

Licensing and Appeals Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 4 March 2019

Present: Councillor Ludford (Chair) – in the Chair

Councillors: Grimshaw, Chohan, Evans, Hassan, Hughes, Jeavons, Lynch, McHale, Madeleine Monaghan, Paul, Reid and Stone

Apologies: Councillor Barrett and T Judge

Also present: Councillors:

LAP/19/31. Minutes

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2018.

Decision

To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 3 December 2018.

LAP/19/32. Taxi Compliance Update Report

The Principal Licensing Officer presented the report that provided the Committee with information in respect of compliance work undertaken by the Unit during April - June 2018 and where possible provided comparative data to demonstrate performance and change.

Table 1 in the report showed an increase in complaints received during Qtr 1 and Qtr 2 18/19 compared to the same quarters the previous years. As has previously been reported to the Committee, service improvements over the past 2 years included objectives to:

- Ensure the wider public are more aware of how to report issues and find it more accessible to do so – particularly with regards to disability related issues
- Improve response, investigation times and quality; thereby generating more complaints as people see more value in doing so

and therefore the general increase in complaints from residents and visitors to the City was anticipated and welcomed.

Qtr 3 18/19 shows a decrease in the number of complaints both from the previous quarter and against the same quarter the previous year. Qtr 3 is usually the busiest quarter for complaints with the City seeing peak numbers in visitors and journeys over the festive period; so this reduction could indicate improved levels of customer service and satisfaction.

The Committee questioned whether more could be done to improve the standard of driving for both Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Drivers, and officers confirmed that driving standards are constantly monitored. Officers also agreed to investigate the possibility of using technology to help improve standards where they fell below the expected level.

The Committee also asked about the issue of ply-for-hire offences, and asked for clarification as to how widespread this was. Officers said that the problems were widespread, and included both drivers licensed by Manchester, and drivers who had Hackney Carriage licenses issued by other authorities, which allowed them to work as Private Hire drivers in Manchester. Officers confirmed that routine checks are carried out on both day and night shifts at various locations across the City, including railway stations, the airport, hospitals and supermarkets. On night shifts interactions are targeted to hotspot areas causing congestion within the Night Time Economy, and locations where the risk of illegal activity is higher. Officers also confirmed that they regularly undertook operations such as Operation Aztec to identify drivers willing to ply-for-hire illegally, but that their resources, although improved, were limited. More recently, Aztec has expanded its focus and now regularly targets illegal plying for hire using specially trained Special Constables undertaking journeys as customers in licensed vehicles. The Operations use different sites to direct vehicles for questioning under caution or vehicle checks, and the system is flexible to enable a check site to be shut down and moved on any given operation.

The Committee asked whether drivers with Hackney Carriage licenses issued by local authorities could misunderstand the law that they could only ply-for-hire within the area covered by the issuing authority, but officers confirmed that they believed the drivers were fully aware of the illegality of their actions, but were willing to take the risk as the financial rewards were high. Officers also confirmed that they would consider changing the paperwork issued by Manchester to make the illegality of ply-for-hire explicit.

Decision

To note the report.