

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

LICENSING COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 17 MARCH
2022**

Present: Councillors Brindle, Cooke, English, Fort, Garten,
Hinder, Joy, Naghi, Mrs Robertson, M Rose, J Sams,
Springett (Chairman) and Trzebinski

47. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies.

48. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

49. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

50. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members and Officers.

51. VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

52. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

53. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public as proposed.

54. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 NOVEMBER 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 November 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed.

55. MINUTES OF THE LICENSING ACT 2003 SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING HELD
ON 2 NOVEMBER 2021

It was felt that the Minutes should be amended to reflect the technical difficulties experienced by virtual attendees and the preference expressed for in-person attendance.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Licensing Act 2003 Sub-Committee Meeting held on 2 November 2021, be approved as a correct record and signed subject to the addition of the following wording, above the resolution:

'The Sub-Committee commented that during the meeting, there were instances of difficulty due to the virtual attendance of attendees and in-person attendance would be preferred in future'.

56. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from Members to the Public.

57. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

58. HACKNEY CARRIAGE & PRIVATE HIRE – KNOWLEDGE & SAFEGUARDING TESTS

Prior to the report's introduction the following speakers addressed the Committee; Ms Jade Collier of Express Cabs on behalf of Maidstone Operators and Mr Jason Brown of Express Cabs.

The Head of Licensing Partnership introduced the report and outlined the three components to the EQUO training. The Taxi Trade's request to be supplied with the questions and answers was not recommended as it would negatively impact the tests' integrity.

The Committee felt that it was not appropriate to provide the taxi trade with the questions and answers to the EQUO training, as successful completion of the test was evidence of a candidate's understanding. However, several Members did express concerns that the revision material provided was not easily understandable.

In response to questions, the Head of Licensing Partnership stated that the EQUO training supplier would prefer for the questions and answers not to be made publicly available; the questions included within the tests for the Licensing Partnership Authorities were likely to be similar to those included within other authorities' tests.

The Head of Licensing Partnership stated that the supplier could be given targeted feedback to amend the revision materials as required, following a meeting with a representative of the taxi trade and the relevant officers. It was confirmed that the provision of the test in full to candidates following its completion was an operational error and would be resolved.

A further extension to the previously agreed removal of the 'Routes and Streets' section of the knowledge test for private hire drivers was felt appropriate, as pass rates had risen from its original removal, alongside

the absence of any associated negative impacts. The removal would take effect from 1 June 2022.

RESOLVED: That

1. A meeting be arranged between the relevant officers and the representative from the trade to clarify and simplify the wording of the training material and the questions; and
2. The removal of the routes and street section of the knowledge test for Private Hire drivers, be extended for another year.

59. HACKNEY CARRIAGE & PRIVATE HIRE – POLICY ON VEHICLE AGE

Prior to the report's introduction, Mr Neil Cox addressed the Committee as the Chair of Maidstone Taxi Association. Due to technical difficulties, the statement submitted was repeated by the Democratic Services Officer.

In introducing the report, the Head of Licensing Partnership stated that the suggestion proposed by Mr Cox was not recommended as it would require a significant increase in resources to administer. The recommendation on the report was updated to reflect the Council's governance arrangements, with the policy change to be agreed by the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee.

The Committee expressed support for extending the vehicle age limit due to the loss of income experienced by taxi drivers during the Covid-19 pandemic, alongside the vehicles reduced use during that time and the ongoing effects of the pandemic. The other contributing factors, such as increased fuel prices, were referenced in highlighting the ongoing problems being experienced by the taxi trade. It was felt that the extension should be reconsidered after one year.

It was confirmed that the extension provided would temporarily amend the vehicle age to seven years for a private hire vehicle and 16 years for a hackney carriage vehicle, irrespective of any previous extensions granted.

RESOLVED: That the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee be recommended to approve the extension to the age of limit of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicles for a further 12-month period.

60. LICENSING ACT 2003 SUB-COMMITTEE - WEBCASTING REPORT

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report and drew attention to Appendix 1 to the report, which outlined the facilities provided by other Local Authorities in Kent.

The Committee expressed support for webcasting meetings of the Licensing Act 2003 Sub-Committee, with reference given to the positive impact of increasing public engagement with the Council's processes.

RESOLVED: That all Licensing Act 2003 Sub-Committee Hearings, where open to the public, be webcast.

61. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.55 p.m.