

Grant of licence

1. We have been asked to decide an application by Virginia Woolf for the renewal of her private hire operator's licence. Ms Woolf trades under the name Bloomsbury Taxis and currently operates 12 vehicles licensed by this Council.
2. We have heard evidence from the Licensing Officer, Ms Woolf herself, her business partner Kate Mansfield and the police. We have carefully considered all of that evidence.
3. The main issues for us to decide are:
4. whether Ms Woolf is experienced enough to hold an operator's licence;
5. whether we are confident that Ms Woolf has addressed the various problems identified by officers in the last 9 months;
6. whether Ms Woolf has provided a good explanation for continuing to employ Mr Woolf and the Facebook post;
7. whether the reports received from the police cause us to doubt whether Ms Woolf is a fit and proper person to hold an operator's licence.
8. We are aware that we have power to grant a new licence to Ms Woolf or refuse to renew her licence and are aware that we may refuse to renew that licence on the grounds that: she has been convicted of a taxi licensing offence; her conduct renders her unfit to hold a licence; there has been a material change in her circumstances; she has been convicted of an immigration offence; or any other reasonable cause.
9. Our decision is to **grant the licence**.
10. We note that Ms Woolf operated without complaint for the first 15 months of holding her licence which we believe demonstrates her ability to comply with the requirements of her licence. We take into account that officers found basic compliance issues, such as inadequate booking records, but we believe those have now been addressed. We are reassured that Ms Woolf is bringing in a more experienced business partner and have confidence that Ms Mansfield will help to ensure that those compliance issues are not repeated. We are satisfied with the explanation Ms Woolf has given for continuing to employ Mr Woolf after the incident with the guide dog and note that she was not personally at fault

for either of the incidents involving him. We do not condone the Facebook message but accept Ms Woolf's apology and we take into account that she has not posted any similar messages. While we do expect operators to co-operate with the police we note that Ms Woolf was under no legal obligation to provide a statement and that she was not in breach of her licence. As for the allegation of theft, we believe that Ms Woolf is innocent until proven guilty and do not find this allegation to be credible – therefore we give it no weight. For these reasons we are satisfied that there are no grounds for refusing to renew Ms Woolf's licence and that she is fit and proper to be granted a new licence.

Refuse to renew the licence.

While we note that Ms Woolf operated without complaint for the first 15 months of her licence, we consider that this is of little relevance because she significantly expanded her business 9 months ago and the basic compliance problems identified by officers suggest to us that she was not ready to make that leap. Therefore we have doubts about her ability to manage such a large operation. We are not reassured by the proposal to bring Ms Mansfield into the business who we think lacks experience in managing a private hire operation of this size and are concerned that she will continue to work night shifts on the side at the weekends which are some of the busiest periods for Bloomsbury Taxis. We believe that her lack of interest in securing an exemption certificate for him shows a lack of judgment. This Council expects high standards of its drivers at all times and we are therefore disappointed by the Facebook message which was unjustified given the problems with Ms Woolf's operations. For the same reason, we are not impressed by Ms Woolf's failure to assist the police – a responsible operator would have done so. Although we acknowledge that Ms Woolf was not convicted of theft, we take into account that the police considered her explanation lacked credibility and consider that honesty is essential for anyone trusted with an operator's licence. For these reasons we are satisfied that there is reasonable cause to refuse to renew Ms Woolf's operator's licence.