



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
LICENSING AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

Held: TUESDAY, 15 MARCH 2022 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Singh Johal (Chair)
Councillor Pickering (Co-Vice Chair)

Councillor Cank

Councillor Gee

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11. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Fonseca, Shelton and Westley.

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to disclose any interests they might have on the business to be discussed.

There were no declarations of interest made.

13. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 November 2021 be approved as a correct record.

14. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been submitted in accordance with the Council's procedures.

15. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS, STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations and statements of case had been submitted in accordance with the Council's procedures.

16. TAXI DRIVER KNOWLEDGE TEST

The Strategic Director, City Development and Neighbourhoods submitted a report for approval to the Committee on the Knowledge Test used for drivers to demonstrate appropriate knowledge of Leicester and general taxi legislation.

The Licensing and Public Safety Committee were asked to consider the options in Section 5 of the report and decide which to adopt.

Rachel Hall, Chief Licensing Officer presented the report. It was noted that every licensing authority sets its own bar for determining whether an applicant was a 'fit and proper' person to hold a Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Driver's Licence, with part of the process in Leicester requiring applicants to pass a knowledge test to demonstrate appropriate knowledge of the city and general taxi legislation. It was reported the current driver paper-based knowledge test was considered to be antiquated, and a computer based technological solution had been sought without success.

The Officer felt that taxi drivers should be ambassadors for the city for visitors and wanted them to have some knowledge of Leicester. Each of the options were then presented to the Committee in detail including advantages and disadvantages for each one.

Members were then given the opportunity to comment and ask questions, as follows:

- It was asked for clarity that if drivers with Wolverhampton plates could operate in Leicester. It was acknowledged that deregulation meant a private hire company could transfer bookings to operators in other cities, with so called 'satellite operator's licences. It was noted that the scale of the problem was big, and through research it had been established that for every two drivers with a Leicester or Leicestershire licence, there was a third driver with a Wolverhampton plate.
- Members asked if Wolverhampton undertook knowledge tests but it was reported it was not a requirement in that authority. It was noted that their fees were cheap through economies of scale, and they currently had over 18,000 licensed drivers.
- Drivers believed they could be licensed more quickly and easily in Wolverhampton.
- Drivers in Leicester had to supply a full, detailed medical check completed by the applicant's own GP or a doctor with access to the applicant's medical records. It was understood that Wolverhampton simply require a doctor to state the person met the required standard.
- Members did not want an online assessment as it would not be known if the person applying would be completing the test or if they were assisted.
- Combining the existing practical and theory tests would reduce waiting times for applicants as currently staff could only test four people at a time, and it would reduce no-show bookings. It was explained that an external provider was likely to be more flexible in response to fluctuating demand.

- Wolverhampton had previously indicated that they send an enforcement officer to Leicester once a month.
- Members stated support for the combined test and having drivers licensed by Leicester was preferable.

The Chair was uncertain about outsourcing the knowledge test and combining it with the existing practical assessment. He asked how the examiners would be monitored to assure the Committee that the assessment would be robust. It was noted that drivers were currently asked 50 questions, and drivers needed a certain level of knowledge of Leicester.

The Officer responded that there was a difficulty with trying to raise the bar of licence standards that drivers would not be able to afford the test, and that whatever option was chosen, the authority had to be mindful of affordability for the applicants.

The Officer informed Members that assessments undertaken by an outside provider would be similar to a driving test, with an assessor monitoring driving skills and assessing an applicant's local driving knowledge. The number of questions that would be asked of an applicant would be set during the procurement process. She added there were no concerns with the companies that currently undertook practical driving assessments as they reported any incidents and shared information with Licensing.

Members were assured that there would be no lowering of standards in the testing, it would just be different in its delivery. In response to Members' concerns a monitoring process could be built into the contract. It was reiterated that the testing method currently being used was not adequate and that a more up to date and robust test was needed. It was further acknowledged that cost was a factor and that a computer-based system would require resources.

Members stated that they wanted taxi drivers under Leicester City Council's control and ultimately to make taxi travel safe for the citizens of Leicester.

The Officer confirmed the combination of practical knowledge test during the driving to specific landmarks, different locations, what routes to take, quickest main roads etc. would be a robust method of assessing knowledge of the city.

The Chair stated that he preferred a computer-based approach, but he was guided by the Committee in supporting option (e) with the combination of practical driver and knowledge assessment. He added he wanted the test monitoring and auditing, and that the Council should set the questions for the knowledge test.

RESOLVED:

That:

1. The comments be noted and taken into further consideration by the Licensing Team.
2. Option (e) be considered as the option of choice by Members.
3. The authority to continue to monitor and audit the knowledge

test, the questions of which should be set by the Council.

17. CLOSE OF MEETING

There being no other items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 6.32pm.