

Operational Services Cabinet Committee

Tuesday, 16 November 2021

7.30 pm

Present:

Cllr Lee Croxton (Chair)
Cllr Gurbax Singh (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Conrad Broadley
Gurdip Ram Bungar
Nirmal Khabra
Leslie Pearton
Alan Ridgers
Brian Sangha
Frank Wardle
Jordan Meade

Nick Brown	Director (Environment) & Deputy Chief Executive
Elizabeth Thornton	Service Manager (Property & Regulatory Services)
Mark Lees	Regulatory Services Manager
Joel Simons	Waste Projects & Compliance Officer
Ben Clarke	Committee Services Officer (Minutes)

15. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Cllr Gary Harding and Cllr Jordan Meade attended as his substitute.

16. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday, 22 September 2021 were signed by the Chair.

17. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Nirmal Khabra declared an interest in Item 5 Taxi Tariff as he was a taxi driver in the Borough.

18. Taxi Tariff

The Committee were presented with the outcome of the recent consultation with Gravesham-licenced Hackney Carriage drivers on the bi-annual taxi tariff review.

The Regulatory Services Manager guided Members through the report and gave some background information on the consultation with the taxi trade and the outcome of that consultation.

The Committee noted that by the end of the consultation period a total of 65 drivers had responded, which represented 40% of the taxi trade. A summary of the responses to the

consultation was listed at 2.4 of the report but 66.2% of drivers who responded were in favour of an increase to the flag with the single most popular option being to increase the flag by 20p to £3.00.

The Regulatory Services Manager advised that for the purposes of benchmarking, the table at 3.4 of the report showed where Gravesham would sit in the league table based on each of the four consultation options set out in section 1.3 of this report. The Committee were reminded that the results were indicative only and based on all other Council's tariffs remaining the same, which was unlikely to happen in practice.

In response to a Member's question, the Regulatory Services Manager explained that the Taxi policy required all taxi drivers to be dressed reasonably smartly; it was agreed that the Licensing Team would send all drivers a polite reminder to dress reasonably smartly while working.

Members were in general agreement with the option of increasing the flag by 20p to £3.00 noting the rising living cost, increased fuel costs, the number of people who used taxis and ensuring that all customers were receiving an efficient and safe service.

The Chair agreed with Cllr Meade and asked that it be minuted that the local taxi service should be widely promoted by the Council as the safest and most reliable form of taxi transport in Gravesham.

It was agreed that:

- The Portfolio Holder would approve any changes recommended under their delegated powers as set out in Annex 1.6 of the Council's Constitution and authorise the Regulatory Services Manager to proceed with and complete the tariff-setting process
- Members endorsed the next review of the tariff to commence no later than autumn 2023 in accordance with the previously agreed two-yearly timetable

19. Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy

The Committee were presented with the proposed amendments to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy and the associated consultation methodology.

The Regulatory Services Manager outlined key points from the report concerning the proposed policy revisions for:

- Vehicle Emissions
 - From 1 April 2025, all vehicle licence applications for newly licenced vehicles (i.e. all applications other than those to 'renew' an existing vehicle licence for the same vehicle by the same holder) must be for vehicles that are powered wholly by electricity.
 - From 1 April 2030, all vehicle licence applications must be for vehicles that are powered wholly by electricity.
- Vehicle Inspections and MOT Tests

- All additional MOT tests currently required by the Council beyond those required by Road Traffic legislation (i.e. when vehicles are 1, 1 ½, 2 and 2 ½ years old, and then at the 6-month point between each annual MOT), will be replaced with a safety and standards inspection, to be carried out by appropriately qualified technicians at the council's vehicle workshop located at the Brookvale Depot, or such other place as the council may reasonably require.
- All routine vehicle licensing inspections (e.g. the application inspections carried out as part of new applications and annual renewal applications thereafter) currently carried out by Licensing Officers, will instead be carried out by technicians at the council's vehicle workshop located at the Brookvale Depot.

The Chair asked that Members consider the proposed policy revision concerning Vehicle Emissions first and asked for questions.

The Regulatory Services Manager fielded questions from the Committee and explained that:

- There were currently no grants or incentives available that could be given to taxi drivers from the Council for moving over to electric vehicles but in the future, the Licensing Team could take that into account when setting the annual licence fee provisions
- It was expected that existing drivers would probably renew their licence with a petrol or diesel vehicle just before the 2025 deadline in order to benefit from using that vehicle right up to 2030. The Licensing Team were happy that there wouldn't be a significant burden on the existing trade with the proposed policy revisions
- It was possible that some new drivers may be deterred by the electric vehicle provision but it was a route that most Councils were following so there wouldn't be many alternatives for new taxi drivers anywhere else. In addition, any new drivers considering coming into the trade for the first time would be making that decision in the knowledge of the electric vehicle requirements. All vehicles would eventually have to move over to electric; statistically there had been a 66% growth in the sales of electric vehicle since 2019
- Work is currently underway to find a dedicated area solely for taxis to charge their vehicles; the local taxi trade would be consulted on the decision

The Committee raised concerns about:

- Implementing the policy without having satisfactory infrastructure in place; a fully electric taxi service would require electric charging points in the Town Centre as many drivers wouldn't be able to charge their vehicles at home
- The amount of charging points that would be available and the policy for using them; if there were too few then all of the taxi drivers wouldn't be able to charge their vehicles and a number of drivers would lose out on business

The Director (Environment) & Deputy Chief Executive explained that the Council had a carbon neutral pledge to reach by 2030 so it was important to have targets in place to help achieve that goal. In response to concerns over infrastructure, the speed at which electric cars were being manufactured was increasing every year and the Council were working with local partnerships and the Energy Saving Trust to ensure that there were sufficient electric charging points in the town centre within the next few years. By 2025, Gravesham would

have enough electric infrastructure in place to allow taxi drivers to charge their vehicles in the town centre.

In response to the logistical issue of too few charging points, the Director (Environment) & Deputy Chief Executive explained that the number of charging points and their locations were key areas that the Parking & Environment Enforcement Services Manager and his colleagues were looking into and would take into consideration.

The Regulatory Services Manager agreed to circulate information outside of the Committee identifying how many new taxi drivers Gravesham registered on average and local turnover.

The Chair asked that Members consider the proposed policy revision concerning Vehicle Inspections & MOT's and asked for questions.

The Director (Environment) & Deputy Chief Executive and the Regulatory Services Manager fielded questions from the Committee and explained that:

- The additional inspections of taxi vehicles at the Brookvale Depot would be completed by Rosherville Servicing Limited. The Safety and Standards Inspection would cover all the points in a regular MOT plus a number of other checks which enhanced the service
- Some taxi drivers may have deals with local garages where they would get a slightly better quote than at the depot but Rosherville Servicing Limited would never charge higher than the Government maximum rate for an MOT. There may be a £5-£10 disparity between local garage prices and Rosherville prices but it was considered that the additional safety and standards checks were important in helping to raise the standards of the service to taxi customers in the long run
- There were 183 licensed taxi vehicles working in the Borough; some taxi drivers had more than one licensed vehicle
- The depot had checked their capacity and were confident that they could accommodate two visits from each of the 183 vehicles every year. An online booking system would be made available for taxi drivers to book their vehicles in for MOT's and inspections; the booking system would give them the added benefit of choosing when they wanted to bring the vehicle in which had less of an impact on their business. It would also be possible to make bookings by telephone. It was hoped that many taxi drivers would also take their vehicles in for their annual MOT and service as well
- The report had been submitted to legal before submission to this Committee and legal were happy with the proposals and content; Legal confirmed that the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 stated that Councils could lawfully specify where taxi and private hire vehicles had to go for inspections. It was only unlawful for Councils to specify where those vehicles had to go for their annual MOT which was not being proposed. Taxi Drivers could take their vehicles for an MOT to any establishment they wanted to

Cllr Meade asked that, moving forward, any report that referenced Rosherville Servicing Limited or included work that was being undertaken by Rosherville Servicing Limited should be included in some form within Appendix 1 to the report. Some Board Members may have to declare an interest and having Rosherville referenced in Appendix 1 would make it more transparent.

The Director (Environment) & Deputy Chief Executive advised that he had checked before the meeting if any Member of the Committee needed to declare an interest due to Rosherville and he explained that the work of Rosherville would be made more explicit in future reports.

Cllr Meade described a recent journey he had via taxi in Coventry where the taxi vehicle had an A4 sized laminate style sign on the back of the driver's seat which outlined the cost of each fare, the charge for any passenger vomiting in the taxi, important objectives for the local authority such as no journey was too short and a QR code which led to an online Council survey that asked for passenger feedback on what was good about the taxi ride and what was not. Cllr Meade asked if something similar could be done in Gravesham as it allowed residents to provide vital feedback to the Council.

The Regulatory Services Manager advised that it sounded like a good idea for the service and agreed to raise the idea with the Digital team to see if a survey could be created and look into the creation of a sign. The Committee was advised that Gravesham taxi drivers all had copies of their tariff cards, which were available on request.

The Regulatory Services Manager explained that once the Policy went to wider consultation including the public as well as the local trade, the results would be collated and brought back to the Committee with recommendations. The report submitted to that meeting would ask the Committee to make the final recommendation for the Chair to sign the Policy and bring it into effect.

The Chair, as Portfolio Holder for Operational Services Cabinet Committee, agreed:

- 1) To apply a 20p increase to the Flag of the taxi tariff.
- 2) That the Regulatory Services Manager will proceed with and complete the tariff setting process in the minimum timeframe allowed by legislation.
- 3) That the next review of the taxi tariff shall commence no later than autumn 2023 in accordance with the previously agreed two-yearly timetable.

The Chair thanked the Committee for their comments.

20. Street Champions and Great British Spring Clean Update

The Committee was presented with a report on the Street Champions initiative and the Great British Spring Clean.

The Waste & Compliance Officer updated Members on the improvements made to volunteer litter picking activities in the Borough through the 'Street Champions' initiative, which launched in January 2020, outlined key figures from the report and also provided Members with an update on the proposed future developments to the scheme.

Members were also given an overview of the Ward Co-Ordinator role and informed that all Members were welcome to volunteer to be Ward Co-Ordinators for their respective Wards.

In response to Members questions, the Waste & Compliance Officer and the Director (Environment) & Deputy Chief Executive explained that:

- As part of the Street Champion initiative, the volunteers report to the Council on a monthly basis which gives the team data at Ward level but it would be too difficult to

track street level data due to the amount of streets volunteers may clean. The first data reported to the team was being counted and would be reported in December; that data would show the team who made the report and what they reported i.e. how much rubbish did they collect. Using that data, the team would be able to see what individuals had worked really hard and options would be explored in the future as to how to reward individual. Further reports would be brought to the Committee on the work of the street champions in the future

- The Waste & Compliance Officer advised instructions on what vegetation could be cut back, when it should be cut back and where the vegetation waste should go could be circulated to the Street Champions outside of the meeting
- The Street Champion webpage and subsequent communications with volunteers will clarify that volunteers are able to do as little or as much as volunteer activity as they wish - there are no set hours for volunteers to commit to. All of the information and data that is collected from the Street Champions would be shared with all Members as well as local rubbish pick up events around the Borough; all Members will be made aware even if it isn't in their ward. If no Member wanted to be a Ward Co-Ordinator in a certain ward then officers would still approve equipment and share information directly with the Street Champion volunteers for that ward. It was hoped that many Members would become involved in some way and to have at least one dedicated Ward Co-Ordinator in each ward

Members raised the point that many wards had more than one Member and each had different roles; ward Members could nominate one Member from each ward to be the Ward-Co-Ordinator.

After further discussion, the Chair advised that he would draft a letter to all Members explaining the role of the Ward Co-Ordinator and ask for nominations. The Chair advised that he would send the letter to Cllr Meade first.

The Committee congratulated the street champions and applauded the level of work they had put into clearing rubbish off the street in their own time; the Chair asked that Communications be worked with to highlight their successes.

Members endorsed the proposal to introduce a Ward Co-Ordinator role for Members, as set out within the report.

21. Corporate Performance Report: Q2 2021-22

The Committee were presented with an update against the Performance Management Framework, as introduced within the Council's Corporate Plan, for Quarter Two 2021-22 (July to September 2021).

Appendix Two to the report provided Members of the Operational Services Committee with a statistical overview of the Council's performance against the Corporate Plan for Quarter Two 2021-22, covering the period July to September 2021.

The Chair went through the report page by page and asked for Member discussion on the performance indicators.

Cllr Ridgers noted the improvement in PI 4 - % of broadly compliant food establishments and the Regulatory Services Manager explained that businesses were recovering from the pandemic and it was likely that those figures would continue to improve.

The Committee noted the information contained within the report.

Close of meeting

The meeting ended at 20:44pm.