

## LICENSING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 11 JULY 2024

**Present:** Councillor Woodward (Chair), Asare, Keane, Leng, Magon (via Teams), Mitchell, Rowland, DP Singh, Stevens and Tarar.

**Apologies:** Councillors Edwards and Dennis.

### 2. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Licensing Applications Committee meetings held on 20 February 2024 and 22 May 2024 were confirmed as correct records and signed by the Chair.

### 3. HACKNEY CARRIAGE VEHICLE EMISSIONS AND AGE POLICY REVIEW

The Committee considered a report that recommended that changes be made to the Council's Hackney Carriage Vehicle Emissions and Age Policy (HCVEAP). The report sought approval to conduct a public consultation exercise on the proposed changes. A table setting out the current and the proposed new emissions & age policy standards and associated deadline dates had been attached to the report at Appendix HCVEAP-1. A copy of the Climate Impact Assessment was attached to the report at Appendix HCVEAP-2.

The current HCVEAP had been adopted by the Licensing Applications Committee on 23 October 2019 to remove older and more polluting vehicles from the fleet with the goal of improving local air quality within the town (see Minute 5). On 9 December 2020 the Committee had resolved to pause the HCVEAP for two years until 1 October 2022 due to the economic impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had had on the trade (see Minute 7). On 1 February 2022 the Committee had further extended the pause to October 2023 but also resolved to remove the oldest and most polluting vehicles from the fleet by October 2022 in addition to continuing the incentive of a free first-year's licence for Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV) or 100% electric vehicles (see Minute 5).

The report explained that the October 2023 date had passed and that temporary arrangements had ended. It therefore recommended a review of the HCVEAP and proposed that certain changes and adjustments be made to the Policy. The report stated that the effects the COVID-19 pandemic had had on the trade were over, that there were now around 50 licenced hybrid vehicles in the fleet and that Government policy had also changed. It was therefore a good time to review and adjust the HCVEAP to ensure it remained fit for purpose.

The report stated that the Council had continued to offer incentives to encourage vehicles to be upgraded. The offer of incentives had officially ended on 1 October 2023 but had in practice been continued to date. The proposed changes to the HCVEAP included that the Council would continue to offer incentives until the Policy was next reviewed. The report stated that the current HCVEAP ran until 1 October 2028 and contained the following dates for vehicles to be replaced:

- (a) 23 October 2024 – The remaining 15 Euro 5a vehicles would be removed from the fleet;

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- (b) 1 October 2025 – All Replacement vehicles would be a minimum ULEV (Ultra Low Emission Vehicles) and less than 8 years old. This rule would apply regardless of whether the vehicle was new or an existing vehicle;
- (c) 1 October 2028 – All vehicles to be a minimum of ULEV.

In addition to continuing towards implementing the existing policy points listed above the report proposed that the following changes be made to the HCVEAP:

- (a) 1 October 2028 – All replacement vehicles should be a minimum of ULEV and less than five years old. This rule should apply regardless of whether the vehicle was new to fleet or an existing vehicle;
- (b) 1 October 2028 – Age limits for ULEV vehicles should be set at a maximum of 15 years and then removed from the fleet. Each vehicle would be assessed on its own merit and an extension of up to a maximum of two additional years might be granted on renewal of the licence after a successful Council compliance test;
- (c) When approved the Policy should run to 2035 when it would be reviewed again unless changes prompted a review sooner.

The report explained that the current HCVEAP ran until 1 October 2028 and had been subject to regular review. At the meeting the Consumer Protection Group Manager clarified that, should the proposed changes be agreed, it was intended that the updated Policy would run until 2035, however the Policy would continue to be reviewed regularly with an interim review next planned for 2028.

Any changes to the HCVEAP would not be implemented until members of the hackney carriage trade had been consulted through the Reading Taxi Association (RTA) and a public consultation exercise had been completed. A report setting out the results of the consultation process and detailing any changes made to the Policy as a result of the responses received would be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee at which a decision would be taken on implementing the proposed changes.

Whilst discussing the report the Committee instructed Licensing officers to ensure that the public consultation exercise was not carried over the August summer holiday period as it was noted that many members of the trade and members of the public would be away or on holiday and might therefore not notice or be able to respond to the consultation. The Consumer Protection Group Manager undertook to conduct the 30-day public consultation in September 2024 instead.

Mr Asif Rashid, Chairman of the Reading Taxi Association, was present at the meeting and addressed the Committee on the proposals.

**Resolved -**

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- (1) That approval be granted for a public consultation to be conducted on the proposed changes to the Hackney Carriage Vehicle Emissions and Age Policy;
- (2) That a report be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee on whether to approve the proposed changes to the Hackney Carriage Vehicle Emissions and Age Policy having taken the results of the public consultation exercise into account.

### 4. TOWN CENTRE BUSKING AND STREET PERFORMANCE GUIDE

The Committee considered a report that proposed the adoption of a Town Centre Busking and Street Performance Guide for Reading and sought approval to conduct a public consultation exercise on the proposed draft Guide. The following documents were attached to the report:

- Appendix 1 – Reading BID Consultation Exercise Results;
- Appendix 2 – Draft Guide for Busking and Street Performance in Reading;
- Equality Impact Assessment; and
- Climate Impact Assessment.

The report explained that busking and other forms of street entertainment were important to the vibrancy of the town centre. The report recognised buskers, street entertainers and other groups shared the streets with those who lived, worked, and visited the town. In certain areas of town a high number of loud, amplified performances were experienced daily. Such performances could have a detrimental affect primarily on businesses and their staff located near to where the performances took place. The report stated that Reading Business Improvement District (BID) and the Council regularly received complaints from businesses in Broad Street and from members of the public about such activities. The enforcement powers available to the Council to tackle problem performers, however, were limited and dependant on the type of activity that was taking place.

The proposed draft Guide for Busking and Street Performance in Reading had been designed to balance the needs of performers with those of residents, workers, shoppers, visitors and other people using the town centre through adopting guidelines which were intended to encourage good community practice. It was anticipated the guidance and light touch approach would help to reduce complaints and help to resolve concerns amicably. The draft Guide had been produced as a joint initiative between the Council and Reading BID and utilised best practice examples from across the country.

The report proposed that a public consultation exercise be conducted to seek the views of businesses, residents, street performers and other stakeholders to help inform a final version of the Guide that would then be brought back to a future meeting of the Committee at which a decision would be taken on whether to adopt and implement the Guide.

**Resolved -**

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- (1) That the draft Guide for Busking and Street Performance in Reading be approved for public consultation;**
- (2) That a further report be submitted to a future meeting on the adoption of a final Guide for Busking and Street Performance in Reading having taken the results of the public consultation exercise into account.**

(The meeting starting at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.35 pm)