

MINUTE
of
LICENSING COMMITTEE

Minute of Meeting held at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Eastwood Park, Giffnock, on 3 March 2015.

Present:

Councillor Tommy Reilly (Chair)
Councillor Kenny Hay (Vice Chair)

Councillor Charlie Gilbert
Councillor Stewart Miller

Councillor Reilly in the Chair

Apology:

Councillor Betty Cunningham.

Attending:

Jacqui McCusker, Senior Solicitor and Ron Leitch, Committee Services Officer.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1441. There were no declarations of interest intimated.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

1442. Councillor Reilly welcomed to the meeting representatives of East Renfrewshire Disability Action (ERDA) and the local taxi trade. He explained that, although they were not entitled to address the committee, he would, as a courtesy, allow a representative from each body a maximum of 5 minutes to summarise their respective positions with regard to the issue under consideration. Following the representations and any questions posed by Members, the committee would adjourn to consider its response and thereafter make a determination.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VEHICLES

1443. Under reference to the Minute of the meeting of 22 October 2014 (Page1206, Item 1263 refers) when it had been agreed to continue consideration of the issue of wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) to a future meeting to allow a meeting to take place between members of the committee, representatives of the taxi trade, representatives of disability groups and other relevant parties, the committee considered a report by the Chief Officer (Legal & Procurement) updating them on the outcome of a meeting held on 12 December 2014 along with other relevant information relating to this issue.

Jim Kyle, representing the taxi trade, explained that the trade did not oppose the proposal to increase the number of WAVs available but expressed the view that the imposition of a 100% wheelchair accessible fleet would result in a major reduction in the number of taxi licence holders to the detriment of both the trade and the public in view of the additional cost of purchasing and running WAVs. He continued by explaining that the trade hoped that it would be possible to seek volunteers to adopt WAVs in the first instance and supported the proposal in the report to offer an incentive in the form of waiving the licence fee for any new taxi or private hire operator providing a WAV or for an existing licence holder replacing an existing vehicle with a WAV. This incentive could be reviewed after a period of 12 months. He also suggested that a further incentive could be to ensure that operators of WAVs were given priority in the awarding of Council contracts.

Michael McEwan, representing ERDA, expressed his frustration at the time taken to resolve this long-running issue which was denying some people with disabilities freedom of access to basic facilities such as shops as a result of the lack of WAVs. He also pointed out that the Council had a duty to avoid discrimination against people with disabilities and that the reasonable availability of WAVs had been adopted in the Council's Equality Mainstreaming Report and Equality Outcomes 2013 – 2017. He continued by highlighting that the owner of the only WAV available on the Barrhead side of the authority had recently surrendered his licence which would lead to a further deterioration in the overall position. He concluded by expressing the view that ERDA was willing to work with the taxi trade to resolve the issue to their mutual benefit.

Having heard Councillor Reilly thank both Mr Kyle and Mr McEwan for their presentations, there followed a brief discussion in the course of which Mr McEwan expressed the view that ERDA would like to see 100% WAV availability within 2 years. Mr Kyle questioned the practicality of imposing a 100% WAV fleet highlighting that a number of drivers were themselves beyond retirement age and would find it difficult to provide the level of assistance required by some disabled passengers. He also suggested that consideration could be given by the committee to removing the age restriction on WAVs as another means of providing an incentive to operators to provide such vehicles. Councillor Reilly, supported by Councillor Miller, highlighted that the report proposed a target of 10% WAVs by the end of 2015. The situation would be reviewed at the end of this voluntary period and if the 10% target had not been reached then further action would be considered.

At this point the committee agreed to a short adjournment to consider its position.

On reconvening Councillor Reilly explained that it was the view of the committee that there was no ideal solution to the current issue. The committee was seeking a significant increase in the number of available WAVs but did not support the imposition of a 100% WAV fleet as it considered that to do so would have significant financial implications for owners and operators and would lead to a further reduction in the number of licensed taxis.

The committee agreed that:-

- (a) the taxi trade be afforded the opportunity to voluntarily increase the number of taxi and private hire WAVs in the first instance;
- (b) as an incentive to encourage owners/drivers to provide WAVs, the licence fee would be waived for a trial period of 1 year for new owners/drivers providing a WAV or for existing licence holders substituting an existing vehicle with a WAV;

- (c) in the event that there was no significant increase in the number of WAVs at the end of the trial period consideration would be given to removing the age limit on purpose built vehicles such as the FX4 Hackney Cab or vehicles of a similar specification; and
- (d) consideration be given to making a recommendation to Cabinet that the licence fee for taxi and private hire WAVs be waived for a further period beyond the end of the proposed trial.

CHAIR

