

10. PROPOSAL TO INTRODUCE COMPULSORY SAFEGUARDING TRAINING FOR LICENSED DRIVERS

REPORT OF: Tom Clark, Head of Regulatory Services.
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Wards Affected: ALL
Key Decision: No
Report to: Licensing Committee
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1. Purpose of Report

To seek the Committee's views about adding a condition to Mid Sussex District Council's Taxi Licensing Policy whereby attendance at Safeguarding Training for all current and new private hire and hackney carriage drivers is compulsory and forms part of the 'fit and proper person' test.

Recommendations

The Committee is asked to express a view whether this matter should be forwarded to Scrutiny Committee to consider endorsing a change in the Taxi Licensing Policy.

Background

2. A hackney carriage or private hire vehicle driver will often find themselves in a position of transporting children who are either on their own or accompanied by adults. They will have the opportunity of observing behaviour that might be indicative of abuse, child sexual exploitation (CSE) or human trafficking. In addition they may find themselves as a potential target for unfounded allegations of CSE or abuse. It is therefore important for drivers to recognise and be aware of the signs and know how to react to them, and in doing so safeguard children and themselves.
3. There have been a number of high profile and significant cases in recent years pertaining to the sexual exploitation of children (CSE). Within the report 'Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham (1997 – 2013) Alexis Jay OBE August 2014' states that the role of taxi drivers in facilitating the abuse of children was identified and highlighted.
4. A recent case of CSE, centred in Oxfordshire under the name Operation Bullfinch, resulted in 13 convictions for CSE. A report "Child Sexual Exploitation – Making a Difference" was released in June 2015 by Maggie Blyth of Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board. Within the recommendations there are references to:
 - (a) Mandatory safeguarding training for taxi drivers, and
 - (b) Robust contracts for the transportation of vulnerable children to school:
5. The aim of the making Safeguarding training compulsory for all licensed drivers and private hire operators is to;
 - Give them an understanding of the need to protect vulnerable adults, young people and children,

- Allow them to identify possible victims of abuse and exploitation by understanding indicators of risk,
 - Provide them with sources of advice and pathways for reporting concerns,
 - Help them understand their role and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children they are transporting.
6. It must be stated here that there is no suggestion this training is being conducted because we suspect the trade of being involved in CSE. It is undertaken to enable drivers to be made aware of how CSE manifests itself, what it is and very importantly what to do if something is suspected.
 7. The Licensing Team at MSDC has previously organised a total of twelve sessions of CSE Awareness Training for Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Drivers and Private Hire Operators. These sessions took place during February and March 2016 and January 2018 and were delivered by Barnados. The sessions lasted for about 90 minutes including questions and discussion afterwards.
 8. Despite the training being offered to drivers for free and a selection of sessions being offered there are 135 drivers from a total of 604 who have not attended one of these sessions.
 9. At present attendance at safeguarding training has been voluntary and paid by the Council. This could continue if Members feel that it is the appropriate way forward. Our concerns are that whilst it is voluntary we have no way of knowing what awareness training newly licensed drivers or those who have not taken up the free training(135 drivers) have received.
 10. We suggest that if it is made compulsory the process to train current and new drivers will be via a Council approved external training company at the drivers expense. If this amendment is accepted as policy it is anticipated that current drivers would be given twelve months to get themselves trained. New drivers would be under an obligation to become trained within twelve months of being licensed. Non attendance would result in the driver appearing before the Licensing Committee who will determine whether he/she is still a fit and proper person to hold a licence.
 11. The proposed amendment is as follows ;

Insert after Paragraph 5.15 Mid Sussex DC Taxi licensing Policy

All new applicants are required to undertake recognised safeguarding training in relation to children and vulnerable passengers as part of their professional development. The Training will be organised by MSDC and delivered through a provider of their choice. This is to ensure that all drivers operate to a consistent standard and are able to provide a safe and suitable level of transport service to children and vulnerable passengers.

CSE training for all new drivers must be undertaken within 12 months from the date of issue of the licence.

Existing MSDC licensed drivers and operators that have not undergone CSE awareness training delivered by Barnados through MSDC during February and March 2016 and January 2018 must attend a session within 12 months from implementation of this revised policy.

Failure to attend this training during the timescales outlined above will result in the driver/operator being required to attend the Licensing Committee to explain why he has missed the training and why he should continue to be regarded as a 'fit and proper person to hold a licence'.

Background Papers

Mid Sussex District Council Taxi Licensing Policy
<https://www.midsussex.gov.uk/media/1186/taxi-licensing-policy.pdf>