

## Taxi Provision Working Group

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### MINUTES OF THE TAXI PROVISION WORKING GROUP MEETING HELD ON 9 MAY 2022 AT ONLINE MEETING VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS.

#### Present:

Cllr Allison Bucknell (Chair), Cllr Steve Bucknell, Cllr Jerry Kunkler and Cllr Pip Ridout

#### Also Present:

Tom Ince (Principal Compliance Officer), Sarah Marshall (Senior Solicitor), Lisa Pullin (Democratic Services Officer) and Adrian Weissenbruch (SEND & Passenger Assistant Manager)

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#### 17 Apologies

Apologies were received from Danial Farr (Compliance Officer).

#### 18 Notes from Last Meeting

The notes of the last meeting held on 14 March 2022 were considered.

#### **Resolved:**

**That the notes of the Working Group meeting held on 14 March 2022 be approved as a correct record.**

#### 19 Update on Agreed Actions from Previous Meeting

The Working Group discussed the updates on the agreed actions and recommendations that had been prepared by Officers and provided the following further updates:

- 1. Agreed Action from March meeting: That Tom Ince and Adrian Weissenbruch work together to seek a date for the taxi driver recruitment event in the atrium at County Hall as soon as possible.**

#### Meeting 9.5.22 update from Adrian Weissenbruch

Had spoken with Facilities Management who reported that events were now be able to be hosted in the Atrium at County Hall and he would liaise with Tom Ince to set up suitable date. It was planned that events be held in the North of the County, in County Hall in Trowbridge and in Salisbury.

- 2. Agreed Action from March meeting: The draft flyer to launch the driver recruitment campaign be shared with Working Group and feedback be provided to Adrian Weissenbruch as soon as possible to be able to meet the print deadline.**

**Update from Adrian W - COMPLETED – Starting to be distributed.**  
**Campaign was launched on 8 April 2022.**

Meeting 9.5.22 update from Adrian Weissenbruch

There had been a great response to the campaign with over 30 information/application packs being requested. Officers were tracking if these were being converted into applications received. Some of those that have expressed an interest were already licenced and want to work for Wiltshire on their available contracts. It can take around 4/5 weeks to get the relevant checks completed and they were starting to see some drivers now come through that are able to work on the Wiltshire contracts. There had also been a response from those who are currently working in other Local Authority areas who wished to create a base in Wiltshire to operate from

Officers highlighted the need for Wiltshire to be aware and to protect themselves from any persons that may be looking to use these driving roles as a County Lines route to accessing vulnerable people etc to smuggle drugs and weapons etc. This was being flagged a potential safeguarding issue. There had been some interest from persons in the Wolverhampton and Cardiff areas but the majority of others outside Wiltshire were close to our borders looking to establish a base in Wiltshire. The message of the opportunities available in Wiltshire had certainly been spread out and it was encouraging to note that this was attracting drivers into Wiltshire.

Tom Ince reported that applications were now almost back up to the pre-Covid levels and had been climbing over the past 7 months and whilst the driver numbers were holding and not decreasing there were still not rising as much as Officers would like. The numbers of vehicles being licensed was rising.

Councillor Steve Bucknell asked about the staffing resources available to process the applications in order to avoid a bottleneck and any delays. Tom Ince reported that his team were currently on top of the applications, however it was the DBS process that was currently causing delays with them taking some time to be completed. They aimed to get the DBS check done as soon as possible so that that was progressing whilst Officers completed their part of the application process. Whilst Tom had 50% of his team off today due to sickness, they had so far managed to keep up with the application levels.

Adrian Weissenbruch understood that the DBS delays were from the local Police force level check that was carried out. Councillor Allison Bucknell asked how that could be escalated? Adrian Weissenbruch reported that this could initially be logged with the Council's DBS Team as a concern to see if they could raise this as a concern with Wiltshire Police.

Tom Ince reported that he had just joined the Police Joint Intelligence Committee and that he was hoping to build a better relationship with Police and be able to raise issues such as this but agreed that in the first instance this should be raised with our own DBS team. Councillor Steve Bucknell offered to raise this with the Police and Crime Commissioner as he was a member of the Police and Crime Panel.

**Action:**

**That the concerns raised on the delays caused by the DBS checks (usually on the local Police) level be reported by Tom Ince to the Council's DBS team and via Cllr Steve Bucknell to the Police and Crime Panel.**

- 3. Agreed Action from March meeting: That the work on the demand survey be commenced with a wide a range of consultees as soon as possible.**

**Update from Tom – Draft outline of survey ideas to be discussed at the next meeting.**

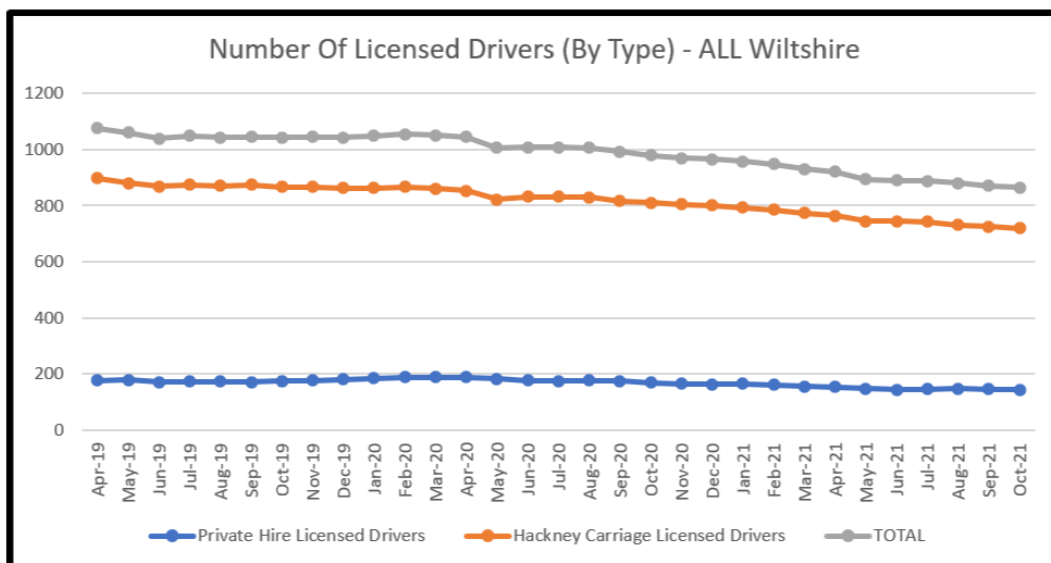
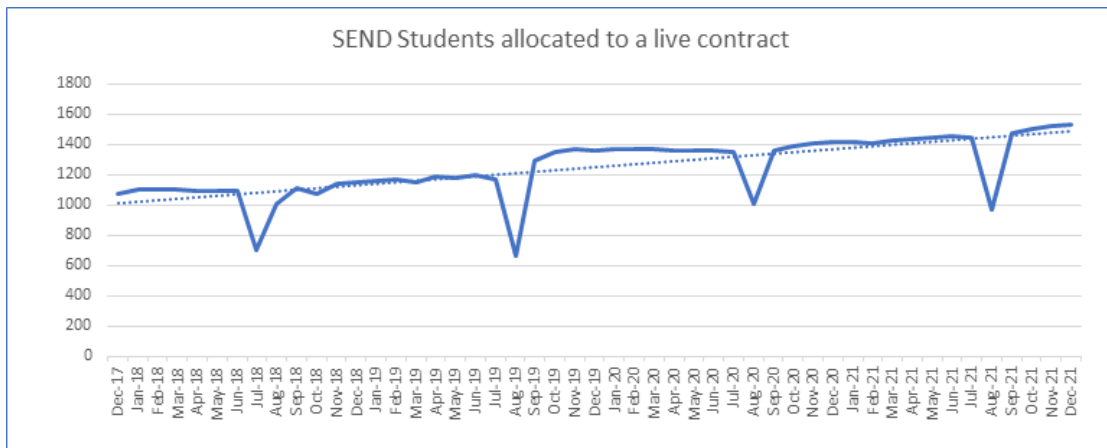
This was not discussed further at the meeting.

- 4. Agreed Action from March meeting: That Adrian Weissenbruch would send his update on this recommendation (*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*) to the Working Group after the meeting.**

**Update from Adrian W - COMPLETED – This was sent to the Working Group via email on 15 March 2022 but it is attached below for information.**

This was not discussed further at the meeting.

Type of Provision	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021
No. Of Active EHCPs	2472	2819	3456	3860	4165
Children Using SEND Travel	1266	1344	1421	1601	1651
% Of EHCP / SEND Travel	51%	48%	41%	41%	40%
Increase of Active EHCP	N/A	347	637	404	305
% Of EHCP Increase	N/A	12%	18%	10%	7%
Increase of SEND Travel	N/A	78	77	180	50
% Of SEND Travel Increase	N/A	6%	5%	11%	3%



5. **Agreed Action from the March meeting: That the Working Group be updated on any instances of a walking chaperone being used as a provision to enable a child/young person to be “transported” to their education setting.**

**Update from Adrian W - COMPLETED – Being considered on a case by case basis, however, students qualify for school transport because they can’t walk to school usually.**

This was not discussed further at the meeting.

6. **Agreed Action from the March meeting: Update the Working Group on the response to the driver recruitment campaign.**

**Update from Adrian W - 19 new operators have made contact and been sent the documentation to work for Wiltshire on our contracts so far.**

This update was reported earlier in the meeting above in these notes.

**7. Agreed Action from the March meeting: An update on the fuel prices crisis.**

**Update from Adrian W - Stabilising, but many contracts have been handed back by operators who can't afford to run them at contract price. Will see costs of contracts go up.**

**Update from Tom - Taxi Licensing are currently undertaking a benchmarking exercise to compare our fare rates against those of our neighbouring authorities following requests from drivers / operators to raise fare levels due to fuel price increases. A report has been prepared for Licensing Committee but still requires sign off.**

**Meeting update 9.5.22 from Adrian Weissenbruch**

Following the last meeting, Officers agreed to award the minibus operators a 3.75% uplift to their contract prices. Whilst this may not sound a large increase amount – this small rise does have a significant impact on the budgets. The rise related to those operators with minibuses in their fleets due to their higher operating costs and the lack of other work they can do. Obviously, the smaller operators that they were not included in this contract uplift and had bitterly accepted that this would be the case. Some of the contracts had been handed back to the Council and these would have to go out to tender and this would likely be at a higher price than the original contract but it would still be an overall saving of applying the contract uplift across the board to all.

Councillor Jerry Kunkler reported a recent incident where the cost of this taxi following a night out for the same journey had risen from £74 to £80 and he felt that the private hire operators were already adding their own increase onto fares and so agreed that the Council should be wary of giving an uplift to contracts as they were already doing this. Adrian Weissenbruch agreed that they gave careful consideration to the decision made and had felt that the % increase that had been requested by the trade was not reflective of the fuel increase and they had not felt it was justified to give the uplift across the board.

**Meeting update 9.5.22 from Tom Ince**

Taxi Licensing were currently undertaking a benchmarking exercise to compare our tariff fare rates against those of our neighbouring authorities following the challenge from drivers about rising costs. They had received five responses to date and were still awaiting two. This report would be presented to the Licensing Committee in June but so far, the results showed that the Wiltshire tariff was on a par with neighbouring authorities with us sitting in the middle and being the average. The current tariff structure allowed drivers to use different tariffs later into the evening etc and in the

report they had considered a small increase to tariff 1 which was the daytime fare but had concluded that their recommendation was not to make a change. This would be for the Licensing Committee to consider.

Consultation had begun on proposals to change the county taxi licensing zones. So far most of the responses from the trade had been positive with one negative response who had expressed concern about having to drive across Wiltshire for their six monthly vehicle MOT checks to a centralised depot.

### **Additional issues raised by Officers at the meeting**

#### **From Adrian Weissenbruch**

Adrian was regularly approached by a Council colleague who is disabled and a wheelchair user. She had reported that she struggles with travel around Wiltshire and whilst he had been able to offer some assistance with her accessing our public transport network, she was struggling to access Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAV) at particular times of the day. Adrian felt that this seemed to be quite an issue in Wiltshire and felt that the majority of Wiltshire's WAV were being used for school transport contracts, but the gap had been highlighted to him and obviously the drivers are choosing to fulfil their contracts rather than take on one off fares for members of the public that may require a WAV.

Tom Ince reported that there were currently 106 WAV licenced vehicles which equated to 30% of the vehicle fleet and only 7% of those were hackney carriage licenced vehicles. It was likely that most of the 30% of WAV were on the school transport contracts. It was not known if the issue was that drivers with access to a WAV were not trained to handle wheelchairs or that they were just not available at the times requested by the public. The Working Group asked if there was anything that could be done to make providing a WAV more appealing to operators? After discussion it was agreed that this issue be referred to the Licensing Committee to agree on a course of action if they wished to pursue this further.

**ACTION: That the Licensing Committee be asked to consider investigating the ways in which the provision of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles could be extended for the public.**

#### 20 **Next Steps**

The Working Group discussed the progress made and agreed that the original issues identified by them were progressing well and that they now felt that the Working Group could be suspended for the time being.

Members were keen for the driver recruitment open days to be set up as soon as possible and would like to be invited to attend and support these events.

Adrian Weissenbruch reported that the taxi operators with Council contracts had

requested an opportunity for there to be an annual session to meet up with Council officers to discuss and raise issues they have with the processes they go through in relation to their contracts, payments etc and suggestions for improvements. Members supported this suggestion.

Councillor Jerry Kunkler suggested that Officers look into an option to be able to split the initial start-up costs as this is quite a large amount to find for some (£297 for a 3 year licence plus other checks would take this up to approximately £500). Tom Ince reported that they had moved away from a monthly payment plan for licences as this was too resource intensive but they may be able to consider splitting these costs into two payments.

Adrian Weissenbruch highlighted an issue that they were still awaiting a legal response on. This related to the payments that were made to operators during the pandemic to keep them afloat – in some cases it had come to light that these payments were not being passed onto the drivers as they should have been. It was agreed that this would be picked up outside of the meeting between Officers. The Members asked to be kept updated on this via email.

**ACTION: That the notes of this Working Group meeting and identified recommendations be shared with the Licensing Committee at their next meeting on 20 June 2022.**

21 **Date and Time of Next Meeting**

It was agreed that the Working Group would be suspended until the Licensing Committee agreed for it to be restarted if/when required.

(Duration of meeting: 12.15 - 12.50 pm)

The Officer who has produced these minutes is Lisa Pullin of Democratic Services, direct line 01225 713015, e-mail [committee@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:committee@wiltshire.gov.uk)

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