

## LICENSING COMMITTEE

29 FEBRUARY 2016

Present: Councillor J Brown (Chair)  
Councillor K Crout (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors S Bolton, I Brown, J Connal, G Derbyshire,  
F Ewudo, M Haley, K Hastrick, T Rogers, S Silver, M Watkin and  
S Williams

Also present: Kris Beuret, Social Research Associates Limited  
Leigh Hutchings, Disability Watford

Officers: Environmental Health and Licensing Section Head  
Licensing Officer  
Licensing Officer  
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

### 20 **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS (IF ANY)**

There were no disclosures of interest.

### 21 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/ COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

There was a change of membership for this meeting: Councillor Taylor replaced  
Councillor Hofman.

Apologies were received from Councillor Mills.

### 22 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 January 2016 were submitted and  
signed.

### 23 **FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF WORKING PARTY CONVENED TO DETERMINE HACKNEY CARRIAGE/PRIVATE HIRE SERVICES FOR DISABLED AND VULNERABLE PASSENGERS**

The Chair introduced Kris Beuret and Leigh Hutchings to the Committee.  
Kris Beuret was from Social Research Associates Limited (SRA Ltd) who  
carried out the Mystery Shopper exercise into the needs of disabled people  
when it came to travelling by private hire or by hackney carriage. She had

also been the Chair at a recent Working Party, whom she had taken through the report contained within the agenda.

Leigh Hutchings represented Disability Watford and had attended two of the working party meetings in order to meet with the trade and ensure the needs of disabled people in Watford were properly represented.

The Committee received the report of the Head of Community and Customer Services. The Business Compliance Officer introduced the report and briefly summed up the six categories of the 29 different recommendations. He asked the committee to consider and approve all recommendations contained therein and handed over to Kris Beuret to explain the report.

Ms Beuret opened by describing the extensive range of consultations that had taken place in order to inform the report. She then went on to describe how the current fare structure was front loaded, which disadvantaged passengers who booked cabs for short journeys. She added that people with disabilities would be more likely to take short journeys and so this fare structure might affect them more than other groups. She also commented that some drivers were reluctant to pick up fares requesting such short journeys and that this was wrong as they should accept that some fares would be short, others long.

Councillor Watkin asked if the Council might be open to challenge on the grounds of discrimination regarding the fare structure.

The Senior Solicitor replied that whilst this was a possibility, for any challenge to succeed it would have to be evidentially demonstrated that as a result of the fare structure, a section of society was treated differently. But since all passengers received the same treatment from the fare structure, any such challenge was unlikely to succeed.

Councillor Williams suggested a one day training session in equality issues.

The Environmental Health and Licensing Section Head stated that this was planned for the drivers.

Councillor Derbyshire then made the point that if a driver refused a fare without good reason, he breached his licence. This was confirmed as correct by the Business Compliance Officer.

Councillor Ewudo commented that if disabled people took more short journeys then surely there was an impact on them more than other groups.

Ms Beuret repeated that this would still not be a good legal challenge and continued with her report. She commented that the Watford taxi fleet showed a good proportion of vehicles suitable for persons with disabilities (20%), but added that 50% was a good aspirational goal.

Councillor Taylor asked how the Council might work towards the 50% target.

Ms Beuret stated that setting a time limit and then checking annually on progress would support such a goal.

The Business Compliance Officer then gave further advice on ways to achieve such a goal.

Ms Beuret continued with her report and Councillor Watkin commented in favour of a whistle blowing scheme in support of the complaints procedure.

Councillor Crout asked if any evidence had been obtained that the public were unaware of the Watford Borough Council procedures in respect of complaints.

Ms Beuret replied that she had received such evidence based on people not being able to see or read the complaints card. She added that language barriers also created issues.

Councillor Ewudo commented that complaints procedures should have been adjusted to suit those who were vulnerable or disabled.

The Chair then invited Mr Hutchings to speak. He stated that Disability Watford welcomed the report and he expressed the wish that the committee should adopt all the recommendations. He added that 57% of disabled people were reluctant to go out because of difficulties with transport, so a transport system that supported such people could only be of benefit.

Mr Hutchings also offered disability awareness training for the Council for after the elections.

Councillor Crout asked him if he felt the workshops had been useful as a forum to meet the trade. Mr Hutchings replied that the first workshop was, but after that the drivers did not attend.

Ms Beuret replied that some drivers struggled to make the meetings, but that she had telephoned them, so they were involved in the consultation.

Councillor Williams commented that Über, in the form of Über Assist was looking to engage and support vulnerable passengers. The taxi trade needed to understand the importance of engaging with the public and competitive. He added that the "best taxi scheme", as suggested within the report, was an excellent initiative.

The Chair ensured that all committee members agreed the recommendations.

RESOLVED –

that the committee notes the report and adopts all recommendations contained therein.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.30 pm  
and finished at 8.22 pm