

# ***Information/Discussion Paper***

## **Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 29th October 2018**

### **Feedback on WAV Taxi Policy Implementation**

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed

## **1. Introduction**

1.1 On the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 2018, Cabinet approved the adoption of a new licensing policy in respect of taxi and private hire licensing in Cheltenham.

1.2 The Cabinet decision was subject of an Overview & Scrutiny (“O&S”) call-in review which was heard on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 2018. The O&S Committee resolved unanimously to:

1. Support the decision made by Cabinet on 6 March 2018 regarding the review of taxi and private hire licensing policy without qualification;
2. Note that there will be further consultation with the taxi drivers on appropriate mitigation issues and request that these be in a spirit of constructive dialogue;
3. Request the Chair to send a letter to Alex Chalk MP and Laurence Robertson MP requesting them to raise the matter with government and ask when the minister would be clarifying government policy on this issue; and
4. Request a report is brought back to O&S in the Autumn 2018 on the results of the consultation in 2 above.

1.3 This briefing note is to update Members on the progress and outcome of resolution 2 above as requested.

## **2. Progress and Outcome**

2.1 Following the outcome of the O&S call-in meeting, a number of meetings were scheduled to discuss the implementation of the policy and any mitigation measures to be proposed.

2.2 In total 4 meetings were held between officers and committee members of the local taxi association.

2.3 It is fair to say that the meetings between officers and the trade representatives were challenging and difficult. The trade representatives continued to raise objections in relation to the adoption of the revised taxi policy as a whole on a number of grounds. On the other hand, officers were of the view that their remit was to discuss the implementation of the policy that had already been adopted and subsequently endorsed, without qualification, by the O&S committee.

2.4 The trade representatives were primarily of the view that the new policy requirement that

all licensed Hackney Carriage vehicles are to be wheelchair accessible by 2021 (“the WAV policy”) was a disproportionate and retrograde step. Their view was that the council should instead focus on implementing an electric and ultra-low emission vehicle policy to safeguard the future of the trade and their investment.

2.5 As previously stated however, officers were clear on their remit which was limited to the policy that was adopted and subsequently endorsed by O&S.

2.6 It was evident from the start, and throughout the meetings, that the trade representatives and officers were approaching the meetings from very different places which made meaningful progress on issues and “constructive dialogue” difficult to achieve.

2.7 Notwithstanding this however, a number of practical issues were agreed or put forward by the trade:

- a. The council will not mandate that any currently licensed hackney carriage vehicle be replaced – provided it remains safe, suitable and in good condition – until a specification has been agreed.
- b. Clarification on the implementation date was agreed as December 2021 to take into account the time that has elapsed on the policy implementation discussions and agreement of the vehicle specification.
- c. The trade representatives have also requested that the council consider waiving new licence fees for proprietors who will be required to change the vehicles.
- d. The trade representatives have requested that the council abandon the rule that all hackney carriage vehicles be silver in colour as this places an additional restriction on choice for them.

2.8 These will be subject to Cabinet approval in November.

2.9 Officers were aware that the trade was seeking clarification on the specific vehicle requirements that the council will accept as suitable wheelchair accessible vehicles (“WAV”). Feedback through the trade representatives and the wider trade generally was that they did not want to spend money on a new WAV for it then not to be a compliant vehicle.

2.10 As a consequence, a consultation was launched in September 2018 on a proposed specification for WAVs. This consultation has now ended and a report will be taken to Cabinet in November for it to agree the specification.

2.11 It is clear from the consultation feedback that sections of the public hire trade continue to oppose the WAV policy. These issues will be highlighted to Cabinet in November.

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<b>Background Papers</b>	Reports and minutes from Call-in, Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Wednesday, 28th March, 2018 6.00 pm
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# Scrutiny Function