

## **AGENDA ITEM**

### **REPORT TO EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY**

**8<sup>th</sup> JULY 2008**

### **REPORT OF TEAM LEADER-SCRUTINY**

## **SCRUTINY REVIEW OF TAXIS**

### **SUMMARY**

To receive further information regarding the possible remit and benefits of conducting a scrutiny review of Taxis within the current year.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the report be noted.
2. Members are invited to consider whether it wishes to prioritise a review of taxis in the near future and, should it wish to proceed with a review, to consider the delegation of responsibility to an appropriate Select Committee or Task & Finish Group.

### **DETAIL**

1. At the last meeting, Members considered the need for a scrutiny review to be carried out on taxis within the Borough and requested further information as to the possible remit and potential benefits of carrying out such a review.
2. The background to the proposal for such a review to be carried out relates in the main to recent controversy around the new level of licensing fees proposed by the Council in February 2008. Following consultation, the Council subsequently agreed a lower level of fees than originally proposed and a package of other measures, including the fact that there would be a scrutiny review during 2008/09.
3. With regard to the potential benefits of carrying out such a review, it should be noted that:-
  - A review of policies and procedures is currently ongoing in relation to practices, procedures and conditions relating to taxi drivers, vehicles and operators. There would therefore be benefit in the scrutiny review contributing to such a policy review;
  - A separate consultation is also ongoing relating to the issue of accessibility in taxis and possible changes to policy that may be introduced to address local needs. Again, there would therefore be benefit in the scrutiny review contributing to such issues;
  - The Government have indicated that they are proposing to carry out a national consultation on accessibility in taxis sometime during the summer. However they have indicated that local councils should continue to address local needs through local policies. The scrutiny review would provide direction on both of these issues;
  - An issue likely to arise out of any policy changes in respect of the licensing of wheelchair accessible vehicles will be the need to determine the standard of conversion that will be required; e.g. should the European Community Whole Vehicle Type Approval standards in the M1 category be the minimum?

- The Institute of Licensing, of which the Council is a member, is currently carrying out consultation with its membership with a view to lobbying Government to change the legislation dealing with taxi licensing to make it fit for purpose for the 21st century. The review may wish to influence/contribute to that consultation process;
  - The issue of taxi numbers may be something that the relevant Scrutiny Committee may want to consider; i.e. the trade have requested that we stop issuing any more hackney carriage licences. However, there can be no control on the number of private hire vehicle licences;
  - Whilst there are in place guidelines on the relevance of convictions, which needs revisiting, the procedure for determining relevance and how it affects an applicants fitness and who should be included in the discussion process (e.g. representatives from Social Services and or Education), could be looked at by the Committee as they may bring a different perspective to the matters under consideration;
  - The Tees Valley Licensing Liaison Group, which comprises members from the boroughs of Stockton, Darlington, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool and Redcar and Cleveland have also been given the task of, and are currently reviewing, taxi policies, procedures and conditions to try and secure commonality where possible. Thus, a review at this time could contribute to such a process
4. In terms of the remit of such a review, details are provided at **Appendix 1** of some of the areas that could be covered, which include issues previously highlighted by members such as the consideration of taxis as part of the public transport service, and the possible use of bus lanes/exemptions from Road Traffic Orders (which has been discussed by the Corporate, Adult Services & Social Inclusion Select Committee when considering access issues to the Town Hall on the High Street.

## **SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME PRIORITIES**

5. The Scrutiny Work Programme for 2008/09 was agreed by this Committee on the 1<sup>st</sup> April as follows:-
- Corporate, Social Inclusion and Adult Services Select Committee - Older Peoples Strategy  
 Children & Young People Select Committee - Obesity  
 Regeneration & Transport Select Committee - Highway and Footpath Management  
 Health Select Committee - Audiology  
 Housing & Community Safety Select Committee - Registered Social Landlords (1st Review); Neighbourhood Policing/Neighbourhood Watch/Outward Facing Aspects of CCTV Monitoring (2nd Review)  
 Environment Select Committee - Customer First  
 Arts, Leisure & Culture Select Committee - Tees Active
7. Progress reports on each review are contained elsewhere on this agenda and it can be seen that the majority of Select Committees are not due to complete their current reviews until October-January. The Environment Select Committee is however well advanced with regard to its review of Customer First and therefore may be in a position to finalise its review report by September.
8. Attached at **Appendix 2** are details of the overall priority of all scrutiny topics suggested; including the suggested review of taxis, and following co-ordination of the initial Work Programme on the 1<sup>st</sup> April combining several scrutiny topics into one review, the taxi review was elevated to tenth priority on the programme behind the initial seven review topics identified at paragraph 5.
9. Members are invited to consider whether it wishes to prioritise a review of taxis in the near future and to consider the delegation of responsibility to an appropriate Select Committee or Task & Finish Group.

## **FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

10. There are no direct financial or legal implications arising from the report.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

11. The proposal is categorised as low to medium risk. Existing management systems and daily routine activities are sufficient to control and reduce risk.

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Background Papers:  
N/A

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:            Not Ward Specific