

**THE MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING
OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF EASINGTON
HELD ON 16 APRIL 2008**

Present:- Mrs. M. Nugent (Chair)

Councillors Mrs. M. Baird, E. Bell,
Mrs. G. Bleasdale, B. Burn, A. Burnip,
R. Burnip, A. Collinson, Mrs. E. M. Connor,
R. Davison, Mrs. S. Forster, Mrs. J.
Freak, J. Haggan, H. High, A.J. Holmes,
Mrs. E. Huntington, Mrs. A.E. Laing,
T. Longstaff, Mrs. S. Mason,
K. McGonnell, D. Milsom, D. Myers,
A. Napier, Mrs. A. Naylor, G. Pinkney,
D. Raine, R. Taylor, R.J. Todd,
T. Unsworth, C. Walker, P.G. Ward
and Mrs. V.M. Williams

1. PROPOSAL TO INCREASE THE AGE LIMIT FOR HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES AND TO INTRODUCE A REQUIREMENT FOR DRIVERS TO PROVIDE MEDICAL CERTIFICATES

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Member for Health in relation to the age limit for hackney carriage and private hire vehicles and the requirement for a Certificate of Medical Fitness, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

The Executive Member for Health advised that the report sought approval to amend the Council's bye-laws and conditions in respect of the current age restriction relating to hackney carriage and private hire vehicles, and to make the age limit for vehicles applicable to wheelchair accessible hackney carriages. The report also sought approval to the introduction of the requirement for a Certificate of Medical Fitness on application for hackney carriage and private hire drivers.

It was reported that currently, vehicles must be less than five years old when first licensed and may continue to be licensed until five years old from the date that the vehicle was first registered with the DVLA. The owner may request an extension to the vehicle licence for one year until the vehicle was six years old. This age limit did not apply to purpose built taxis or those adapted to be wheelchair accessible.

A request had been made by the taxi trade to increase the age limit for taxis and a benchmarking exercise was carried out with the other authorities in the County Durham area which revealed that seven years was the most common age limit.

Consideration had been given to the standards applied in other Districts, the Council's ability to maintain standards of taxis by inspection and enforcement and the impact on residents using taxis, and it was considered reasonable to allow a further one year extension, on request, where a vehicle was maintained to exceptional standards.

Extraordinary District Council – 16 April 2008

It was also considered reasonable that wheelchair accessible hackney carriages should also have to comply with the specification as they were now available at no more expense than conventional un-adapted vehicles. It was proposed that this condition be applied to vehicles licensed from the date of this meeting.

With regard to the proposal to introduce the requirement for a Certificate of Medical Fitness, the Executive Member stated that local authorities were allowed to stipulate to applicants for drivers licences, the documentation that would be required before a licence was granted. This authority did not currently require applicants for hackney carriage or private hire drivers licences to provide evidence of medical fitness. The House of Commons Transport Select Committee on taxis and private hire vehicles had recommended that taxi driver licence applicants should pass a medical examination before a licence was granted. Best practice advice recommended that Group 2 medical standards applied by the DVLA in relation to bus and coach drivers should also be applied by local authorities to taxi drivers.

The adoption of the DVLA requirements for frequency of medicals would ensure the Council accorded with current best practice. It would also be consistent with other Durham authorities.

It was proposed therefore, that the conditions be amended to require all new applicants for hackney carriage and private hire drivers licences to provide a Group 2 medical certificate prior to a licence being granted. The condition would not be applicable to drivers currently licensed with the District of Easington until 1 June 2008.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the current standard conditions be amended to permit the increase in vehicle age limit as follows:-
 - vehicles must be less than five years of age at the date of first licence;
 - vehicles may continue to be licensed to five years of age;
 - vehicles judged to be in exceptional condition in accordance with the Council's adopted standard may be licensed for one year extensions beyond the five year limit, until the vehicle was seven years old. An annual application for an extension would be required by the owner of the vehicle.
- (b) the bye-laws and conditions be amended to remove the exemption from age limit for wheelchair accessible vehicles to all newly licensed vehicles with effect from 16 April 2008;
- (c) the conditions be amended to require applicants for hackney carriage and private hire drivers licences to provide a Group 2 medical certificate prior to a licence being granted. These would be required on first application and after the age of forty five, every five years up until the age of sixty five. Certificates to be provided every year where an applicant was older than sixty five years. This condition be not applicable to drivers currently licensed within the District of Easington until 1 June 2008.

2. THREE YEAR HOUSING STRATEGY 2008 - 2011

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Member for Housing in relation to the District of Easington Housing Strategy 2008 - 2011, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Members were advised that Section 87 of the Local Government Act 2003 put local housing strategies on a statutory basis and set out the requirements for the issues to be addressed, which included homelessness, housing need, physical standards and energy efficiency of housing stock in the local authority area.

Significant progress had been made against the action plan in the 2002 Strategy, including the replacement of low demand public and private sector housing with new housing development in a number of settlements across the District, the improvement of older terraced housing in the renewal areas of Dawdon and Easington Colliery, a continuing reduction in homelessness through focussed prevention work, and the development of a number of key policy areas including allocations and choice based lettings.

The revised Housing Strategy 2008 - 2011 had been developed to reflect the substantial changes in the sub-regional, regional and local policy context, the needs of local people and the changing dynamics of local housing markets since 2002. The action plan included as part of the Strategy, had been developed to address the issues of affordability, increasing demand for social rented housing, the condition of the housing stock, the needs of vulnerable residents and the role of housing in supporting future economic growth through its contribution to the overall regeneration of the District.

The Head of Housing took Members through the key contents of the Strategy which set out a vision, four key strategic aims and a number of key objectives. The objectives were supported by a three year action plan linked to performance indicators which would measure delivery of the actions and the intended outcomes for residents.

The Head of Housing proceeded to take Members through the key actions to deliver each of the following four aims:-

Aim 1 – ‘To improve the quality and standard of housing and the environment to ensure that sustainable mixed communities are created’;

Aim 2 – ‘To target housing investment and locations that would produce the greatest benefit for the District and support the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area’;

Aim 3 – ‘To ensure the type and mix of new and existing housing provides choice and meets housing needs and demands’;

Aim 4 – ‘To address the supported housing needs of vulnerable groups’.

He explained that the Strategy had been developed to ensure consistency with the Council's Regeneration Statement and emerging Local Development Framework. It would be performance monitored through the Housing Policy and Strategy Team within the Housing Service and would be reported through the East Durham Partnership Action for Housing and Communities Group, and the

Extraordinary District Council – 16 April 2008

Council's Housing Strategy Group and Regeneration Services Scrutiny Committee.

The Leader of the Council welcomed the Strategy and commended everyone involved in its development. He sought an assurance that there was provision within the document to adapt to the recent changes in the housing market and its effects on the residents of the District. I. Morris confirmed that the Strategy had been developed to be able to respond to changes in the housing climate but acknowledged that there was a need to closely monitor the situation. Members were referred to Appendix 7 which outlined the priorities for the Council in relation to the National Affordable Housing Programme 2008-2011.

A Member asked about the introduction of planning conditions to require new build properties to be fully wheelchair accessible. I Morris advised that in conjunction with Housing Associations new developments were built in accordance with the principle of 'lifetime homes' which specified minimum standards, however, this was difficult to impose on private sector new build. This was an issue the Government was to address.

In response to a further question in relation to the flexibility of the existing grant scheme which allowed individuals to adapt their own properties to meet specific needs, he advised that the current financial assistance policy was under review.

Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** that the revised District of Easington Housing Strategy 2008 – 2011, be adopted.

JE/CB/COM/DIST/080405
23 April 2008