

## **Blaby District Council**

### **Licensing & Regulatory Committee**

**Date of Meeting** 15 February 2023  
**Title of Report** **Licensing – Third-party DBS Provider Required**  
**Report Author** Licensing Team Leader

#### **1. What is this report about?**

- 1.1 This report focuses on the requirement for a third-party provider to conduct Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks on behalf of applicants, namely new and existing Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Drivers and Private Hire Operators as the Council move away from its position as an Umbrella Body for counter signing DBS applications.
- 1.2 As a result of processing fewer than 1000 checks per year, the Council are unable to subscribe to the DBS electronic checking service and therefore must process all checks manually. This means that the checks are resource heavy, especially for services like Licensing. Therefore, on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2022, the Council's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) agreed that the Council would no longer continue as an Umbrella Body due to the time and cost implications involved and would instruct its various departments to seek alternative providers.
- 1.3 In doing so, many benefits will be realised both for the Licensing department and the customers/applicants served. This report will highlight these benefits including the continued transformation and improvement of the "customer journey" – an ongoing programme of works supported by the Council's Transformation Team designed to streamline and improve an applicant's experience and interaction with Licensing.

#### **2. Recommendation(s)**

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>2.1 Agree to the Licensing department identifying and procuring a third-party DBS provider to conduct DBS checks on behalf of new and existing applicants.</li><li>2.2 Agree that the third-party DBS provider can begin undertaking checks as soon as reasonably practicable.</li><li>2.3 Delegate authority to the Group Manager of Environmental Health, Housing &amp; Community Services, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder and the Chairman of Licensing and Regulatory Committee or its equivalent Policy Committee, to update the existing Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy 2022 – 2027, and other subsequent Policies or Conditions of Licence to reflect this change.</li></ol> |
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### **3. Reason for Decision(s) Recommended**

- 3.1 It is appropriate that members of the Licensing and Regulatory Committee understand that it is necessary to procure a third-party DBS provider as soon as practicable, whilst recognising that there are many additional benefits that can be had by doing so for both the Licensing department, Council in general, and the applicant.

### **4. Matters to consider**

#### **4.1 Background**

Since 2016 Blaby District Council has been a Disclosure and Barring Umbrella Body Service. This means that the Council can act on behalf of the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) to process all criminal record applications for businesses, private, and public organisations.

Blaby District Council processes checks for relevant directly employed staff, licensing applicants (Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Drivers and Private Hire Operators), and for some external bodies.

Because the Council process fewer than 1000 checks a year, it is unable to subscribe to the DBS electronic checking service and therefore must process all checks manually. This means that the checks are resource heavy, especially for departments like Licensing who process them more frequently.

In a report presented to the Council's Senior Leadership Team on 30<sup>th</sup> August 2022, it was identified that there was a considerable amount of cost, as well as time, associated to manually undertaking DBS checks. Consequently, it was agreed that the Council should look to outsource DBS checks, identifiably to a third-party provider who could process applications electronically, and specifically to a provider who would own all aspects of the application and administration processes – including (and importantly) digital identity verification.

Consequently, because Licensing are one of the main departments processing many DBS checks annually, primarily for new and existing Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Drivers and Private Hire Operators, it is important for the benefit of upholding business continuity, that a third-party provider is sourced quickly and effectively.

There are a number of benefits that have been identified with a third-party provider undertaking DBS checks on behalf of the Council, and these are listed below:

- Most DBS providers undertaking checks in relation to new and existing Drivers and Operators will use an electronic portal which enables:
  - Electronic applicant registration
  - Online document upload and online document + ID verification
  - Online payment, including both DBS and administration costs
  - Provider will handle any issues encountered with verification

- Same day counter signatory + submission to DBS
  - Average of 2 weeks for return of DBS certificates
  - Provider will “flag” any issues to the applicant + Council
  - Encourage and remind applicants to register for the DBS Online Update Service (mandatory policy requirement)
  - Provide Licensing with an online dashboard to see progress and status of DBS checks
  - Provider will regularly check for new “flags” once DBS Certificate issued, at least fortnightly over the course of the next three years the DBS is valid
- The DBS provider handles all aspects of the application and administration processes, including (and importantly) digital identity verification
  - Applicants can apply from anywhere at any time to suit them
  - No need for applicants to visit the Council offices to apply manually for a DBS certificate
  - Huge amount of time and cost saved by Officers and the Licensing department in general not having to manually handle or process applications, or resolve complex or incomplete or incorrect applications
  - The Licensing department will not need to rely on HR Officer to counter sign application forms
  - Continues to improve the “customer journey” and experience with the Licensing department as processes become less resource intensive and become increasingly efficient for all parties
  - Supports the Council’s carbon reduction priorities as there will be less occasions when applicants are driving to the Council Offices

Although it is recognised within the Council’s own Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy 2022-2027 that any substantial changes or updates will only be implemented after further consultation with the trade and the public; substantial being defined as having a significant financial or procedural impact on the trade or public, it is recognised and accepted that any additional costs to an applicant are of greater value when offset against the time and resources they employ personally to manually apply for a DBS application with the Council.

Initial feedback from members of the trade during general conversation has supported this proposal.

#### 4.2 Proposal(s)

Agree to the Licensing department identifying and procuring a third-party DBS provider to conduct DBS checks on behalf of new and existing applicants.

Agree that the third-party DBS provider can begin undertaking checks as soon as reasonably practicable.

Delegate authority to the Group Manager of Environmental Health, Housing & Community Services, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder and the Chairman of Licensing and Regulatory Committee or its equivalent Policy Committee, to update the existing Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy 2022 – 2027, and other subsequent Policies or Conditions of Licence to reflect this change.

## 5. What will it cost and are there opportunities for savings?

- 5.1 The basic cost for a DBS certificate is £38.00. Applicants pay this to the Council and in turn the Council pay this to the DBS service. Within the application fee for a driver application for example, the Council will recover £12.84 in administration and processing costs, however this is a nominal fee in comparison to the actual time and resource required to complete a manual application process, sometimes including multiple visits by an applicant to the Council offices to verify personal documentation, rectify errors made on application forms, or to provide missing information. Thereafter, emailing and calling applicants to provide original DBS certificates to Officers, reminders to register for the DBS Online Update Service, as well as undertaking regular online checks are significantly more than the fees charged. Some DBS providers will invoice the Council costs to continue undertaking checks of the Online Update Service in year two and year three of a certificate, however it is common for Council's to pass the charges onto the applicants.

Whilst it is difficult to quantify the level saving available to the Council, it is expected that if the DBS provider selected handles all aspects of the application and administration processes, including (and importantly) digital identity verification, the resources saved in terms of time and cost to the Council will be significant. These resources can then be employed to further support other priorities such as improving the overall “customer journey” as part of Licensing's commitment to transforming and streamlining its procedures.

	Current year	2023/24
<b>Revenue</b>	Met within existing budgets	Met within proposed budgets
<b>Capital</b>	None	None

## 6. What are the risks and how can they be reduced?

### 6.1

Current Risk	Actions to reduce the risks
Because the Council process fewer than 1000 checks a year, it is unable to subscribe to the DBS electronic checking service and therefore must process all checks manually. This means that the checks are resource heavy, especially for departments like	Outsource to a third-party DBS Provider who will handle all aspects of the DBS application process

Licensing who process them more frequently	
The Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Trade may not like additional costs associated to the application and continued checks of a DBS	The additional cost to an applicant will be offset against the time and resources they employ personally to manually apply for a DBS application with the Council. Having access to a provider online where applications can be made at any time, from anywhere, at the convenience of the applicant will be of significant benefit.
The Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Trade may request further consultation prior to any further decisions being made.	<p>The Council has decided that as a result of the circumstances highlighted in this report, further consultation is not required. The changes and costs associated to the procedure changes are not considered significant – or more specifically, are not considered significantly detrimental to the applicants.</p> <p>The outsourcing of DBS checks is considered significantly beneficial to applicants and the Council alike.</p>

## **7. Other options considered**

7.1 To continue to process DBS applications manually.

## **8. Other significant issues**

8.1 In preparing this report, the author has considered issues related to Human Rights, Legal Matters, Human Resources, Equalities, Public Health Inequalities, and Climate Local and there are no areas of concern.

## **9. Appendix**

9.1 None

## **10. Background paper(s)**

Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy 2022 – 2027

**11. Report author's contact details**

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