

LICENSING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 22 JUNE 2021

Present: Councillor Edwards (Chair);
Councillors Woodward (Vice-Chair), Page, Rowland, Carnell,
Challenger, Ennis and McGonigle

Apologies: Councillors Rynn, Maskell and Skeats

2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Licensing Applications Committee meetings held on 9 December 2020 and 26 May 2021 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chair.

3. UNMET DEMAND SURVEY

The Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report asking the Committee to consider whether an Unmet Demand Survey should be carried out during the current Covid 19 pandemic and whether it would be appropriate to amend the current limiting policy approach to hackney carriage numbers. A copy of an e-mail sent to both Reading taxi trades and a response from RTA was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

The report explained that a moratorium on the issue of new hackney carriage vehicle licences had been implemented in March 2009 and had been maintained ever since, following analysis of unmet demand surveys completed in 2012, 2015 and 2018, each of which confirmed there was no significant underlying unmet demand for hackney carriages in Reading. Officers were in the process of arranging a new survey in accordance with the Taxi requirements of Section 16 of the Transport Act 1985 and the Department for Transport and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing: Best Practice Guidance 2010 (Sections 45 to 51) when the Covid19 pandemic caused the country to go into three national lockdowns which had made it impossible to continue with the implementation of a survey.

The report set out guidance that had been produced by the Department for Transport which stated:

“Section 16 of the Transport Act 1985 does not specify the frequency of the unmet demand assessment, but the Department’s Best Practice Guidance issued in 2010 suggested this is conducted every three years. Though the decision as to when an unmet demand survey is conducted remains that for a licensing authority, we are aware that we are in a very unusual situation at present; while this continues it would seem highly unlikely that there would be significant unmet demand for taxis. We would expect unmet demand surveys to be conducted once travel levels return to more normal levels or if concerns are raised by the trade or public.”

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If a survey was to be conducted in the current circumstances, it was highly unlikely the results would be a true reflection of the trade in Reading or of levels of demand for hackney carriage vehicles. Accordingly, the report proposed that the survey be delayed until such time as a more normal level of usage was apparent.

No public consultation had taken place, although comments had been requested from both the Reading Taxi Association and the Reading Cab Drivers Association. There had been no response from the Reading Cab Drivers Association. The response from the Reading Taxi Association agreed to delay the Unmet Demand Survey by 12 months and confirmed that, at the moment, there were only an estimated 93 HCVs working the ranks out of the 216 licensed HCVs, and that carrying out a survey now would be unfair on rental drivers. Chris Avery, Reading Cab Drivers Association and Asif Rashid, Reading Taxi Association attended the meeting, addressed the Committee, and both confirmed to the Committee that they agreed the survey should be delayed until 2022.

Resolved -

- (1) That the Unmet Demand Survey not be implemented in 2021 due to the current financial hardship that was affecting the Reading Borough Council Hackney Carriage trade and that it be delayed until 2022 when it was hoped that the current financial difficulties due to the Covid 19 pandemic had eased following the return of business to the trade;
- (2) That the current policy of not issuing any further hackney carriage licences, be retained pending a review in late 2022.

(The meeting closed at 6.52 pm)