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## **PUBLIC PROTECTION LICENSING COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> February, 2019.

Present: Councillor V.P. Driscoll (Chairman); Councillors R. Crowley, Mrs. P. Drake, O. Griffiths, Dr. I.J. Johnson, K.P. Mahoney, K.F. McCaffer, Mrs. A. Moore, Mrs. J.M. Norman, J.W. Thomas, Mrs. M.R. Wilkinson and Ms. M. Wright.

### 711 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE -

These were received from Councillors G.A. Cox and L.O. Rowlands.

### 712 MINUTES -

RESOLVED - T H A T the minutes of the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> January, 2019 be approved as a correct record.

### 713 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST -

No declarations were received.

### 714 WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON IMPROVING PUBLIC TRANSPORT -

The Licensing Policy Officer presented the report, which provided details of the Welsh Government proposals for the licensing of taxis.

Members were advised that Welsh Government was seeking views on their proposals to reform the Taxi and Private Hire regime in Wales, particularly with regards to standards, enforcement and information sharing. The report outlined the broad issues the Welsh Government had identified with the current regime and their proposals to deal with the issues. The report sought approval for the Head of Shared Regulatory Service to draft a response to the consultation as regards to taxi licensing, and to incorporate that response into the full Cabinet reply.

As a way of a background summary, the Licensing Policy Officer stated that the Wales Act 2017 devolved a number of licensing functions to Welsh Government. This included Hackney Carriages, Private Hire Vehicles and Private Hire Operators. On 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2018, the Welsh Government published a White Paper Part I of which was concerned with bus services which were outside the remit of licensing. Part II of the White Paper was concerned with taxi and private hire vehicles.

In terms of areas of reform, this covered national standards with a proposal to reduce a common set of standards throughout Wales in order to obtain a taxi licence. Around enforcement, there was a proposal to allow a Licensing Authority to take enforcement action against any vehicle operating in its area. The third area of

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reform was around information sharing with a proposal to create a database, or make other information sharing arrangements, to ensure that relevant information could be shared throughout Licensing Authorities in Wales for the purposes of safeguarding.

In addition, the White Paper contained a proposal to create a Joint Transport Authority that would result in the redirection of the existing licensing functions of the 22 Welsh Local Authorities into a single National Licensing Authority. The licensing functions would include licensing, fee and fare setting, enforcement, hearing appeals arising from licensing decisions, prosecutions and deciding matters such as whether to apply quantity controls to taxis.

The White Paper was seeking views of two proposed options.

Option A was the preferred option of Welsh Government and included the transfer of all taxi licensing functions from Local Authorities to the new Joint Transport Authority together with the proposals on setting national standards, enforcement and information sharing.

Option B was proposed as an alternative whereby they would implement the proposals concerning national standards, enforcement and information sharing but would retain the role of the current 22 Welsh Licensing Authorities.

The consultation included 16 questions relating to taxi and private hire vehicles and was to close on 27th March, 2019.

A Committee Member stated that there were some good proposals within the White Paper but was astounded that areas such as standards and information sharing had not already been put in place. The Member raised a concern around the possibility of the national standards being lower than those currently operated within the Vale of Glamorgan and raised concern with the possible loss of local control. The Member asked for clarification around the input to the consultation by the Committee. In reply, the Operational Manager Neighbourhood Services stated that a lot of detail had yet to emerge and officers would be meeting with Welsh Government officials to clarify certain areas. Option A would take away powers from local authorities, while Option B would create national standards that would be controlled locally by existing Councils. Option B was the officer's preferred choice. Due to the lack of clarity within the consultation document it was proposed that a full response would be fed through Cabinet as 38 of the 50 pages were around buses. Comments from the Committee would be fed back into the Cabinet's response.

In terms of Options A and B, the consensus of the Committee was for Option B to be the preferred option. Members felt that local control was paramount, but agreed with the need to create national standards, new enforcement policies and better ability to share information.

With regard to Option A, the Committee felt that there was insufficient evidence to justify the benefit of the proposals.

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In reply to a query regarding the age policy for taxis and the possibility of Welsh Government either lowering or increasing the age that vehicles had to be, the Operational Manager Neighbourhood Services stated that this kind of detail was not within the White Paper. It was however one area that Licensing Officers would be meeting with the local trade to discuss. The officer then highlighted that through improving emissions, this may lead to a more modern fleet of taxi vehicles

Subsequently it was

RESOLVED -

- (1) T H A T the contents of the report be noted, with Option B being the Committee's preference.
- (2) T H A T the Head of Shared Regulatory Services be authorised to draft a response to the consultation as regards taxi licensing, and incorporate that response into the full Cabinet reply.

Reasons for decisions

- (1) To provide the Committee with information on developments for public transport in Wales.
- (2) As the licensing of taxi and private hire vehicles was within the remit of the Shared Regulatory Service, they can provide input to the consultation based on the knowledge and experience of officers.