



North Devon Council

Report: Licensing and Community Safety Committee, 14 December 20201

Topic: Allegation surrounding shortage of licensed drivers

Report by: Katy Nicholls, Public Protection Manager

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. At a meeting of Licensing and Community Safety Committee on the 19 October 2021, a letter from a member of North Devon's taxi and private hire community was discussed, which raised concerns in terms of driver shortages. Members of the committee considered this correspondence alongside driver data etc., and instructed that further information be gained to enable a more robust consideration to be made. This report compiles the information requested by Members.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Members of Licensing Committee consider the responses provided to their request for additional information, and consider making any recommendation for a change in North Devon Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To adequately address any concerns raised in terms of taxi and private hire drivers licensed within the district, and to ensure that the Council's policy is suitable and sufficient.

4. REPORT

4.1. At a meeting of Licensing and Community Safety Committee on the 19 October 2021 it was resolved that:

the Public Protection Manager be requested to provide a report to the November 2021 meeting of the Committee which would detail: (a) Whether the process to obtain a licence could be streamlined without compromising on safety and suitability of drivers to passengers (b) If after site visits it could be ascertained whether there were problems with shortages of drivers at particular times (c) How the Council's fees compared with neighbouring authorities (d) What support the Council had offered to drivers affected by loss of income during the Covid-19 lockdowns (e) Whether the Council could use its communications team to promote uptake of drivers to the trade.

4.2 In speaking with colleagues in the Licensing Team and those more widely, no suggestions could be made at this stage in terms of streamlining the Council's processes when determining the fitness and propriety of a driver. Moreover, it is believed that in bringing the Council in line with the latest guidance issued by the Department for Transport in their Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards (July 2020), there is a prospect that the application process could become more

involved, (e.g. the addition of safeguarding and disability awareness training sessions) albeit that this will be subject of further policy decisions to be made in early 2022.

- 4.3 The Public Protection Manager made one visit to Barnstaple Town Centre at 11pm on Saturday 6 November 2021, and witnessed a healthy supply of vehicles. In order to avoid further time taken in monitoring ranks, it was proposed that the Town Centre Manager be contacted to ask assistance from staff within CCTV to provide feedback on taxi and private hire numbers. The reply to this request was forthcoming, evidence was provided and operatives questioned in terms of the supply noted that in their opinion there was a steady and good supply of taxis until the early hours (the request had sought information pertaining to the period after the latest licensed premises terminal hours).
- 4.4 The Council's fees, and that of its near neighbours are tabulated in Appendix A.
- 4.5 When posed the question in respect of (d) in the above resolution, in reply the Director of Resources/Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that:

Any driver who lost income and thus depending on their overall financial situation/other income etc. may have benefitted from council tax support (i.e. qualified for reduction on their council tax); if was a business with a premises then the taxi firm could have benefitted from 100% small business rate relief which was extended and also potentially eligible for one of the cash business grants that the Council administered on behalf of government.

Individual taxi drivers (self employed) would have been eligible for the self employed grants on offer from government (which were based upon previous trading positions submitted on their HMRC self employment returns) – this one though was dealt with via HMRC and not via the Council.

The Council had a hardship fund where customers really struggling financially could access funds for food vouchers, funds for white goods and funds provided for medical transport to hospital and medical appointments – this was administered through Customer Services.

- 4.6 When posed the question in respect of (e) in the above resolution, in reply the Communications Team indicated that they would be very happy to assist in producing materials for distribution by way of social media, and press release, if required.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. There are no resource implications associated with this report.

6. EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

- 6.1. There are no equalities implications anticipated as a result of this report.



7. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

7.1. Article of Part 3 Annexe 1 paragraph:

7.2. Referred or delegated power?:

8. STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

8.1. This report contains no confidential information or exempt information under the provisions of Schedule 12A of 1972 Act.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1. The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: (The background papers are available for inspection and kept by the author of the report).

None

10. STATEMENT OF INTERNAL ADVICE

10.1. The author (below) confirms that advice has been taken from all appropriate Councillors and Officers: Katy Nicholls, Public Protection Manager

29.11.2021