

Ref: RDB/RP/MM/03.10.2017

17 October 2017

Councillor Michael Michael,
Cabinet Member for Clean Streets, Recycling & Environment,
County Hall,
Atlantic Wharf,
Cardiff CF10 4UW.



Dear Councillor Michael,

Environmental Scrutiny Committee – 3 October 2017

On behalf of the Environmental Scrutiny Committee I would like to thank you and the officers from Shared Regulatory Services for attending the Committee meeting on Tuesday 3 October 2017. As you are aware the meeting considered items titled 'Managing Food Hygiene in Cardiff' and 'Cardiff's Taxi Services'. The comments and observations made by Members following these items are set out in this letter.

Managing Food Hygiene in Cardiff

- The Committee acknowledge that the resources available to Shared Regulatory Services for managing food hygiene in Cardiff are limited given the scale of the task. At the same time, the targets set by the Welsh Government for food hygiene are very high for this important public safety issue; for example, there is currently a 93% target for PAM/023 that measures the percentage of food establishments which are broadly compliant with food hygiene standards. Having considered the challenges faced and range of important tasks that they undertake Members feel that Shared Regulatory Services deserve to be congratulated for the work and results that they deliver. I would, therefore, ask that you pass on our appreciation and thanks to the service.
- **Income Generation** - Members support the approach taken by Shared Regulatory Services in generating income from some food hygiene related

services. The Committee understands that the approach is relatively new and that it is not realistic for the income raised to fully offset any future funding cuts, however, every pound helps and this is very much a step in the right direction. Moving forward the Committee supports this approach and would encourage the service to continually review best practice across the food hygiene industry so that it is able to identify any new potential income streams.

- **Joined Up Working** - During the item the Committee felt that food hygiene monitoring standards could be improved by adopting a 'joined up' approach for sharing Council information. For example, every time a catering related change of use application is submitted to Planning the information should be forwarded to Shared Regulatory Services so that they are aware of the change and can take appropriate action. This the Members felt would help ensure improved food safety compliance for new food businesses which are generally viewed as a higher risk. A member of the Committee made the point that Members were automatically informed by email of any new change of use applications (including for catering establishments) within their wards and that extending this email to include Shared Regulatory Services should be a very simple thing to do. I would ask that you look into introducing this small change as it could help boost food hygiene standards, particularly for new food businesses.
- **Extending the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme** - It is clear that the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme has had a really positive impact in terms of raising public awareness and food hygiene standards in Cardiff. Businesses now view a good Food Hygiene Rating Score as an asset while the public seems to use the score as a determining factor when deciding where to eat. During the meeting Members explored the idea of placing Food Hygiene Rating Scores onto takeaway menus and websites. They were told that there is no current statutory requirement for this to happen at the moment, however, it is something that the Welsh Government has considered. Opinion as to whether Food Hygiene Rating Scores should be added to websites or takeaway menus was divided, with

some Members taking the view that a link to the Food Standards website should be sufficient while others felt that a score on a menu or website was a far more transparent option. Either way the Committee believes that highlighting the score or how to access the score is important as it puts the public in a better position to make an informed choice. When you have the opportunity I would urge you and Shared Regulatory Services to lobby the Welsh Government to extend the Food Hygiene Rating Scheme to include takeaway menus and websites.

- **Targeted Food Hygiene Events** - Members were pleased that Shared Regulatory Services were running food hygiene events; in particular they were impressed that approximately 180 businesses had recently attended an event at the Principality Stadium. The Committee felt that this approach could be further developed to support some harder to reach food catering establishments by having targeted events in specific geographical areas, for example, the idea of running an event targeted at food businesses on City Road was suggested. The Committee would support such a targeted approach and would encourage the service to develop the idea.

Cardiff's Taxi Services

- **Fixed Penalty Notices** - During the meeting Members expressed an interest in finding out how many fixed penalty notices were issued in Cardiff against taxi drivers for the misuse of bus lanes. I would be grateful if you could confirm the number fixed penalty notices issued along with the reasons for issuing for 2016/17 and 2017/18 to date.
- **Blocking Bus Lanes** – Some Members of the Committee were concerned by the frequency with which bus lanes were blocked by taxis in the city centre. Officers explained that taxis are currently allowed to use Cardiff's bus lanes and that dropping off and picking up is permitted, however, this needs to be done within a 'reasonable' timescale and that using the bus lanes as extended layover spots or unofficial taxi ranks was not allowed. The Committee feel that the bus lanes need to be kept clear as

unnecessary blockages delay bus journeys. Ultimately delayed bus journeys discourage people from using bus services and, therefore, have an impact on Cardiff's 50:50 modal shift target. Members acknowledge that it is a minority of taxi drivers who actually cause bus lane disruption, and so the Committee would urge you to take the strongest possible enforcement action against persistent offenders. The hope is that if enforcement action is taken against one or two drivers then the message will quickly spread that the Council does not tolerate taxis blocking bus lanes.

- **Taxi Complaints** - The topic of taxi related complaints was discussed at length during the meeting. Members raised a number of concerns about the recording of complaints and the wider complaints process, therefore, I would be grateful if you could respond to the following:
 - The Committee asked for clarification as to whether road traffic offences were taken into consideration when dealing with complaints, specifically if they had an impact on any further action taken against taxi drivers;
 - Prior to the meeting Members received a breakdown of complaints for the period 2012 to 2016. With the exception of 2015 the number of complaints was fairly constant, however, due to the way in which the complaints were recorded it was impossible to identify the number of complaints made for specific types of incident, for example, refusal of fares or overcharging. The Committee were informed that Shared Regulatory Services is in the process of installing a new data base that will be used to record taxi complaints and that the functionality of this data base will give the Council a greater understanding of the types of complaints and why they are made. The Committee welcomes this development and I would ask that you provide them with an update on the new data base structure and its reporting abilities once it is completed. Members hope that the new data base will provide clear and accessible information which in turn is used to drive up taxi standards in Cardiff;

- At the meeting a Member expressed some concern at how the Council had dealt with a complaint made by him about a taxi related incident. He felt that the whole reporting process was overcomplicated and that it would put most people off fully following through with genuine complaints. I would be grateful if you could provide the Committee with a summary of the full complaints reporting process along with some suggestions around what could be done to improve complainant support during the process.

- **Taxi Spot Checks** - The Committee strongly supports the use of regular taxi spot checks to ensure that licensing conditions and standards are followed in Cardiff. At the meeting one of the Members stressed the importance of checking the individual's details against the actual vehicle and taxi driver licensing scheme to establish that they are an authorised driver. The Committee agreed with the idea of having a more thorough driver validation check as a part of the spot check process – this they feel would help improve taxi safety and standards in the city. A suggestion was made that taxi drivers should in future display a larger photo than the one on the badge currently used, and that this should be displayed in a prominent part of the vehicle. I would ask that you look into how we and our partners (for example, South Wales Police) currently undertake taxi spot checks and provide feedback on what is / or can be done to ensure that taxi drivers are thoroughly validated as a part of this process. In addition to this, the Committee supports the continued use of using secret shoppers in Cardiff. They feel that this is an excellent monitoring tool to help establish what taxi standards are really like in Cardiff.

- **Taxi Ranks** - The issue of taxi ranks and the impact that they have on the city centre was discussed at the meeting. Recent consultation reports seemed to suggest that taxi drivers felt that more taxi ranks were needed in the city centre, while several Members suggested potential locations in the north, east and west of the city centre that if created might improve taxi provision. One Member in particular emphasised that creating a taxi rank

in the Westgate Street area of the city might divert taxis from blocking off bus lanes opposite the castle, improving the flow of buses and safety. The conclusion that the Members came to was that now might be an appropriate time to review the provision of taxi ranks in the city centre, therefore, I would ask that you look into the option on undertaking a taxi rank review and provide feedback on your findings to the Committee.

- **Air Quality & Clean Air Zones** - Improving air quality and the potential of creating a 'Clean Air Zone' for Cardiff was briefly discussed as a part of the 'Cardiff's Taxi Services' item. I can confirm that the topics of improving air quality and 'Clean Air Zones' will feature as a part of the next Environmental Scrutiny Committee task & finish exercise titled 'Improving Cardiff's Air Quality'. I will ensure that you and your Cabinet colleagues are kept informed of the content of this exercise and invited to give evidence for the areas relating to your individual portfolios of responsibility.
- **Taxi Marshals** – Members welcome the intention of the Cardiff Business Improvement District (BID) to fund the appointment of additional taxi marshals in the city centre. The Committee felt that this would enhance provision and improve Cardiff's taxi offer. The only concern that Members had was ensuring a consistent standard across the BID and Council funded staff so that the public receive a seamless and consistent service. On behalf of the Committee I would ask for assurance that a consistent approach will be applied to taxi marshalling in Cardiff and that their performance is monitored using a common approach.
- **Taxi Marshal Badge Camera** – Members understand that being a taxi marshal can at times be a very challenging and sometimes dangerous role. The Committee is aware that other roles supported by the Council face similar safety issues (for example, Civil Parking Enforcement Officers & Waste Enforcement Officers) and that to combat the threat they have been given personal badge cameras. I would ask that you look into the option of providing all taxi marshals (both Council and future BID staff) with

a similar badge camera system and provide a summary of your findings back to the Committee.

- **Common Taxi Policies** – At the meeting officers explained that traditionally taxi licensing standards had varied between local authority areas and that some private hire drivers had in the past applied to other less stringent local authority areas to obtain a licence which then allowed them to operate in Cardiff. Members were pleased to hear that the creation of Shared Regulatory Services had largely resulted in the standardisation of the taxi licensing processes across the Cardiff, Bridgend and Vale of Glamorgan. They felt that this was a very positive step forward and that standardisation was something that would only benefit taxi licensing standards across Wales as a whole. With this in mind I would ask that you and Shared Regulatory Services continue to push forward the standardisation of taxi licensing as a sensible way forward for improving taxi standards in Wales.

I would be grateful if you would consider the above comments and provide a response to the content of this letter. Please note that the comments made in this letter about Cardiff's Taxi Services are also included in a letter to Councillor Jacqueline Parry in respect of her role as Chair of Cardiff's Licensing & Public Protection Committee. I am happy to accept a combined response from both of you in relation to the points raised on Cardiff's Taxi Services.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ramesh Patel', written in a cursive style.

Councillor Ramesh Patel
Chairperson Environmental Scrutiny Committee

Cc:

- Councillor Jacqueline Parry, Chair of Cardiff's Licensing & Public Protection Committee
- Andrew Gregory, Director of City Operations
- Dave Holland, Head of Shared Regulatory Services
- Christina Hill, Operational Manager Commercial Services, Shared Regulatory Services
- Will Lane, Operational Manager Neighbourhood Services, Shared Regulatory Services
- Matthew Wakelam, Operational Manager, Infrastructure & Operations
- Davina Fiore, Director of Governance & Legal Services
- Members of Cardiff's Environmental Scrutiny Committee