

REPORT BY THE CHAIR OF THE LICENSING AND REGULATORY COMMITTEES

This is the first Chairman's report to Council, from Regulatory and Licensing Committees for some time. I thought it important for the Council to receive a report this year, particularly as the work done, specifically by the Regulatory Committee, came into public view, unfortunately for all the wrong reasons in August 2014.

These two committees work extremely hard, and I would like to thank my Councillor colleagues, for all the support they have given to me, since I became Chairman in September 2014, and for the amount of time and energy they give to ensuring the important work these committees have responsibility for is carried out professionally.

Regulatory Committee**Taxi Licensing**Internal Audit Report

An internal audit was commissioned by Carole Mills, Chief Executive into the Council's taxi licensing function and the final report was made public in December 2014. The Audit report included a Management Action plan of 25 points which were addressed by the Committee, 18 of which have been implemented, and the final 7 are actions are either outside of the Committee's responsibilities or are longer term considerations. This action plan has been monitored closely by the Committee.

Taxi Licensing Policy

The Council adopted a new Taxi Licensing Policy in September 2014, and the Cabinet reviewed it again in December. The Committee agreed for a working group to review the Policy in detail to make further comments, my thanks to Councillors Chris Williams and Dave Lewis, and to Ed Fisher, who with myself went line by line through the policy and have made further suggestions, which are now in train to be considered by the Council's legal team. Additionally, we have sought further input from drivers and operators, and we have now received more comments which are being considered. I would hope that a new, further improved draft, would come to the Regulatory Committee in July 2015, and be considered again by Cabinet before the end of 2015. The policy is now robust and clear, but must not be allowed to stagnate and must continue to improve.

Disclosure Barring Service (DBS)

In light of the difficulties highlighted in August, all taxi drivers who wished to retain a Milton Keynes badge have been required to apply for a new DBS checks.

1016 DBS applications have been made and currently, 866 have been returned, we still await the final 150. Of the 866, 779 have returned clean, with no trace of convictions. 87 have shown a "trace", these 87 are now all being considered, either by officer, or by the Regulatory Sub-Committee. 19 drivers did not respond to the request for a new DBS check and their licences have been revoked.

Although an agency was used to carry out the DBS checks there was enormous extra work placed on officers, and of course dealing with any traces found has added to the work load. My thanks to all officers who have been involved in this process.

Training

A number of excellent training sessions have taken place, led by James Button, the taxi licensing guru. These sessions have been jointly for members and officers and have been extremely successful. More are already planned for after May.

Regulatory Sub-Committee

The Regulatory Sub-Committee has conducted 28 hearings in relation to taxi licensing. My thanks to Councillors and officers who attend these important evening meetings.

Appeals

15 taxi drivers have appealed the decisions of either the sub-committee or officers. 3 occasions the court upheld the council decision fully and 1 partially. 11 appeals are currently within the Court process.

Prosecutions

It is a criminal offence for a private hire driver to take a passenger who has not previously booked. It is vital that we ensure passengers are safe and the vehicle they are being driven in is road worthy and insured. Regular operations are carried out by officers and a number of members have attended these operations. As a result, 16 prosecutions are going through the court process,

And the Committee does not just deal with Taxis!

Village Greens

A number of village green applications have been heard by the Committee and there are a further 6 In the pipeline.

A more robust process for dealing with Village Green applications is currently being considered by the Committee.

Licensing Committee

Casino

The Casino brings £700k to the council income. The committee has considered in detail how this money is being used within the council, to the "greatest benefit".

Licensing Sub-Committee

The Licensing Sub-Committee has heard 10 licence and street trading applications.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere thanks to all officers in this area. Officers have showed professionalism throughout the challenges, everyone working extremely hard, always having in mind that our priority is to keep the public safe. My particular thanks to Mike Hainge, who on becoming the Service Director (Public Realm) in August, found himself, within days, at the centre of an extremely difficult time for this Council. Additionally, the work of these committees could not happen without the vital support of a number of legal officers and Dino Imbimbo and Jane Crighton from Democratic Services.

Councillor Catriona Morris
Chairman Licensing and Regulatory Committees