

POLICY AND PROJECT ADVISORY BOARD

Meeting held on Wednesday, 17th September, 2025 at the Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 pm.

Voting Members

Cllr Abe Allen (Chairman)
Cllr Lisa Greenway (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr A. Adeola
Cllr Thomas Day
Cllr Halleh Koohestani
Cllr Mara Makunura
Cllr S.J. Masterson
Cllr T.W. Mitchell
Cllr M.J. Roberts
Cllr Dhan Sarki

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Cllr Ivan Whitmee.

13. CHANGE OF BOARD MEMBERSHIP

The Board **NOTED**

- i) the appointment of Cllr Thomas Day as a member of the Board in place of Cllr M.D. Smith for the remainder of the 2025/26 Municipal Year;
- ii) the appointment of Cllr Dhan Sarki as a member of the Board in place of Cllr Rhian Jones for the remainder of the 2025/26 Municipal Year; and
- iii) the appointments of Cllrs Gaynor Austin and G.B. Lyon as Standing Deputies to the Board for the remainder of the 2025/26 Municipal Year.

14. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22nd July, 2025 were agreed as a correct record.

15. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW - CONSULTATION RESPONSES

The Board welcomed Mrs Karen Edwards, Executive Director and Mr Alex Shiell, Service Manager – Policy, Strategy and Transformation, who provided an update on the recent consultation exercise that had been carried out in respect of the Community Governance Review (CGR).

The Board was advised that 412 local residents had provided an individual response to the survey. There was broad support for the view that parish councils or

neighbourhood area committees in the Rushmoor area would help to make sure that local communities would have their views heard and be able to influence what happened in the local area. This view was particularly strongly held by Aldershot residents and less so by residents in Farnborough. Respondents expressed a preference for parish councils over neighbourhood area committees but concern was expressed over additional costs/precepts. The most common response in terms of what area a parish should cover was around the Boroughs two towns, Aldershot and Farnborough. Other areas were mentioned also, including North Camp/South Farnborough, Cove, Hawley and Southwood. The majority of residents only wanted this additional layer of local government if there was no increase to council tax bills. The Board was asked to express a view as to whether the Council should proceed to a second round Corporate Governance Review consultation.

In discussing the content of the presentation, the Board raised the following points:

- A view was expressed that, if progressing to a second round, residents should be asked what range of activities any parish council should undertake.
- It was confirmed that it would be for the new parish council to develop its own objectives – these could not be imposed on them.
- Need to make an effort to ensure residents understand how Neighbourhood Area Committees would work so that a reasonable comparison can be made between these and parish councils.
- We should give resident indicative figures as to what a parish council might cost.
- We need to protect and safeguard the assets we currently have.
- We should use plain english, such as 'additional cost to your council tax' as opposed to 'precept'.
- Can social media be used to get message across?
- How do we deal with 'hard to reach' groups such as young people, ethnic minorities and digitally excluded?
- Significant cost associated with door knock survey – considered elected members would have a role to play in this area.
- Could churches and Garrison Radio be good outlets for getting message out?
- Considered that a parish council covering the entire Aldershot and Farnborough area would be unusual.

In summarising the Board's feedback on these matters, the Chairman made the following points:

- Support the recommendation to proceed to a second-round Corporate Governance Review consultation
- Reiterate that clear, concise and easy to understand information should be provided to residents alongside the consultation to enable them to make an informed decision, such as:
 - a comparison of the differences between parish councils and neighbourhood area committees
 - a demonstration of the cost-benefit of different combinations of precepts, assets and services
- Suggest that action is taken to improve the response rate, particularly amongst under-represented groups (younger people and the Nepali community, such as:
 - an enhanced communications campaign across digital channels and in person events
 - engagement of local partner and community groups.
- Encourage all councillors to promote the consultation to their communities.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Edwards and Mr Shiell for their input.

16. **PERMITTING SCHEME FOR AUTOMATED PASSENGER SERVICE CONSULTATION**

The Board welcomed Ms Rachael Howes, Licensing Officer, who provided a presentation on the Government's consultation on driverless passenger vehicles.

The Board was advised that the Government had passed the Automated Vehicles Act 2024, which had set the framework for self-driving vehicles to be used commercially by the late 2020s. The law would allow for licensed operators (companies not individuals) to run automated taxis and private hire services. The Department for Transport was carrying out a consultation that sought views on the proposed automated services to support the deployment of commercial self-driving pilots and the Portfolio Holder had asked the Board to give its views to be incorporated in the Council's response. It was proposed that these pilots would start around spring 2026 with wider deployment from 2027. Local licensing authorities would be responsible for granting consent for taxi/private hire vehicle-like services before the Government, via the DVSA, would issue a permit for an Automated Passenger Service (APS). When deciding whether to give consent, an authority would consider local policy issues, such as local taxi licensing standards and policies, local transport integration and passenger safety and safeguarding expectations.

In discussing the content of the presentation, the Board raised the following points:

- Need to be aware of the danger of APS operators working over a wide area – how should the Council support its local businesses?
- With pilots not starting until later this year, there was no data at present on accident rates etc.
- How would passengers needing physical support be dealt with in this situation?
- How would passengers be safeguarded from being followed by unwanted parties?
- What would the procedure be if the vehicle was involved in an accident?
- Need to make sure fare information is transparent.
- With cameras in vehicles, where would the images and data be stored and who would have access to this – a safeguarding/GDPR concern?
- In administering APS in future, the Council should seek to do this on a cost-recovery basis.
- The view was expressed that being amongst the first to adopt APS in the Borough could bring benefits to the local economy.

In summarising the Board's feedback on these matters, the Chairman set out the Board's recommendations to the Portfolio Holder to facilitate the completion of the APS consultation document as follows:

In your view, what information are taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) licensing authorities likely to consider most relevant when determining whether to grant approval or authorisation?

The licensing authority already has stringent policies in place for Taxi/PHV licensing, these should be applied for any operators, drivers / anyone who will be present in the vehicle and vehicles with adaptations where necessary to account for the automation. This will ensure consistency, and fairness of operation with the conventional taxi companies already operating in our Borough. In addition, the Board would want to see:

- Information about how the controlling mechanisms are applied to the vehicle (to understand the likelihood of their being any issues)
- Information about what level of testing has taken place for the vehicles
- What will the operator put in place for disabled passengers who need support
- Details of how the operator will ensure the cleanliness of the vehicle between passengers

- Emergency procedures for system failure, accidents, incidents or a passenger feeling unsafe
- Information on how fares will be calculated
- What level of automation the vehicles will have
- Proposed locations, times of operation, restrictions to operating e.g. in inclement weather
- Information about the safety mechanisms in place in the vehicle e.g. CCTV
- GDPR Policy and information about what data will be captured about passengers
- Levels of insurance, indemnity, liabilities

The Board would like to see operators applying for permits demonstrate that their business operation (not just their vehicles) will be situated in our Borough, therefore providing jobs and boosting our local economy – this could be a condition of any consent, or consideration being given to a jobs guarantee.

Consideration should also be given to what we can learn from other areas where automated vehicles are used e.g. Europe, USA, and UK for driverless cars not used as taxis, and whether there are any specific issues that should be addressed.

Whether we have the infrastructure in place for the proposed operation.

What information would you expect to see published by permit holders on the safeguarding of passengers?

- Information that is required by the licensing authorities policy for operators of PHVs/Taxis
- Information for passengers as to how they can get support if needed, request alternative vehicle, make complaints (contact details)
- What passengers should do in the event of a system failure, emergency or where they are concerned for their safety
- Information on how fares are calculated
- Information about safety features e.g. CCTV
- GDPR Policy
- Levels of insurance, indemnity, liabilities

General Comments

Generally, the Board was supportive of allowing automated passenger services, provided that it would be well regulated and the relevant safety measures are in place to protect passengers, other road users and residents. They eliminate human error but there needs to be appropriate safeguards in place in the event that the technology fails. There needs to be an even playing field for these operators and the current taxi companies, to enable fair competition and consistency in safeguarding passengers.

Any pilot should have a scope and limits and take place at a time where there is likely to be a lesser impact if there are issues e.g. not during the Farnborough Airshow, however the Board recognises that once pilots are over, an automated passenger service when embedded and working would be good for the local economy and would support the airport and large events that take place in the Borough.

Statutory guidance must be clear and fit for purpose.

The Chairman thanked Ms Howes for her input.

17. WORK PLAN

The Board noted the current Work Plan.

It was agreed that items to be included in the Plan would be discussed at the next Progress Group meeting.

The meeting closed at 8.39 pm.

CLLR ABE ALLEN (CHAIRMAN)
