

Minutes of a meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on Thursday, 9 December 2021 in Council Chamber, City Hall - City Hall, Bradford

Commenced 5.00 pm
Concluded 7.15 pm

Present – Councillors

LABOUR	CONSERVATIVE	INDEPENDENT SOCIALIST
Azam Tait Nazir	Bibby Riaz	Jenkins

Apologies: Councillor Jeanette Sunderland

Councillor Azam in the Chair

43. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST

In the interest of transparency Councillor T Hussain declared that he was a Member of the Police and Crime Panel (Minute 49).

ACTION: City Solicitor

44. MINUTES

Resolved –

That the minutes of the meetings held on 16 September, 5 October and 11 November 2021 be signed as a correct record.

Action: City Solicitor

45. INSPECTION OF REPORTS AND BACKGROUND PAPERS

There were no appeals submitted by the public to review decisions to restrict documents.

46. REFERRALS TO THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

There were no referrals made to the Committee.

47. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

Members were asked to consider if the item relating to the Community Safety Partnership, (**Document “U” containing Not for Publication Appendix 2**) should be considered in the absence of the public and, if so, to approve the following recommendation:

Resolved –

That the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Appendix 2 of Document “U” containing Not for Publication information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime, because information would be disclosed which is considered to be exempt information within paragraph 7 (Prevention, Investigation or Prosecution of Crime) of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

It was considered that, in all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information as it was in the overriding interest of proper administration that Members were made aware of the performance of the Community Safety Partnership.

48. BRADFORD DISTRICT COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP PERFORMANCE REPORT AND DELIVERY PLAN

The Chair of the District Community Safety Partnership, presented a report, (**Document “U” containing Not for Publication Appendix 2**) providing details of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) performance report for the 12 months to 30th June 2021 and presenting the annual CSP Delivery Plan.

Resolved –

- 1. The Committee would like to thank all partners for the continuous work in this very important area.**
- 2. This Committee requests that Quarterly Performance Reports, which include a RAG rating, be presented to the Committee.**

(Michael Churley – 01274 431364)

49. HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE SERVICE

The Strategic Director, Place, submitted a report, Document “T”, which informed the committee of the key role of the hackney carriage and private hire service, what its responsibilities were and how it carried out those duties.

It was explained that the aim of the Licensing regime was to issue only licences to drivers of good character and with sufficient driving ability and competence. Private Hire Operators should also pose no threat to the public nor should they have any links to criminality. Vehicles are to be of a sound mechanical condition, be comfortable and clean. They should also meet the requirements of Bradford City’s Clean Air Plan.

The public should have reasonable access to both hackney carriage and private hire services due to the integral role they play in local transport provision.

The report outlined licensing policy and delegated powers and it was explained that some legislation was dated and preceded mobile communications. Department for Transport (DfT) had issued guidance in July 2020 requiring Councils to review their policies to meet statutory standards and a link to the DfT Standards report was included in Document “T”. It was reported that the service had begun engagement with the trade and a report, with recommendations, would be provided to the Regulatory and Appeals Committee in the next year.

Details of the functions of the service provided a distinction between Hackney Carriage and Private Hire and a guide to the roles, responsibilities and legislation for personnel involved with Hackney Carriage and Private Hire were appended to Document “T”.

Statistics on the number of licences, vehicles and operators in the district was provided together with the current structure of the service. The report revealed a Customer Charter which had been developed and set out customer and service performance to which the service must adhere. Included in that charter were standards to provide excellent customer service; deliver prompt responses to contacts, renewals and new driver applications. Licensing process statistics for the period 1 April 2021 to 31 October 2021 were provided.

The rationale for instigating regular trade meetings was discussed and the impacts of the COVID pandemic on the trade was report. Document T concluded with a summary of challenges faced by the service in the future including challenges faced from changes to conditions in order to meet the requirements of the DfT statutory guidance. It was confirmed that condition changes would be presented to the Regulatory and Appeals Committee in 2022.

Following a very detailed presentation Members raised a number of questions to which the following response were provided:

- A driver suitability policy across West Yorkshire and York would be in place within a few months.
- A national register of revocations allowed the service to check the history of new applicants or for renewals of licences. The DfT standards aimed to

tighten that register allowing the service to check driver cautions and take action. If a driver appeared on that register they would not necessarily be refused a licence as all applications were decided on their merit.

- The staff structure contained 25.5 posts.
- The table of charges published with the report contained an error. The costs of a licence for one was £81 and for three years was £199 saving £40 to drivers who renewed for three years. The saving was not as large as some Members believed it could be as there was still a need to do annual checks and obtain driver input. New technology developed would allow a driver's badge to be chipped and provided information to reduce administrative costs. It was also possible to check the validity of a driver's badge.
- The Estate Management Programme was considering the potential to develop a new structure and merge the Shearbridge Depot with others. A decision was expected shortly.
- The Customer Survey was a new initiative. The target was for all staff to send out a survey to interact with users following each interaction with the service. The surveys were tailored to include all interactions with the service including administration and fitters in the garage.
- The service had no real control regarding the level of responses received but action was being taken to consider the feedback and increase participation.
- There were 22 complaints about the service included in the report although only two had progressed to stage two. It was not known the total number of complaints upheld. That number would be investigated and reported back to Members.

The report revealed that 30,000 face covers, hand sanitisers and screens had been distributed by the service to the trade and that operation was questioned. It was explained that enforcement officers had bagged up parcels for operators to collect from the depot. These had been collected in bulk and distributed to drivers. Trade representatives had collected supplies for the Hackney Carriage trade and if drivers were not part of a trade organisation separate collections had been organised.

The view that challenges to the service was a reduction in drivers and a view that there were too many drivers was raised by a Member. The Licensing Service Manager explained that this was challenge was because of the availability of other types of driving work available which some drivers felt was easier or more lucrative work.

A Member raised issues which had occurred with the data base system operated and questioned if an improved data base or digital interaction was likely in the future. An additional Member referred to other specialist systems throughout the Council were it had been difficult to get sufficient IT support or intervention. It was suggested that it may be worthwhile in obtaining a report on systems across the Council and the support available to ensure those systems were fit for purpose and had adequate support available internally.

Incidents of drivers who were licensed outside of the area operating in the district were discussed and it was explained that the current systems used did not provide information on drivers who had been refused licences in other areas. It was confirmed that all West Yorkshire and York officers could enforce across boundaries and refer issues back to issuing Councils. At a recent meeting with West Yorkshire colleagues it had been agreed that a consistent approach around the DfT guidelines was required.

Anti-idling messages to drivers were raised and it was questioned what measures were being taken to prevent that practice. It was explained that work was conducted last year and if drivers were found with their engines idling they were given notice. Drivers had complained that they were cold and elected members had not been happy with the campaign. It was suggested that drivers could be targeted in more clement weather and that Members could be involved in a bid to change that culture.

Messages to raise awareness of Child Sexual Exploitation were discussed and it was explained that pertinent measures to reinforce that message could be included in driver refresher training. The DfT guidance was addressing that issue and the service did have a good relationship with the police.

Staff retention was discussed with Members raising concerns that staff often left to go to other authorities for better pay and conditions. It was reported that a staffing review conducted a few years ago may be outdated and measures to improve the structure would be undertaken.

A Member raised concerns that following a meeting arranged by the Portfolio Holder on 28 July 2021, between the service and the trade, to discuss the culture in the service and allegations of racism, no follow up had been provided as promised. He felt that the service was inaccessible and that officers were racist. He challenged when and how that culture could be changed. He reported an incident where officers were disrespectful to him until they had realised he was an elected member and he questioned how the service could change its culture so that people were not afraid to approach officers.

In response it was stated that the report addressed issues of diversity and that the Customer Charter had been developed to increase engagement with the trade. Feedback that was requested of the trade included questions about the perception of the service. In reality at the current time people were not visiting the depot and contact was made via telephone or online. It was acknowledged that racism was not acceptable.

The Chair acknowledged the pressure and challenges faced by the service and reported he had received a number of calls from a person disputing events which turned out to be false and he recognised that the service would deal with similar occurrences regularly.

The frustration people had felt about issues affecting their livelihood was discussed and it was acknowledged that meetings with the trade, such as the one discussed on 28 July 2021, were needed. It was questioned if regular meetings were arranged. In response it was reported that a meeting had been arranged to which all operators had been invited to discuss new DfT requirements. Only two

operators had attended that meeting although some written communications had been received. The service was acting on suggestions from the trade about conditions it was felt should be mandatory. It was hoped that communication methods could be kept open and acknowledged that with 5,000 drivers there would be differing views.

Members reiterated their concerns that feedback had not been provided following the meeting organised by the Portfolio Holder in July 2021. It was felt that relationships would be damaged if concerns were not addressed. A Member reported his activity on the Equality Reference Group and issues raised about the service to that group. He felt that the service should be independently appraised to provide a clear picture of the culture and issues being raised. A Member reported his belief that it was the attitude of officers not the policies that were being questioned.

The Licensing Service Manager reported that there had been a review of conduct. It was explained that when reviewing licences officers would carry out investigations and look at evidence which was applied to national policy. No single officer would make a decision alone and issues would be considered by a panel of officers and challenged as if in a court. Officers would not take or refuse a licence lightly but protecting the public had to be the priority.

Resolved –

- 1. That a further progress report be presented in 12 months.**
- 2. This Committee requests that a report relating to IT services and systems, including the support for standard systems used in the Council, along with more service specific IT support, be presented to this Committee**

(Carol Stos – 07582 101569)
(Dominic Barnes-Browne)

50. CORPORATE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2021-22

The Chair of the Committee submitted a report (**Document “V”**) which presented the Committee’s work programme for 2021/22.

The Overview and Scrutiny Lead reminded Members that at the meeting on Tuesday 16 February 2021 the Committee had considered West Yorkshire Devolution and recommended that future updates be provided. Officers from Bradford Council and the West Yorkshire Combined Authority were in attendance at that time and members of the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee were also invited to that meeting.

Members were advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Lead would be inviting officers from the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, along with the Mayor of West Yorkshire, to attend a meeting of the Committee in the New Year. That

meeting would be to scrutinise the work undertaken to date and the impact and outcomes that this has had for the residents of the Bradford District. As previously, members of the Regeneration and Environment Overview and Scrutiny would also be invited to that meeting.

It was explained that an invitation had also been sent to Members to a meeting on 6 January with strategic partners to discuss domestic violence and Members were urged to attend if possible.

The Chair requested that Members contact the Overview and Scrutiny Lead about any issues they would like to be included on the work programme.

No resolution was passed on this item.

Chair

Note: These minutes are subject to approval as a correct record at the next meeting of the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

THESE MINUTES HAVE BEEN PRODUCED, WHEREVER POSSIBLE, ON RECYCLED PAPER