

Licensing Committee – Meeting held on Monday, 30th October, 2023.

Present:- Councillors Shah (Chair), Satti (Vice-Chair), Carter, Instone (from 6.59pm), Khawar, Mohammad, Mohindra, Naveed, Nazir and Stedmond

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors I. Ahmed, Ajaib, Akram and W. Sabah

PART 1

7. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Shah and Satti declared that they knew a number of hackney carriage/private hire drivers but would consider the agenda item with an open and clear mind. Both Councillors remained and participated in the meeting.

8. Guidance on Predetermination/ Predisposition - To Note

Members noted the guidance on predetermination and predisposition.

9. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 1st June 2023

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 1st June 2023 be approved as a correct record.

10. Proposed amendments to the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Vehicle Policy.

The Principal Licensing Officer outlined details of the report, reminding Members that the current vehicle policy was approved by the Licensing Committee in 2018 and came into force on 1 September 2018. The policy had a phased implementation, with most licensed vehicles having to meet the Ultra-Low Emission Vehicle (ULEV) standard by 31 December 2025.

Application of the current policy meant that from 1 January 2025, any licensed vehicle that did not meet the ULEV standard, would result in the renewal application being rejected and applicants having to replace the vehicle with one that met the ULEV requirement. It was highlighted that Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs) were not included in the 2018 policy change. At present, they could be licensed indefinitely, with no age limit, subject to passing the certificate of compliance test and did not need to meet the ULEV emission standard in 2025.

It was explained that although the current policy was introduced to improve the quality of the private hire and hackney carriage fleet, with an emphasis placed on licensing vehicles that emit fewer emissions in line with the Council's commitment to improve air quality in Slough; the policy had greatly reduced the number of new private hire vehicle licences granted and was a significant barrier to entering the licensed trade for new driver applicants. The Covid19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis had further exacerbated the

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issue and since 2018, there had been an approximate 50% reduction in the number of licensed private hire vehicle licensed by the council.

Following a review of the current fleet of licensed vehicles, it was concluded that meeting the ULEV vehicle standard by 31 December 2025 was not achievable and would place an unreasonable financial burden on the licensed trade. Additionally, licensing a vehicle that was less than the 3 years old requirement was deemed cost prohibitive.

It was brought to Members attention that through the Council's Low Emission Strategy, a government grant of £370,035 had been secured to create pilot schemes to assist the licensed trade to transition to ULEV vehicles. However, to date, the licensing team had not received any information regarding any schemes and it was confirmed that the trade had not received any financial assistance to encourage licensing of ULEV vehicles.

A public consultation on the proposed changes to the policy was held between 16 August and 14 September 2023. Two policy options were proposed, as detailed in the report and each option was identical except for implementation dates and age of the vehicle at the time of first being licensed.

The Chair invited Mr Sarfraz Khan from Slough Taxi Federation to address the meeting. It was submitted that there had been a decrease in the number of licensed drivers in the borough and purchase costs of electric vehicles compliant with the policy were a primary factor for this. The Committee were requested to give consideration to extending the implementation date of the policy to 2030 and that the policy not apply to wheelchair accessible vehicles.

The Principal Licensing Officer responded to the points raised, clarifying that there was no requirement for electric only vehicles and that neither the existing or proposed policy was applicable to wheelchair accessible vehicles. The policy allowed for the licensing of hybrid vehicles.

A number of Members expressed concern regarding the government grant - as secured through the council's Low Emission Strategy - and requested that further details be provided as to why this had not been utilised to support the trade. It was explained that although the funds were available, a lack of resources had meant that the matter had not progressed. It was agreed that the Chair would write to the Environment Management Team seeking an update on the funding, including any details of the timeframe for implementation of the proposed project.

A Member stated that the current policy was too restrictive and adopting the proposed changes would introduce flexibility for the trade whilst allowing a gradual implementation of the policy; noting that both the proposed options allowed for currently licensed petrol, diesel and mild hybrid vehicles to be renewed and remain licensed until they reached 9 years of age.

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Having considered the consultation responses and discussed the matter, the Committee agreed that Option B, as detailed in the report, be agreed, subject to amending that vehicles must be less than five, not four, years old when first licensed. Members also requested that the vehicle policy be reviewed and it was agreed that the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Vehicle Policy would be reviewed in October 2025.

Resolved –

- a) That details of the report and consultation responses be noted.
- b) That the current vehicle age and specification policy for private hire and hackney carriage vehicles is rescinded.
- c) That the vehicle age and specification policy for private hire and hackney carriage drivers be amended as follows:
 - i) Remove the requirement for vehicles to meet the ULEV emission standard
 - ii) That currently licensed petrol, diesel and lid hybrid vehicles to be renewed and remain licensed until they reach 9 years of age
 - iii) Wheelchair accessible and specialist vehicles can remain licensed until the vehicle reaches 17 years of age.
 - iv) The licensing of petrol and diesels wheelchair accessible and specialist vehicles will continue, and these vehicles will not need to be replaced with hybrid or electric vehicles.
 - v) The grant of a new vehicle licence to diesel vehicles will cease on 1 January 2026
 - vi) The grant of a new vehicle licence to petrol vehicles will cease on 1 January 2027
 - vii) Vehicles must not be less than 5 years old when first licensed
- d) That the vehicle policy amendments are effective from 1 November 2023.
- e) That the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Vehicle Policy be reviewed in October 2025
- f) That the Licensing Committee Chair write to the Principal Environment Officer seeking clarification and further details with regards to the central government grant of £370,035 that was secured through the Council's Low Emission Strategy, to create pilot schemes to assist the licensed trade to transition to ULEV vehicles.

11. Members Attendance Record 2023/24

Resolved – That details of the Member Attendance Record be noted.

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12. Date of Next Meeting - 5th February 2024

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 5th February 2024.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30pm and closed at 7.47pm)