

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Scrutiny Working Groups 2012/13**

#### **1. Hackney Carriages Policy Review working group**

**Working group members: Councillors** Paling (Chair), Prew–Smith, Miller, B. Andrews, Hughes, and Brooks. (Councillor Hope joined the group in the latter stages of the review.)

##### **1.1 Findings and Recommendations**

In summing up the review Members noted and were very pleased with the cooperation of the Portfolio Holder, Public Protection and Communications in giving evidence and also with the comprehensive research and feedback provided by officers of the Public Protection and Legal teams.

##### **1.2 Key findings**

On reviewing all evidence Members were satisfied in the main that the Gedling Borough Council Taxi Licensing Policy is robust and effective in steering both the licensing service and Environment and Licencing Committee process, reinforced by the fact that the policy is currently being standardised to align more closely with the policies of authorities across the County.

Members were also assured that the application process, whilst previously having been perceived as complex and onerous, is now kept under regular review and also subject to benchmarking with other authorities. Following the most recent review and a move to a 'passport office' type approach led by Customer Services, whereby a checklist of inclusions guides the applicant through the process, Members are anticipating better quality applications and information referred to the committee from July 2013 onwards.

Notwithstanding the above, it had been clear to both Members and officers that some parameters applied by Gedling are less restrictive in comparison with other authorities. Along with possible differences in charging and the 'knock on' impact of new filtering processes coming into operation in neighbouring authorities, i.e. NVQ s and topography tests, the compound effect has been an excessive demand for licences in Gedling, and a disproportionate number of drivers operating with limited geographical knowledge of the area. This is also known to be a primary concern of local Taxi firms.

Members had expressed some concern over levels of customer care and communication skills amongst drivers, and were also keen to ensure that the Licensing Service contributes to the Environmental Sustainability agenda; a key priority for Gedling Borough Council.

##### **1.3 Recommendations**

The Hackney Carriage Licensing Scrutiny Working group makes the following recommendations to the Portfolio Holder for Public Protection and Communications:

1. That the planned benchmarking exercise and further standardisation of Gedling Borough Council's Licensing Policy against those of neighbouring authorities is progressed in consultation with the Licensing Committee as stated in the officer responses at **appendix 1**.
2. That subject to rigorous Equalities Impact Assessment the Council and Environment and Licensing Team progress the implementation of a topography test as part of the taxi licensing process with immediate effect.
3. That the Council and Licensing Team seek to encourage and promote amongst fleet operators the introduction of an NVQ for taxi drivers, to incorporate customer care and communication skills, health and safety and awareness when assisting people with disabilities.
4. That the Environment and Licensing Team seeks to include taxi fleets in the DEFRA Transport Plan as part of the 'Eco Stars' initiative, giving consideration to the use of the 'fleet age' procedures as an opportunity to influence fleet operators to participate in the scheme.
5. That a cost comparison exercise on the licensing fees is carried out with those of other authorities, to establish whether this is a contributing factor to the increased demand experienced at Gedling Borough Council.
6. That the September 2013 Environment and Licencing Committee takes the opportunity to reflect upon and review the level of positive impact of the new application process and improved forms and guidance.
7. That all of the above measures form a 5 year improvement plan which is assessed at an appropriate point in the future and reported to the Overview Scrutiny Committee.