

## Taxi Provision Working Group

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### MINUTES OF THE TAXI PROVISION WORKING GROUP MEETING HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 2021 VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS - ONLINE MEETING.

#### **Present:**

Cllr Allison Bucknell, Cllr Steve Bucknell, Cllr Jerry Kunkler and Cllr Pip Ridout

#### **Also Present:**

Sarah Marshall (Senior Solicitor), Lisa Pullin (Democratic Services Officer)  
Adrian Weissenbruch (SEND & Passenger Assistant Manager) and Peter White (Enforcement Manager)

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#### 7 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Adrian Hampton (Head of Highway Operations), Tom Ince (Principal Compliance Officer) and Jill Thomas (PTU Contract Support Officer).

#### 8 **Notes from Last Meeting**

The notes of the last meeting held on 8 November 2021 were considered.

#### **Resolved:**

**That the notes of the Working Group meeting held on 8 November 2021 be approved as a correct record.**

#### 9 **Update report and Proposals to Progress**

The Working Group discussed the proposals that Officers had prepared to address the actions points arising from the Licensing Committee meeting of 6 September 2021.

Adrian Weissenbruch gave the following update:

- The Taxi Licensing team and the Passenger Transport Unit ('PTU') teams were continuing to meet regularly to discuss the concerns with the driver and vehicle numbers, particularly the ability to be able to deliver the school transport contracts;
- It was planned to hold a driver recruitment day in the Atrium at County Hall and possibly other locations in the county which would be supported by licenced operators, and the Taxi Licensing and Passenger Transport teams;

Cllr Steve Bucknell asked about the level of risk if a successful recruitment event were held and there was subsequently found to be no work available for drivers. He acknowledged the amount of supply data that had been collated and reported on by the Taxi Licensing team and asked whether there should be more demand data sought before a push on recruitment.

Adrian Weissenbruch responded that whilst they did not currently know about the demands for the traditional “rank” work for drivers – it was clear the Council’s own demand (as the biggest customers to taxi operators) was high due to the demand required to fulfil the school transport contracts and if this could not be fulfilled could potentially led to them being unable to fulfil their statutory duty for education transport provision. Staff in the PTU teams are facing increased abuse from parents/carers as in some cases there were no drivers/vehicles available to transport their children to school. Adrian reported that taxi operators were desperate to recruit drivers and that the need for school transport contracts was likely to continue to rise.

Adrian Weissenbruch continued the update:

- It was important to get the Council’s Communications team involved and get their support in order to be alert the public of Wiltshire of the issues that the Council is facing and encourage people to consider perhaps a change in career to become a driver as the industry was currently in crisis. Adrian asked for Member support in getting the Communications team on board;
- It was acknowledged that the Areas Boards could also be utilised to communicate the issue of driver shortages and the work available and this information should be shared via the Area Boards as soon as possible;
- Encouragement/support should be given to taxi operators to recruit and undertake awareness raising for other drivers who could become self-employed – with the reassurance that the contracts were there ready to be fulfilled. Tendering processes for contracts were being undertaken and it is understood that at the present time no bids were being received;

Councillor Jerry Kunkler reported that in his rural area he was aware that the age of the vehicle was now a barrier to some that may consider becoming a taxi driver and asked if the vehicle age requirements could be relaxed in some way if the car was roadworthy?

Adrian Weissenbruch confirmed that the biggest cost prohibitor for people looking to become a driver was getting a vehicle that meets with Wiltshire Council requirements/standards which were some of the highest standards nationally and whilst this had not yet been discussed it was something Officers could look into further.

Peter White (Enforcement Manager) reported that he was aware that the licensing of some older vehicles had been refused as it was against the current policy but could see no reason why there could not be a review of the policy in light of the current crisis.

The Working Group members were keen for an urgent review of the vehicle policy and would also need to give consideration to the issue of emissions but it acknowledged that this may also be a barrier for some older vehicles and the Licensing Committee may need to consider potential short term fixes to resolve the problem.

Sarah Marshall (Senior Solicitor) the vehicle requirements policy could potentially be relaxed for a limited period of time. However, whilst the Council has acknowledged the climate emergency, there was the immediate need to get children and young people into their education settings.

The Working Group were not generally in favour of the provision of the first 50 licenses free of charge to the first applicants after a recruitment event but may give consideration to that suggestion as a 'plan b' if the recruitment events were not successful.

Cllr Allison Bucknell reported that at a recent School Transport appeal hearing they had recommended a walking chaperone service be investigated (rather than the use of door to door taxis) in the case where there was a school bus available, but the child was unable to walk unaccompanied to the bus stop.

Adrian Weissenbruch reported that the PTU would continue to scrutinise the transport provision as part of their business as usual roles and that they could look to recruit into walking chaperone roles which may reduce the numbers of taxis being required in some cases.

It was confirmed that hackney carriage drivers are also able to take pre-booked work but that private hire vehicles were not able to collect fares by patrons waiting at a rank or to be hailed down by customers whilst they were driving around.

Cllr Allison Bucknell wondered if there were any figures on how many taxi journeys were hailed rather than being prebooked and whether or not the role of the hackney carriage was now on its way out other than in large city centres?

The second identified priority was to establish the demand for taxi provision by use of the public and particularly the late night economy. The Working Group agreed that there should be a survey of all licensed premises to establish the areas that are seeing demand for taxis not being met and to survey all operators, drivers and vehicle owners to establish where the demand is and when and would request that this work be carried out as soon as possible after Christmas.

Adrian Weissenbruch reported that the PTU are due to go out to re-tender 200 contracts that were due to expire at Easter 2022. In an attempt to try and settle

the market and allow for stability during the current prolonged periods of uncertainty it was the intention that these contracts be extended for a further 12 months.

Councillor Allison Bucknell asked if there was likely to be any changes in demand/patterns when the Silverwood School was fully up and running. Adrian Weissenbruch stated there were already some changes with 60 pupils transferring to the Rowde site from September 2021 but this was generally having a neutral effect on the budget. It was the intention to use the opportunity to look at transport provision differently with the view to the Council eventually looking to purchase vehicles (through a capital bid) and providing their own transport to and from the site in a number of years.

Councillor Steve Bucknell asked if there was any research on which what role paid better – a taxi or delivery driver and could we state that you could earn more as a taxi driver? Adrian Weissenbruch suggested that it could be sold to drivers that they could do both – they could do the morning school run, carry out delivery work and then do the afternoon school run. However, education transport driver work was not easy – they could be a risk of a serious allegation being made which although could be unfounded could potentially ruin someone's life. Cllr Steve Bucknell asked if drivers were carrying taxi and delivery roles would that change the types of vehicles they use? Adrian Weissenbruch reported that this may encourage drivers to use a Wheelchair accessible vehicle which would then allow plenty of capacity for parcels too.

The Working Group thanked Officers for the proposals report.

## 10 **Next steps**

The following next steps were discussed and agreed by the Working Group:

### **Recommended that:**

- 1. Officers make arrangements to host a driver recruitment day in the Atrium County Hall either in person or online if required by current Covid guidelines that is supported by Licensed Operators, Taxi Licensing and the Passenger Transport Unit as soon as possible.**
- 2. Officers to work with the Council's Communications team to prepare an article to be shared in the local press to call for drivers and outline how easy it is to get licensed.**
- 3. Officers to produce flyers for local businesses such as pubs and supermarkets to call for drivers and outline how easy it is to get licensed and to involve the Area Boards wherever possible.**
- 4. To establish demand Officers to arrange for a survey of:**

- i) All licenced premises (pubs and nightclubs) to establish the areas that are seeing demand for taxis not being met, noting specific days and times
  - ii) All operators, drivers and vehicle owners to establish where demand is and when
5. The Passenger Transport Unit to review current and historical statistics and demand to predict trends over next 5 years and liaise with children's services and schools to establish a demand curve over next 5 years.
  6. The Passenger Transport Unit to investigate the use of a walking chaperone service in relevant areas to reduce the number of taxis required for the education transport requirements.
  7. Officers to carry out an urgent review of the Vehicle regulations policy (V8 – Current Guidelines updated April 2018) and any restrictions (such as the age of vehicles) which could potentially be considered to be a barrier to people seeking a licence.
  8. The Licensing Committee to consider any revisions to the above named Vehicle regulations policy at a relevant meeting of the Licensing Committee.

11 **Date and time of next meeting**

Members agreed that there was no need for a further meeting of the Working Group to be arranged at this stage, although Members would like to be kept up to date as to developments being made. Members would review this position following the meeting of the Licensing Committee in March 2022.

(Duration of meeting: 11.00 am - 12.00 pm)

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