

MINUTES OF A JOINT MEETING OF LICENSING & SAFETY COMMITTEE AND TAXI/PRIVATE HIRE LIAISON GROUP HELD ON MONDAY 11 JULY, 2016 AT 6.00 P.M.

In a Conference Room at the Council House, Walsall

Present:

Councillor S. Fitzpatrick (Chair)
Councillor Sarohi (Vice Chair)
Councillor Barker
Councillor S. Ditta
Councillor D. Hazell
Councillor Murray
Councillor Nawaz
Councillor Rochelle
Councillor Sears
Councillor Worrall

In Attendance

Barbara Watt	-	Director of Public Health
Lorraine Boothman	-	Regulatory Services Manager
Carol Boughton	-	Head of Service – Safeguarding
Mr Z Ali	-	Private Hire Association
Mr K Hussain	-	Private Hire Association
Mr Ahmed	-	Hackney Carriage Association

1/16 Appointment of Chair

That Councillor Fitzpatrick be appointed Chairman for the duration of the meeting only.

2/16 Apologies

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors C. Bott and Clarke.

3/16 Declarations of Interest

Councillor S Ditta declared an interest in item 5 – Child Sexual Exploitation and took no part in the voting thereon.

4/16 Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

Resolved

There were no items to be considered in private session. At this point in the meeting, the Chairman indicated that the reports relating to Child

Sexual Exploitation and wheelchair securing straps would be dealt with in Public Session.

5/16

Child Sexual Exploitation

The report of the Director of Public Health was submitted:-

(see annexed)

The Director of Public Health (Barbara Watt) enlarged upon the report for benefit of the meeting and explained how the licensing regime would be used to improve health and well being in Walsall. Through CSE training of hackney carriage and private hire drivers, the trade would provide the eyes and ears for Walsall in fighting to protect children and vulnerable adults. She continued that safeguarding children from harm was particularly important and everyone should be involved. Awareness training would be introduced for new and existing drivers and once trained they would be able to recognise the signs of exploitation or trafficking and report their concerns to the appropriate partner organisations.

The Head of Safeguarding (Carol Boughton) reported that for eighteen months the Council had been training teachers, Doctors, the Police and the hotel trade to recognise CSE, ASB and People Trafficking. It was hoped that the trade would agree to play a part too. Street Teams would go out to provide training so that information drivers picked up could be processed and lead to abusers being apprehended.

The West Midlands Police representative reiterated the fact that drivers were needed to be the eyes and ears of the organisation in defeating Child Sexual Exploitation. As drivers worked all hours of the day and night and covered the whole of the borough with their journeys they would provide a valuable resource.

She then showed a selection of video clips to the meeting which gave a flavour of the two hour training session which would be given to drivers. As a result of the training, drivers would be made aware of any problems and given the confidence to report what they had seen to the Police and partner organisations. She outlined the implications for drivers if a child was trafficked in their vehicle and indicated that it did not only relate to young girls but could also apply to young males at risk from older males or females.

Finally she drew attention to the "See something, say something" national campaign and asked drivers to listen out for nicknames being used, addresses being discussed or particular vehicles being described.

Councillor S. Ditta asked how the training would be carried out. The Regulatory Services Manager (Lorraine Boothman) replied that drivers would be offered several dates for training.

Councillor S Ditta asked if the trade representatives and operating bases could be used to provide information to drivers. Miss Boothman replied that in the first instance drivers would be written to and asked to attend training so that a structured approach could be maintained.

Councillor Nawaz asked about building some flexibility into the training and what the timeline for completion would be. Miss Boothman replied that CSE training would be included in the training for all new applicants. Existing drivers would be offered alternative dates to undertake training. It was hoped to train up to a maximum of 30 persons per session and all existing drivers would have received the training within two years.

Councillor Nawaz asked if existing drivers would receive the training at no cost to themselves. Miss Boothman replied that it would be possible to provide the training to existing drivers at no cost.

The Private Hire Associations representative (Mr Ali) felt that no decision should be taken at this evening's meeting as he felt that he could not make a decision until he had carried out the full training session. He added that the selection of clips from the training which had been shown to the meeting this evening had not taught him anything he did not already know. He was delighted that existing drivers would not have to pay for the training and asked if other neighbouring borough's were providing similar training to their drivers. The Police representative confirmed that this was the case.

Mr Ali felt that drivers already knew what to look for and where to report their concerns so this training was unnecessary. He asked if the training would be made compulsory. Councillor Fitzpatrick replied that if drivers would agree to be trained voluntarily then compulsion would not be necessary. However, if drivers refused to be trained then it might have to be compulsory.

Mr Ali asked if one person could be trained from each base then he/she could cascade the information through the organisation. Miss Boothman replied that this was impractical as there were a considerable number of drivers who did not work from a base so would be missed if a piecemeal approach to the training was tried.

Councillor Nawaz asked what other concerns the trade had over CSE training. Mr Hussain (Private Hire Association Representative) indicated that drivers knew what was right or wrong. He was concerned at the cost implications. Miss Boothman replied that it was proposed to charge new applicants £10.50 for the training. There would be no costs to existing drivers.

Councillor Ditta asked how Walsall's fees for training compared with other Local Authorities. Miss Boothman replied that they were broadly similar.

Mr Ahmed (Hackney Carriage Association Representative) stated that his members knew how to deal with CSE and did not need training. He felt that it was a publicity stunt on behalf of the Council.

Carol Boughton replied that the Council had trained 120 GP's in the Borough, all 60 Councillors, hotel staff, door operatives and others but no mention had been made of this in the press.

Councillor Worrall expressed confusion over the process which had been followed. He indicated that he thought that there would be more training. He asked if it would be possible to see the complete training video.

Councillor Sarohi suggested that if drivers saw anything unusual then they should report it to the Police or Council Officers. He added that new applicants who were unemployed should also receive the training for free.

Barbara Watt reiterated the fact that this was a serious issue and drivers should be willing to help the Council to overcome the problem. She appealed to drivers to help be part of the solution.

Councillor Ditta referred to the fact that, as a teacher she was required to undertake CSE training annually as there were changes every year. It was vital for the protection of the children of Walsall.

Councillor Worrall referred to the fact that events nationally had shown that there is a problem with Child Sexual Exploitation so everything possible needed to be done to prevent it. He felt that a cost of £10.50 was a small price to pay to ensure the safety of the children in the borough.

Mr Hussain suggested that a number of drivers should be selected to carry out the training session before a final decision was made. He was concerned that whatever decision was reached should not affect the livelihood of drivers.

Councillor Nawaz asked why drivers objected to being involved. Mr Ali replied that drivers were concerned because the training was being made compulsory for them when it was voluntary for other workers. He felt all Council licensed individuals should be trained.

Councillor Hazell referred to the fact that as Councillors they had an obligation to try to protect every child in the borough from harm. As drivers were carrying young people around the borough they were in a unique position to report anything suspicious and to break up illegal activities by reporting them to the Police or Social Services.

After further discussion it was:

Resolved

That consideration of the introduction of Child Sexual Exploitation training for hackney carriage and private hire drivers be referred to the Licensing and Safety Committee on 20th July 2016 for determination.

5/16

Wheelchair Securing Straps

The report of the Director of Public Health was submitted:

(see annexed)

Additional information supplied by Councillor Hazell was circulated to the meeting.

(see annexed)

The Director of Public Health (Barbara Watt) enlarged upon the report for the benefit of the meeting and explained the background which had led to the recommendation for a testing and marking regime for wheelchair security straps. She drew the meeting's attention to paragraph 2.1 of the report.

Councillor Hazell advised the meeting that he had raised this matter at Council in September, 2015 and was concerned that it had taken so long to reach this position. He had spoken to a significant number of Local Authorities about a checking regime for wheelchair securing straps and only a handful carried out any testing regime. He stated that seatbelts were routinely examined as part of the M.O.T test on vehicles so it should not be difficult to include wheelchair securing straps as part of the test regime. A label should be attached to each set of securing straps to show the vehicle they belonged to and should also be stored in a bag or case to avoid contamination from oil, grease, petrol or brake fluid which might weaken them.

Councillor Hazell continued that whilst the normal three point seatbelt would protect the individual in the wheelchair, without straps to secure the chair itself if the driver had to swerve then the wheelchair itself could tip over. He added that the ramps used to allow wheelchairs to access vehicles should also be subject to M.O.T. testing to ensure that they were fit for purpose.

The Hackney Carriage Association representative (Mr Ahmed) agreed with Councillor Hazell that wheelchair securing straps and ramps should be provided for each licensed vehicle and labelled accordingly to prevent them being shared between vehicles.

Barbara Watt indicated that the M.O.T. Testing Station Manager had indicated that including wheelchair security straps in the M.O.T. examination could be undertaken at no extra cost.

A driver complained that the M.O.T. testing station struggled to cope with existing taxi trade vehicles requiring M.O.T's. He was concerned that adding additional items to be checked would only make the

situation worse. He asked if other independent garages which carried out M.O.T's could be added to the depot to reduce the backlog of vehicles awaiting tests.

Councillor Fitzpatrick asked for a report on these comments.

After further discussion it was:

Resolved

That the following be added as test items to be inspected as part of the M.O.T test on hackney carriage and private hire vehicles:-

- (a) A complete set of straps for securing wheelchairs is present in vehicles:
- (b) That the straps are marked as belonging to a particular vehicle in a non-destructive manner.
- (c) That the straps are stored in a bag or case to prevent contamination.

Further Resolved

That a report on the use of independent garages to carry out MOT's on Hackney Carriages or Private Hire Vehicles be submitted to the Taxi/Private Hire Liaison Group.

6/16

Termination of Meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 8.10 p.m.

Chairman.....

Date.....