

Report of Head of Elections, Licensing and Registration

Report to Licensing Committee

Date: 5 October 2016

Subject: Information Report: Taxi & Private Hire Licensing Service
Improvements Overview

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

- 1 This report is intended to give an overview of the developments to the Taxi and Private Hire service over the past 12 months and the service improvements currently underway.

Recommendations

2. That Members note the information in this report.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 To brief members on the work the service has undertaken in the last 12 months and the improvements being worked upon moving forward.

2 Background information

- 2.1 The role of the Taxi and Private Hire Licensing service has always been recognised as an important Council function in ensuring that the travelling public are safe with professional drivers who have attained good standards, safe vehicles and a dedicated enforcement team.
- 2.2 In recent years, the spotlight on licensing functions nationally has attracted much media attention and the deficiencies in procedures across the country which led to the shocking effects on a large number of children's lives have been identified.
- 2.3 The Leeds City Council Executive Board immediately commenced an even stronger overview of its taxi and private hire licensing functions and Officers were subject to scrutiny and accountability to the Cross-Council Safeguarding Group, the Licensing Committee, Central and Corporate Scrutiny Boards and annually to the Executive Board.
- 2.4 New policies have been introduced, including a strengthened Convictions Criteria policy and the introduction of a safeguarding training requirement has been placed on all drivers. The annual on-line DBS procedure has meant processing around 6,000 individuals into the new system over a 12 month cycle.
- 2.5 Additionally, new applicant numbers have increased and the issue around managing footfall into the office and other contact has put enormous strain on the staff and resource capability.
- 2.6 The service also completed a near total restructure of the enforcement team; moving forward to offer a greater night time enforcement capability and, with the introduction of a new rota, working later into the night and more nights of the week to meet the challenges of the De-Regulation Act.
- 2.7 Running parallel to those recruitment issues was the appointment of further licensing staff, along with additional responsibilities to undertake more decisions within the licensing service and the recruitment of five temporary staff to completely manage the introduction of the annual DBS requirement.
- 2.8 So much attention is placed on carrying out the 'here and now' duties by the staff within the service that opportunities for developing the service can often be overtaken by the need to protect the Council and public. However, the opportunity to concentrate on service improvements and efficiencies is now receiving the attention it deserves.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 Throughout 2016 the service has worked closely with the Customer Access team to improve and re-engineer how we respond to contact with our client base. This has led to a number of initiatives being undertaken.

3.2 Digitising the service

- 3.2.1 The service has engaged with ICT with a view to digitise the service as much as possible and therefore moving away from the heavily based paper based service and administration processes and utilising online forms, online payment options and ultimately online applications and renewals.
- 3.2.2 All of the services current paper files, in excess of 10,000, will be scanned onto the licensing system once resources are available. Not only will this free up much needed space in the licensing office, it will save time and costs across the service.
- 3.2.3 The facility to book and pay immediately for appointments online is being explored.
- 3.2.4 All documentation being visible via the licensing system will also pave the way to moving our generic email and telephone enquiries into the contact centre and utilise the Customer Hubs to enable licensing staff to have quality time with clients and also enable greater scrutiny of applications.

3.3 Webpage Review

- 3.3.1 A comprehensive review of the information held on the taxi and private hire licensing webpages has been undertaken. This was in conjunction with feedback from the contact centre web chat team i.e. we ensured information was present on the webpage for the questions they were frequently asked.
- 3.3.2 The aim is to provide as much information online so that clients do not need to telephone, email or visit the licensing office in person for many enquiries. An online video tutorial is in development to succinctly guide clients through the application process in the first instance and potentially through a variety of different processes during the lifetime of their licence.

3.4 Emails

- 3.4.1 The service receives an average of 300 emails per month.
- 3.4.2 The auto response to the service email account has been updated to signpost client contact back to the webpage in the first instance. It now includes specific links to where information is published so that clients may be able to assist themselves in the first instance.
- 3.4.2 The administrative processing of emails has been reviewed. The response to emails has been made as much a priority as answering telephone calls and responding to face to face contact. This not only reduces repeat emails, and ultimately repeat telephone calls and face to face contact, but also builds confidence amongst our client base that they will receive a response.
- 3.4.3 Licensing Officers are including hyperlinks links in their responses to where the client could have found the information on the webpage so whilst resolving the enquiry we are also re-educating and re-enforcing the drive to become 'self-service' for many enquiries.

3.5 Telephone enquires

- 3.5.1 The service receives an average of 2,000 telephone calls per month.
- 3.5.2 In addition, a high volume of answerphone messages were received when the office was closed. This resulted in repeat contact and a significant workload for officers on their next working day. The facility to leave a message has now been switched off out of hours; instead callers are re-directed to our webpage where they can access information 24 hours a day, 365 days a week.
- 3.5.2 A change has also been made to the answer machine during working hours. This advises clients not to leave a second message to try and reduce repeat contacts. The message also signposts callers back to the webpage.
- 3.5.3 As with the administration of emails, the answering of calls/ responding to voicemails has been made equal priority to emails and face to face contact where staff resources permit.

3.6 Resources

- 3.6.1 The creation of two temporary Licensing and Compliance Officer positions have been approved. This will facilitate the introduction of a floor walking/ meet and greet service where an officer can signpost face to face contact to the most appropriate function of the service, check documents, hand out documents and provide quick information or book an appointment.
- 3.6.2 This will have a significant positive impact on the busy reception area and ensure that clients with simple enquiries do not simply take a seat and wait to be seen. In addition, the checking of documents will ensure that clients do not queue unnecessarily when they do not have the correct documents to hand.
- 3.6.3 To reduce the administrative burden on Enforcement Officers, a position has been approved so that the post holder will collate court files, deal with witnesses and prioritise complaints, resolving minor issues at source.

3.6 Wi-Fi

- 3.6.1 The installation of Wi-Fi across the building will facilitate the purchase of a tablet to enable the floor walker to answer a wide range of enquiries about specific licensing records.
- 3.6.2 A further IT permanent on-site resource is proposed to ensure the licensing system is developed in-line with all of the service improvement proposals.

3.7 Systems – IT and business

- 3.7.1 Reminders of appointments are now being sent via text message. The facility for the client to respond via text is also being trialled in the DBS administration process.
- 3.7.2 Renewal reminders for all licences are no longer sent by mail and service use both text and email.

- 3.7.3 Laptops are on order for the whole of the workforce at taxi and private hire licensing to facilitate a more flexible way of working.
- 3.7.4 Proposals are being explored to move in stages to only accepting vehicle licence renewals by post or email with on-line prepayment. This could potentially reduce the footfall by 3000+ per year.
- 3.7.5 A contentious proposal is to move to a completely cashless service. The benefits are significant in terms of efficiency on daily cash reconciliation, security collection fees and reducing risk of crime against staff.

3.8 Workplace

- 3.8.1 Plans to make changes to the workplace to best utilise space are underway and plans have been presented to staff. Similarly the external temporary storage container and porta-cabin are being disposed of to create further space for parking.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

- 4.1.2 The majority of information contained in this report has not been the subject of full consultation with the trade as it is resource and staffing proposals at this stage only. However some details were shared and discussed at the most recent Hackney carriage trade forum and were generally supported.
- 4.1.3 Full consultation with the staff within the Taxi and Private Hire Licensing service has been undertaken and will continue as proposals are developed.
- 4.1.4 Further consultation will be undertaken with the licensed trade on the key issues as proposals are developed and prior to implementation.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

- 4.2.1 Equality and Cohesion Screening Assessments are carried out on the policies agreed at Licensing Committee which are used to inform decision making. These are available as Background Documents.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

- 4.3.1 The Taxi & Private Hire Licensing policies contribute to the following aims:

Best Council Plan 2013 -17

Towards being an Enterprising Council

Our Ambition and Approach

Our Ambition is for Leeds to be the best city and Leeds City Council to be the best council in the UK – fair, open and welcoming with an economy that is both prosperous and sustainable so all our communities are successful.

Our Approach is to adopt a new leadership style of civic enterprise, where the council becomes more enterprising, business and partners become more civic, and citizens become more actively engaged in the work of the city.

Our Best Council Outcomes

Make it easier for people to do business with us

Our Best Council Objectives

Promoting sustainable and inclusive economic growth – Improving the economic wellbeing of local people and businesses. With a focus on:

- Helping people into jobs,
- Boosting the local economy
- Generating income for the council

Ensuring high quality public services – improving quality, efficiency and involving people in shaping their city. With a focus on;

- Getting services right first time
- Improving customer satisfaction

4.3.2 The Taxi & Private Hire Licensing policies contribute to priorities:

- Reduce crime levels and their impact across Leeds
- Effectively tackle and reduce anti-social behaviour in communities

4.3.3 Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults:

4.3.4 Leeds City Council has both a moral and legal obligation to ensure the duty of care for both children and vulnerable adults across all of its services. This cannot be achieved by any single service or agency. Safeguarding is ultimately the responsibility of all of us and depends on the everyday vigilance of staff who play a part in the lives of children or vulnerable adults.

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 As this is an information report there are no resource or value for money issues to consider.

4.4.2 However it should be noted that the Taxi and Private Hire Licensing service is cost neutral to the Council and by virtue of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1976, raises its own revenue by setting fees to meet the cost of issuing and administering licences. This means that the additional costs associated with the proposals will be funded via licence fees and will not place additional pressure on the Council's budget.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 There are no legal implications arising from these proposals and they are not subject to call in or publication.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 Consideration will be given to each proposal prior to introduction.

5 Conclusions

5.1 The opportunity to concentrate on service improvements and efficiencies is now receiving the attention it deserves.

5.2 Those proposals taken forward by Officers will have regard to council policy, conditions and criteria approved by Licensing Committee.

6 Recommendations

6.1 That Members note the information in this report.

7 Background documents