

**WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**  
**MISCELLANEOUS LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEE**

**14 JUNE 2016**

**AMENDMENTS TO LICENSING ADMINISTRATION OF HACKNEY CARRIAGE  
AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES AND CONSULTATION ON CHILD SEXUAL  
EXPLOITATION TRAINING**

**REPORT OF THE GROUP MANAGER ENVIRONMENTAL AND REGULATORY  
SERVICES**

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(The decisions on this matter will be resolutions)

**1. PURPOSE**

- (a) To advise Members of some administrative improvements to the application process and on-going administration of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Driver and Vehicle Licences in West Oxfordshire.
- (b) To seek approval to carry out consultation with the licenced trade regarding the introduction of Child Sexual Exploitation training.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

- (a) That the information set out in the report be noted.
- (b) That the proposed consultation with the licensed Taxi and Private Hire trade regarding the introduction of Child Sexual Exploitation training be approved.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1. Over the past 14 months, as part of the Environmental Services Public Protection review, all licensing processes at West Oxfordshire District Council, as well as in its partnership Councils (Cotswold and Forest of Dean), in the 2020 Project have been reviewed.
- 3.2. This review has included the documenting of existing processes across the Councils and the alignment of those processes with the aim of removing inefficiencies and improving customer service.
- 3.3. The Licensing function within the Business Support Service goes live on 27 June 2016.
- 3.4. In 2017, a further report will be brought to the Sub-Committee to review and align policy, where appropriate, and go out for consultation with the trade.
- 3.5. As part of the review a number of administrative improvements have been identified which aim to remove delays for drivers in the processing of new applications or renewals and make the processes more efficient by using web based technology where possible.
- 3.6. Disclosure and Barring Service

*Current Process*

The Disclosure and Barring service (DBS) check required for applications and renewals of Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Driver licences, is a key part of the

application/renewal process and helps to build a picture of whether the applicant is a fit and proper person and can be granted a licence.

- 3.7. Currently this check is paper based where the applicant must complete a four page application form. The applicant then meets with a licensing officer who checks the application form and confirms they have seen sight of identification documents i.e. bank statements, passport, birth certificate etc. This meeting normally takes 30 to 40 minutes of officer time plus an additional 20 minutes of administration. The form is then sent to colleagues at Cotswold District Council who act as our Umbrella Body. Cotswold District Council undertakes a further 20 minute verification check and then sends the whole application to the Disclosure and Barring service. \*(An Umbrella body is a verification Body undertaking more than 100 DBS checks a year)
- 3.8. The certificate which outlines the results of the check is sent directly to the applicant and can take up to 8 weeks. The applicant must then share the results of the check with the Licensing Authority to demonstrate their suitability for a licence. This check costs the applicant £44 and the fee is set by the Disclosure and Barring Service. A DBS check must be undertaken every 3 years.
- 3.9. *New Process*  
The new administrative process which makes use of a web based service to vastly decrease the time taken to conduct the check and is a paperless process. Other public sector providers who undertake DBS checks use similar systems.
- 3.10. A procurement exercise has identified that the Council could contract with a new web based Umbrella Body – Complete Background Screening (CBS). This would mean that a new applicant would complete an on line application for a DBS check either at home or using the computer in the Council's Elmfield reception area. The online system is very quick and easy and takes no more than 10 minutes to complete. The other advantage is that with the on line system there is less potential for error as the user cannot continue unless the data input is correct. The web based system then emails the Licensing team that a new request has been made. The driver brings their identification documents into the Council to be checked by a Licensing Officer. The online system then links automatically with the Government Disclosure and Barring Service which conducts the check. The results of the check are then emailed to the applicant with a much quicker turnaround of 7 -10 days which means the application is processed much quicker for the new driver.
- 3.11. This new service costs the driver £6.00 plus VAT as a set administration fee in addition to the flat fee of £44. For the driver the new scheme has the benefit of being quicker and more efficient, so they are able to start working much sooner than in the old system, particularly in the case of new drivers. The benefit for the Council is that there are no initial set up costs and it can be established very quickly and is less resource intensive for officers to administer.
- 3.12. There is also the facility to sign up to a DBS Update Service which costs £13 per year (i.e. total of £39 for the 3 years as opposed to £44). This service means officers can check the drivers DBS Certificate on line in the future without the driver having to do a new check and we would encourage all drivers to sign up to this new service if possible. The £6.00 administration fee is a one off cost paid at the beginning.

3.13. Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) Check

*Current Process*

Another important administrative check undertaken for new applications is the check on the applicant's driving licence using a DVLA mandate. This check allows the Council to check the status, details and any endorsement history of a drivers licence.

The current process is again paper based. The driver completes a one page paper mandate. This is checked by the officer and then posted to the DVLA. The check takes about 3 weeks to return. The fee to the applicant is £5 (at cost).

*New Process*

- 3.14. The new uses an existing web based facility offered by the DVLA whereby the licence details can be checked online in a matter of moments by a Licensing officer. It requires the applicant to create a check code on the DVLA website by inputting their driving licence number, their post code, and national insurance number. A code is then created which they email to the licensing team who can then check the licence details.
- 3.15. There is no cost to the applicant or Council for this service. As an aside the removal of the £5 DVLA fee will almost cancel out the introduction of the additional £6.00 (plus VAT) fee for the online DBS check.

3.16. Proposed Consultation of mandatory Child Sexual Exploitation training

The Oxfordshire Joint Operating Framework for Transporting Children/Adults with Care and Support Needs and Taxi Licensing was commissioned by the Child Sexual Exploitation Sub-Group of Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board and is the result of collaboration between the City and District Councils, the County Council and the Police.

- 3.17. It provides a single set of minimum standards for agencies with responsibilities for transporting children/adults with care and support needs in Oxfordshire, including addressing vetting, training, awareness raising, information sharing, policy alignment, enforcement activity and quality assurance and monitoring.
- 3.18. It is also a direct result of the learning from the Bullfinch investigation into historical child sexual exploitation in Oxford, the subsequent Serious Case Review and the findings of the Stocktake Report set up to review Oxfordshire's current approach to tackling child sexual exploitation (published in July 2015).
- 3.19. The review recommended that Taxi Licensing Authorities in Oxfordshire seek harmonisation of licensing standards across the county and a Joint Operating Framework be produced. Overall the 2015 Stocktake Report was positive about the local progress made and it included the following recommendation relating to transport and taxi licensing.

"Oxfordshire County Council and all District councils must work more closely together to ensure that the regulation of the contracts to transport vulnerable children and taxi licensing across Oxfordshire is more robust"

- 3.20. The Chief Executives of all the Oxfordshire District Councils and the County Council have agreed in principle to the Joint Operating Framework part of which includes mandatory training for licensed drivers.
- 3.21. In order to understand the thoughts of the licensed trade regarding this potential change the proposal is to undertake consultation with the trade over the summer period. This would be with a view to bringing a report back to committee in the autumn outlining the findings from the consultation and with recommendations.

#### **4. ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS**

The Committee could choose not to consult with the licensed Taxi and Private Hire trade on the introduction of child exploitation training. Given the evidence outlined in the report officers believe the best way forward is to undertake consultation immediately and for the Committee to consider the findings and recommendations on the best way forward.

#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The costs of the review have been met by the 2020 Project.

#### **6. RISKS**

There are a number of risks associated with the new assessment regime. The most significant risk is to public safety and the council must satisfy itself that licensed drivers meet the required standards in order to protect the public.

#### **7. REASONS**

The Council exercises control over Taxi and Private Hire operations in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 to ensure that vehicles, operators and drivers meet the required standards in order to protect the public.

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