

General Licensing Committee Report



Listening Learning Leading

Report of Head of Environmental Services

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AGENDA ITEM NO 4

Taxi licensing policy

Recommendation

That the General Licensing Committee:

1. Agrees to adopt the draft taxi licensing policy.
2. Authorises the Head of Environmental Services on consultation with the Chairman of the General Licensing Committee to make minor amendments to the taxi licensing policy where necessary.
3. Recommends that Council authorises the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to make the necessary changes to the Council's Constitution arising from the adoption of the taxi licensing policy.

Purpose of report

1. This report presents the draft taxi licensing policy which the committee are asked to agree to adopt. The recommendations from the Customer and Community Scrutiny Committee are included in the draft policy for the committee to consider.

Background

2. South Oxfordshire District Council has responsibility for licensing Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles, drivers and operators within the district of South Oxfordshire. To date this responsibility has been exercised in accordance with a number of policies and procedures developed over the years. A comprehensive review of these policies and procedures has been prompted by new guidance for licensing authorities, issued by central Government. This guidance sets out what is considered to be best practice in terms of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire licensing.

3. This policy will apply for a four year period but will be kept under review during that time.
4. Consultation on the draft policy took place on 12 December 2007 and ended on 11 February 2008, with relevant organisations and the taxi drivers and operators. Copies of these responses are available and are held by the Licensing Officer. A total of nine key points were raised as a result of the consultation process. Seven of these points have been incorporated into the proposed policy. The major changes are highlighted in Appendix A and the revised draft policy can be found in Appendix D, The two points made by the trade during the consultations which were not taken on board were the removal of the knowledge test and the retention of the existing roof signs.
5. The revised draft policy was presented to the Customer and Community Scrutiny Committee on 9 June 2008 and the committee decided that the Scrutiny Taxi Sub Working group should review the revised draft policy in detail. This meeting was held on 12 August 2008 and the general comments from the group can be found in Appendix B. On 27 October 2008 the Customer and Community Scrutiny Committee was presented with the draft policy and the amendments from the scrutiny taxi sub working group. The committee recommended that the Licensing Committee adopts the draft taxi licensing policy appended to this report, and the policy should include the recommendations from the Customer and Community Scrutiny Committee Taxi Working Group. Appendix C of this report bench marks the proposed policy amendments with other Local Authority taxi policies.

Financial Implications

6. The income from Hackney Carriage and Private Hire driver licences was £57,600 in 07/08. Over a three year period that income would generate £172,800 (without inflation). The cost of issuing a three year licence will be in the region of £140 and £160. This will generate an income of around £120,000 for the same period. There will be new income generated from the proposed policy changes for example; the knowledge test and administration charges however the change from one year to three year drivers licences will see a reduction in income.

Legal Implications

7. The statement of licensing policy will be produced pursuant to the powers conferred by the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 and the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, as amended, which places on the council the duty to carry out its licensing functions in respect of hackney carriage and private hire vehicles.

Human Resource Implications

8. The change from yearly to three yearly drivers' licences will have an impact on current administration resources. Three yearly licences will be issued in 2008/09 and therefore the number of applications will only reduce from 2009/10. Given the three year cycle in 2011/12 we will receive a large proportion of licence renewals however this will reduce in time because of the natural turnover of taxi drivers. The number of licensing administration staff currently employed is three full time posts and an officer on a one year fixed term contract. In 2008/09 we will

undertake a comprehensive review of resources related to the licensing function to ensure we are delivering the service as efficiently as is possible.

Conclusion

9. The revised draft Taxi Licensing Policy has been developed in conjunction with the other authorities within Oxfordshire and Thames Valley, the Police, taxi representatives and members of the Customer and Community Scrutiny Committee.
10. Adopting the revised draft Taxi Licensing Policy will ensure that it complies with government best practice guidance and will provide protection for the public using the service.