

QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL UNDER PROCEDURE
RULE 10.0

COUNCIL – 30th July 2014

QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR S WILLIAMS

Received on 25.07.14

Question: Can the council explain the rational behind cutting funding for disability training, and will they work with disability Watford to provide disability training to any organisation that has been granted a licence in the borough.

Answer

We understand the context of this question is in relation to disability awareness training for taxi and private hire drivers. The Council has not cut funding for disability awareness training; the Council completed provision of compulsory disability awareness training for all existing hackney carriage and private hire drivers between 2007 and 2012. For all new applicants since then, they are required to undertake training as part of their licence conditions. Due to the limited number of new drivers entering the trade this training is now provided annually. The Council is happy to discuss with Disability Watford how they could participate/provide this annual training but it will need to meet certain requirements and standards. This may include winning a procurement process should they wish to charge for it.

To keep all drivers up to date, since 2013, they are also required to attend compulsory refresher training when renewing their licences every 6 years. This training includes viewing and discussion about a disability awareness DVD that has been specifically produced for licensed drivers by the Sector Skills Council for Passenger Transport.

Recognising the ongoing issues being faced by taxi and private hire customers in Watford, in December 2012, officers held a workshop with private hire operators to help them compile disability assistance policies in line with their own licensing obligations and to comply with their duties under the (then) Disability Discrimination Act 2005. The Council also organises and undertakes “test purchases” in relation to compliance with licensing conditions that may undermine equalities and demonstrate discrimination – such as charging additional fare to carry a wheelchair user.

Licences are issued by the Council for various different activities, and of course the majority of businesses within Watford do not undertake licensable activities. Most of the licences issued do not allow for the inclusion of licence conditions relating to disability awareness and so it is not the case that the Council could require licensed businesses to undertake training.

All organisations and businesses (including small businesses such as taxis and private hire vehicles) are under a legal duty not to discriminate against and to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate people with disabilities. Whilst the Council certainly has a role, and takes this role seriously, in promoting equalities within our community, we are not able to provide training to all businesses. The responsibility is upon them to ensure they are complying with the legal requirements in the same way that they would comply with health and safety, employment, data protection and other legislation. However, if Disability Watford were to develop and provide its own training course for local businesses we could explore what support, in terms of venue or promotion, we might be able to offer.

For more information please contact: Jeffrey Leib (Licensing Manager) on 278476 or email jeffrey.leib@watford.gov.uk