amended taxi policy was not final, and an update would be available to be considered by Members at the next meeting of the Taxi Policy task and finish group.

It was discussed whether the rehabilitation period for an offense would start from the date of release from prison or from the date when the offense was spent, which could be 12 years from release. Councillors stated that this was an unreasonable length of time. It was noted that licenses would not be granted if the applicant was on the sex offenders register. If an applicant was not on the sex offenders register but had been convicted of a sexual offense, it would depend on the offense and the circumstances it was committed under.

It was noted that the date of release of prison was not necessarily the length of the sentence. The length of the whole sentence would be the length of time considered by a sub-committee during the application process. Members were advised that the Head of Health and Housing was concerned that applicants were being granted a license before the end of the full rehabilitation period. The current policy did not cover all offenses.

One Councillor stressed that Taxis were used by vulnerable people, and while Councillors did not want to license people with criminal histories they had little choice. The responses received from taxi drivers did not object to proposal that the length of time free from conviction be increased from 3 years to 5 years. It was stated that this would be strict in comparison with other authorities.

For convictions regarding intoxication with a motor vehicle, under the influence of either drink or drugs, it was suggested that where more than two offenses were recorded the applicant should undergo a medical to prove whether or not they had a dependency. There should also be a period of five years free from conviction. A doctor's note would have to be produced to prove that an applicant did not have a dependency on alcohol or drugs. It was stated that they would have to go to their own GP, not a Doctor of their choosing.

Proposed Policy 5: proposed the introduction of a points based system for offenses. This was strongly objected to by taxi drivers in their responses. Councillors stated that this was due to a problem in the presentation of this proposal. It was proposed that an accumulation of points would lead to the driver having to explain why to a sub-committee; there would be no automatic revoking of licenses because of points. Currently, a parallel system was in place, where it was at the discretion of officers whether to bring a series of minor offenses to be considered at the sub-committee. The points system would not be needed, but it was clearer than the current system. The points system would also promote more cautious driving, as they would be aware of how many points they had accumulated. It was important to note that if the police were taking action that the Council would not be adding points to their record as well. The system would be a guide for officers, not a guide for punishment. There was a negative association with the phrase 'penalty points', whereas they may not be as strong a negative association with the phrase 'monitoring of contraventions'.

It was suggested that drivers should sign something to accept the points that had been given to them, as it would stop them from denying their transgressions at a later date. It was suggested that a colour scheme be used instead of a points system.

Members suggested that the information regarding the transgression of the drivers be shared with the operators of the firms they drive for. Permission for this could be added to application forms. This would add to the transparency that they were being monitored, and would not affect the better drivers.

Proposed Policy 6 stated that applicants who had been living in the country for less than five years should provide a police report from the country they were living in. This was due to the length of time that the policy stated should elapse between the last date of conviction and date of application. South Bucks District Council asked for a Certificate of Good Conduct for all non-EU applicants who had been living in the UK for less than five years. It was questioned why this applied only to non-EU applicants, as offenses committed on the Continent were still not picked up by a CRB check.

It was also stated that a Certificate of Good Conduct be produced if a driver were to go abroad for a long period of time. Drivers were generally good at handing in their plates if they were going away for a period of time, and inform the Council so that they did not chase them for documents. It was suggested that six months abroad may be a suitable period to request a statement from the country. It was also suggested that drivers should undergo a medical exam if they were abroad for more than six months. Officers stated that they would look into this and report back at the next meeting.

Proposed Policies 7 and 8 related to the age and appearance of vehicles used as taxis. It was stated that a lot of cars were close to the edge of the time limit proposed. It was proposed that new applicants should have a car less than four years old, and renewal vehicles should be less than ten years old. One Councillor stated that mileage and wear and tear of vehicles was more important than the age.

It was stated that Councillors would prefer to see a car no older than ten years, but now was not the time to impose this. It was stated that if the car were beyond the policy but it passed both the visible and mechanical inspections it could be used, but the driver may have to pay an additional charge. Councillors stated that they would like to see what a vision check consisted of.

Proposed Policy 9 related to the policy regarding executive plates. It was stated that the executive plates should not be used on normal taxis. One Councillor suggested that the reasoning behind this for taxi drivers was that they received better deals on insurance. It was suggested that there should be a charge to be given an executive plate.

Councillors stated that the standards of the vehicle needed to be higher for executive vehicles, and training for drivers should be implemented. Vehicles should be a good standard, and drivers should be smartly dressed. Advertising should not be allowed on the vehicles at any time.

Officers stated that they would look at the benefits for drivers to use executive plates, including the lower insurance rates. It was also noted that executive vehicles did not have to use the door stickers that were supplied by the Council.

Proposed Policy 10 would remove the existing requirement placed upon drivers to notify the Council and decrease the number of times the drivers had to contact the department. It was stated that this was a procedural change. Members stated their support for this proposal.

Proposed Policy 11 proposed that there be a minimum size for taxi roof signs and a removal of any alternative to the word 'taxi'. One Councillor recommended that there be a standard size, and that the Council stock them. If there was a fixed size it would be important that there be a long lead in time. It was suggested that the lead in time be three years.

Proposed Policy 12 proposed a new non-standard private hire vehicle category to cater for limousines and novelty vehicles. Members were advised that the Council was not in a position to consider this at this time. The

consensus amongst Members was that they were happy to do it, and the Council had been approached by limousine companies. Officers stated that they would look at this in more detail.

**The meeting ended at 8.10 pm**

