

COUNTY BOROUGH OF BLAENAU GWENT

REPORT TO: THE CHAIR AND MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

SUBJECT: PLANNING, REGULATORY AND GENERAL LICENSING COMMITTEE (GENERAL LICENSING MATTERS) – 14TH JUNE, 2021

REPORT OF: DEMOCRATIC & COMMITTEE SUPPORT OFFICER

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR D. HANCOCK (CHAIR)

Councillors W. Hodgins (Vice-Chair)

D. Bevan

M. Day

G. L. Davies

K. Pritchard

K. Rowson

T. Smith

B. Thomas

G. Thomas

L. Winnett

D. Wilkshire

B. Willis

**WITH: Team Manager – Trading Standards and Licensing
Senior Licensing Officer
Solicitor x 2**

DECISIONS UNDER DELEGATED POWERS

<u>ITEM</u>	<u>SUBJECT</u>	<u>ACTION</u>
No. 1	<u>SIMULTANEOUS TRANSLATION</u> It was noted that no requests had been received for the simultaneous translation service.	

<p>No. 2</p>	<p><u>APOLOGIES</u></p> <p>The following apologies for absence were received:-</p> <p>Councillor J. Hill Councillor C. Meredith</p>	
<p>No. 3</p>	<p><u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & DISPENSATIONS</u></p> <p>There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.</p>	
<p>No. 4</p>	<p><u>TAXI POLICY – DEPARTMENT FOR TRANSPORT STATUTORY TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE STANDARDS</u></p> <p>Consideration was given to the report of the Senior Licensing Officer.</p> <p>The Team Manager – Trading Standards and Licensing informed that the report detailed the ‘Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards’ document and the Welsh Government’s ‘Guide to Harmonisation of Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing in Wales’. A copy of the aforementioned documents was provided in the appendices. The Team Manager also stated that the report sought approval for a change to the Authority’s Policy Relating to Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licences to allow for 6 monthly Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks to take place.</p> <p>The Team Leader further spoke to the report and outlined the key points. The Team Leader assured the Committee that the Authority was already implementing most of the recommendations and a working group which had been set up across Wales to further their implementation in a consistent manner across Wales. In terms of costs to licence holders it was reported that at present the Council expected licensed drivers to obtain an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Services report (DBS) every three years at the licence holders expense of £50. The Standards suggested that these checks should be carried out every six months and that this is therefore best achieved if the licence holder signs up to the DBS Update Service.</p>	

This enabled a rolling programme to be implemented which allowed the Council to check records without the need for the licence holder to make a new application. The costs to the licence holder for the new system was £13 per year. This eventually would result in a small saving to the licence holder and the benefit to the Council would be that records could be checked instantly.

The Team Manager – Trading Standards and Licensing referred the Committee to the Option 1 which was the preferred option and advised that further reports would be presented to the Committee if and when there were further changes proposed via the working group or proposed policy changes. It was added that informal consultation had been undertaken with the taxi trade’s association in Blaenau Gwent and no significant issues of concern had been identified, therefore it was felt that there was no need to further consult at this point in time on the proposal before the Committee. Further consultation with the trade would occur as appropriate on other changes, as necessary.

At this juncture the Chair invited questions from Members.

A Member felt that once the new system was up and running it gave the larger operators the added safeguard that a driver, if convicted would be identified and reported accordingly.

Another Member welcomed the report and felt that it gave additional assurances which was paramount for the safety of the public. The Member asked if there had been any sexual assaults reported in Blaenau Gwent as there had been in Manchester and Merseyside. It was confirmed that Officers were not aware of any similar incidents reported in Blaenau Gwent.

In response to a question raised in relation to adequate staff to cover the additional work, it was informed that at present the Licensing Team consisted of 4 members of staff. Although, some staff worked reduced hours, during the recent months all four staff had been working 37 hours due to extra work related to the pandemic.

The Team Manager felt that there was no need for additional resources as the work would be absorbed in the current staffing levels.

A Member raised concerns around the lack of a standardised dress code for Blaenau Gwent and welcomed the comments in the report. The Member felt that if taxi drivers wore standard dress code it would enable customers to recognise them easily.

The Team Member concurred with the comments and advised that it was a matter to be discussed at the working party. The Senior Licensing Officer added that although the Authority does not have a formal dress code there was certain items of clothing that were not acceptable. There were certain points from Welsh Government document that the Authority could consider to be added in terms of a dress code.

Upon a vote being taken, it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the adoption of the DBS requirements of the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards be approved (Option 1), specifically with regard to:-

- The implementation of 6 monthly checks, commencing with immediate effect, on a rolling programme as and when renewals are due; and
- That the Authority's Policy Relating to Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licences be amended accordingly and Members agreed to a full consultation

No. 5

CARDIFF CAPITAL REGION
GREEN TAXI PILOT SCHEME

Consideration was given to the report of the Senior Licensing Officer.

The Team Manager – Trading Standards and Licensing advised that the report outlined the Cardiff Capital Region (CCR) Green Taxi Pilot Scheme to be introduced in Blaenau Gwent and sought approval to allow an exception to the Authority’s Policy Relating to Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licences in respect of the livery of these vehicles.

This request was consistent and identifiable across the other 12 authorities who were taking part in the pilot scheme. The report reflected work to be carried out by the Licensing team within existing resources, however there are no financial implications as cost would be fully funded by the Cardiff Capital Region.

The Team Leader further spoke to the report and gave details of the pilot scheme. The Team Leader noted that Welsh Government had set a target of decarbonisation for all local authorities taxi fleet in Wales by 2028 and it was hoped that the Green Taxi pilots would assist in achieving the target. The pilot scheme would run for 2-3 years and associated charging ports for use by taxis/private hire vehicles would be installed near or in main taxi ranks in Blaenau Gwent. The more detailed information was being finalised and once it was available reports would be presented accordingly to ensure Members were kept up to date.

The Team Leader stated that Blaenau Gwent Licensing Authority was not the lead on the project, the Authority was taking part in the pilot scheme. The Management of the scheme would be carried out by a management Company within the Cardiff Capital Region.

The Authority had been provided with two wheelchair accessible Nissan Dynamo vehicles and these would be available for drivers during the trial free of charge. It was hoped that the scheme would be a 'try before you buy' initiative, allowing licensed taxi drivers to try the vehicle free of charge for 30 days. The trial was likely to also include free electric charging, insurance, vehicle licensing, breakdown cover etc. It was felt that if drivers liked the vehicles it would create an incentive for drivers as a potential future choice of vehicle.

It was reported that some informal consultation had been carried out with the Blaenau Gwent Taxi Association on 28th April 2021 and a positive discussion took place on the proposed changes with no significant concerns raised.

The Team Leader – Trading Standards and Licensing further referred Members to the options and noted the preferred option. It was added that the vehicles to be used across the authorities taking part in the pilot would be instantly recognisable as vehicles in the green pilot scheme and these would be given an exception from normal signage.

At this juncture, the Chair invited questions from Members.

A Member as if grants would be available for taxi drivers as electric vehicle are expensive. The Senior Licensing Officer advised that there would be grants available, however the vehicle provided was top of the range and there were cheaper ones available without wheelchair access. The grants from Welsh Government would be £2,000 and savings identified were in the region of £5,000 per year in comparison to current diesel or petrol vehicles. There were also discussions ongoing about leasing options and grants for drivers to have charging points at their homes. The charging points to be placed at taxi ranks would only be for taxis

	<p>A Member raised concerns around taxi firms with fleet stock with drivers using the same vehicles and it was informed that Blaenau Gwent only had a couple of fleet vehicles. These issues were more likely to be experienced in City Centres and would be flagged up in the Working group as the pilot was across 12 authorities. Any such issues which arise as part of the trial valuable feedback in ascertaining how the scheme would be progressed into the future.</p> <p>RESOLVED that the report be accepted and the exception to the Authority's Policy Relating to Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licences for each vehicle licensed for the use in the Green Taxi pilot scheme, including adoption of the livery to be used, as shown in Appendix 1 be approved (Option 1).</p>	
<p>No. 6</p>	<p><u>TIME OF FUTURE MEETINGS</u></p> <p>RESOLVED that future meetings be held at 2.00 p.m.</p>	