

NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

LICENSING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 28 March 2018

PRESENT: Councillor Sargeant (Deputy Chair – in the Chair); Councillors Graystone, Haque, Ansell, Culbard, Duffy, Beardsworth and T Eales

OFFICERS: Ruth Austen (Environmental Health & Licensing Manager)
Andrew Whittles (Low Emission Strategies Ltd)
Louise Faulkner (Licensing Team Leader)
Ian Ellis (Senior Licensing Enforcement Officer)
Clive Tobin (Litigation & Licensing Solicitor)
Ed Bostock (Democratic Services Officer)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received by Councillors Flavell and Walker.

2. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2018 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

3. DEPUTATIONS / PUBLIC ADDRESSES

Stephen Ward addressed the Committee and commented that there was not a complete list of Euro 6 vehicles available. Regarding the proposal to allow each proprietor to submit a renewal application to be considered on its own merits, Mr Ward stated that this could be subject to accusations of favouritism and reasoned that a maximum age limit on vehicles would be a better way to control emissions on hackney carriages and private hire vehicles.

Stuart Russell, representing the Private Hire Association, addressed the Committee and stated that the policy was over the top and that a common-sense approach was needed. He commented that buses were also a high polluter in the town and that nothing was being done about them. Mr Russell suggested that the Council provide a list of suitable Euro 6 vehicles as many dealerships couldn't tell you which emissions standards vehicles complied with.

In response to a question, the Committee heard that suppliers were able to tell drivers whether vehicles were at the Euro 6 standard or not. Mr Russell further stated that should the policy be approved, cross-border hire would be much more likely.

Simon Willsher addressed the Committee and commented on the price of suitable hackney vehicles currently available, which he claimed were very limited. He stated that the rules proposed within the report were among the strictest and most limiting in the country.

The Licensing Team Leader clarified that should the proposal to accept hackney vehicle renewal applications for individual consideration be approved, it would be a panel of Councillors making a decision, and not officers.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that work was underway to provide charging points in the town's Council-owned car parks.

Kevin Willsher addressed the Committee and stated that the trade was under extreme pressure currently and that the cap on vehicles should have been introduced earlier. Mr

Willsher added that the infrastructure for electric vehicles should be in place before the Council pushed for such a change.

In response to a question, the Committee heard that the financial situation at Northamptonshire County Council had negatively affected the trade, particularly in terms of the tendering process for school runs.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Manager explained that charging points were a requirement for new developments in the town.

David Wright, the owner of Bounds Taxis, addressed the Committee and stated that, when looking to purchase a second-hand vehicle, it was difficult to know whether it met the standards that were proposed in the report.

In response to a question Mr Wright stated that he was not opposed to change but would prefer to see an age restriction on vehicles.

Antonio Cupo addressed the Committee and stated that due to a demand and supply issue he had struggled to purchase a compliant electric vehicle outside of London. He further stated that slipping standards at the Council meant that the hackney fleet's quality had declined over the years. Mr Cupo voiced his support for an age restriction on vehicles.

The Licensing Team Leader explained that should an age restriction be put in place, the majority of vehicles used by the trade would have to be taken off the road immediately; an emissions standard was seen as a better way to reduce emissions and improve air quality.

Mohammed Abul Basar addressed the Committee and stated that more time should be given to owners of older hackney vehicles to replace them. He further stated that drivers would welcome a loan scheme offered by the Council to assist in purchasing low emission vehicles.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Haque declared a personal and non-pecuniary interest in respect of item 6 by virtue of knowing some members of the taxi trade.

5. MATTERS OF URGENCY WHICH BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES THE CHAIR IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED

There were none.

6. TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE EMISSIONS POLICY

The Licensing Team Leader submitted a report and Members were asked to consider the Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle and Emissions Policy to improve air quality and reduce the health impact for residents and visitors to Northampton.

Andrew Whittles, from Low Emission Strategies Ltd., explained that 40% of asthma cases in children were attributed to poor air quality caused by vehicles and advised that there were different approaches which could be taken other than buying different vehicles. For example, TX vehicles could be converted to LPG for approximately £9,000 and meet Euro 6 standards.

In response to a question relating to taxi driver working across county borders, the Committee heard that a national database had been proposed with local authorities sharing data and information, leading to more stringent policing of taxis and buses.

RESOLVED:

- 1) The Committee approved the Emissions Policy in principle.
- 2) The Committee agree the timetable in the Policy in principle.
- 3) Members do however, have concerns about the steps required to implement the Policy and therefore adjourn their decision on the Policy for one month so that they can receive a further report on the following matters:
 - a) An infrastructure plan which sets out:
 - i) The process for installation of charging points and the likely timescale for doing so;
 - ii) A plan or projection of the likely number of charging points required.
 - b) An appeal process for proprietors who wish the Council to allow them to license a vehicle which does not comply with the policy including:
 - i) Whether such decisions should be made by Committee or Sub-Committee
 - ii) The procedure to be followed, and;
 - iii) The type of information which will usually need to be provided by proprietors.
 - c) Any financial (or other) support which the Council may be able to give proprietors to assist them in changing to compliant vehicles or converting existing vehicles to be compliant (e.g. an LPG conversion).
 - d) Whether a Euro 5 Prius has the same emissions as a Euro 6 Prius and any differences between the two standards.

Compilation and maintenance of a list of vehicles which are compliant with the Policy.

The meeting concluded at 8:41 pm