

Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Forum

Tuesday 19th April 2011

Present:

Steve Griffin (SG), Stephen Smith (SS), Adrian Joy (AJ), John Piper (JP), Alison Feldon (AF), Kaprasad Chhantial (KC), Nick Tully (NT), Tracey Ruck (TR), Sue Whybrow (SW), Mick Hilderty?(green top)

Councillor Goddard (Chair of Licensing and Health and Safety Committee) (CG)
James Hann – Licensing Manager (JH)
Jack Godley – Licensing Officer (JG)

1. Minutes and Actions from the Previous Meeting

JH advised that unfortunately the minutes from the previous meeting were not available. There was some debate about a previous meeting and the record made of discussions held with John Burns. JH clarified that the minutes taken at most Council meetings were not verbatim and were a record of major points and actions. TR advised that it would be useful to have a publically accessible online archive of the meeting minutes.

Action: JH to look into setting up an online archive for meeting minutes.

2. Station Development

JH informed the Forum that the project was unlikely to proceed in the current economic climate. Ashford's Future had been wound down with projects being divided amongst various partners. There would be some development on the international train station with the installation of a ramp by the gate. TR asked that the Forum be kept informed of any further developments.

There was also a query about the progress in relation to the proposed sale of the land owned by SEEDA adjacent to the Hitachi roundabout.

Action: JH to speak to Legal Services about the position of the proposed land sale.

POST MEETING NOTE: the position is that the station forecourt project hasn't got a final go ahead (and it seems unlikely it will at the moment) so the land sale isn't needed and so has not progressed.

3. CRB and DVLA

CRB

JH confirmed that the Criminal Record Bureau have advised that enhanced CRB checks are not necessary for the vast majority of taxi drivers not involved in carrying out frequent transport of children and vulnerable adults. However ABC will be questioning this with the Home Office along with other local authorities and legal experts. It was suggested that until further questions have been asked an enhanced check would be

recommended. JH clarified issues around the wording on the form and confirmed the difference between the checks and prices.

DVLA

JH advised that ABC is looking into using a third party to renew forms. The company have a contract with the DVLA and are able to send the form and access data electronically via the DVLA. This will improve the turnaround times but at an extra fee of 75p. There was some discussion around whether the forms should be renewed annually or every 2 to 3 years.

4. Gateway Plus

JH gave an outline of services that will be provided at the new Gateway Plus which is expected to open in July. All front office transactions will take place at the Gateway and there will not be a service at the Civic Centre for Customer Contact staff to assist with applications. Plates will still be able to be collected from the Civic Centre and post dropped off but appointments will be required to meet officers. Help with CRB forms will also take place at the Gateway Plus.

5. Jack Godley – Introduction

JG the new Licensing Officer introduced himself to the Forum and outlined his response to various issues as set out below:

- Plate Selling

JG advised that the plate and hackney carriage licence need to go together. When a plate is sold ABC were under a legal obligation to remove the previous holder from the register.

- Renting Plates

The proprietor of the vehicle is responsible for the plate and hackney carriage licence. A discussion ensued around the issues relating to dual users.

- Drivers Licences

JH asked the Forum to consider the issues around renewing driving licences either annually or every 2 to 3 years. Forum members were asked to forward any responses to their representatives.

Action: Forum to consider renewal timeframe.

- Driving Standards Agency Testing

JG advised that to ensure good standards he would be looking at testing the driving standards of all new applications. The test will cost £85 and covers driving standards, the highway code and carrying disabled passengers. Forum members suggested that drivers with points on their licence should also take the DSA test. SW asked JH to look

into whether there are grants available for out of work taxi drivers to help with costs to get back into taxi driving work.

Action: JH to check grant situation with the Job Centre.

- Hackney Carriage Licence

JG will be looking at reviewing the current test to improve the standard. Tests will include 60 questions and be broken down into 4 to 5 stages. There will be a bank of questions about road names in the borough (including villages) and places of interest. The expected pass mark will be a minimum of 90%. Feedback will be given at the end of the test. JG will also be doing a snap shot test to evaluate with an experienced hackney carriage driver.

Action: Subject to a request JG advised that he can incorporate knowledge of the area into the process for private hire licences.

- Vehicle Age

JG confirmed that this was 7 years subject to any specific requests for an extension. Any extension would be based on the condition of the vehicle. The Forum requested that they be given input into this area of policy so that a clause could be added clarifying the timing and process for requests to extend the life of a vehicle. There was a debate about the different between made and adapted.

Action: JH to look into issue around vehicle age requirement in relation to adapted rear wheel steering vehicles.

- Multiple Purpose Vehicles

There was a discussion about MPVs and the seating style requirement in relation to escape routes. AF had looked into other local authorities regulations and advised that ABC were different. NT requested a list of MPVs that could be used under the current policy.

Action: JG to look at policy, review safety issues and look at what other local authorities are doing.

- Hackney Carriage Waiting List

JG proposing to remove list or rename to saloon car waiting list as there was currently still availability for disabled access vehicles. SW suggested that the list be frozen. JH will look at reviewing the number of hackney carriage licences once an announcement has been made from the Government over disability accessible vehicle requirements. An unmet demand survey will then be required if any vehicle number restrictions are imposed, which drivers and operators would have to fund.

- Smoking

JG clarified that as the cab was considered a place of work and therefore covered by legislation. This meant that smoking in the vehicle whilst working would not be

permitted. Anyone found smoking would be issued a fixed penalty notice. This prosecution could then be taken into consideration when hackney carriage licences were renewed.

- Mobile Phones

Subject to a complaint about a driver using a mobile whilst driving JG advised that there were hands free options available. He confirmed that any future instances would be dealt with swiftly and robustly.

- Dress Code

JG will send anyone off the rank if the dress code is below an acceptable standard. He confirmed that shorts should be tailored.

- Digital Photos

Pictures were still required at present, however, when licences were renewed JG will be taking digital photos and storing them electronically.

- Taxi Ranks

JH confirmed that the planning department had no proposals to increase the number of taxi ranks in the town. JG advised that if the rank opposite Phoenix was not used during the day then it would be lost (due to the pressure for loading bays to serve Bank Street).

- Renewals

JG advised that drivers need to take more responsibility for renewing their licences and would like the renewal form back one month before the renewal date. SW suggested that the renewals forms include a section for email addresses and that a driver set up their email as their name and hackney carriage number. JG advised that it would be useful if he had current employment details. JH confirmed that they wanted to ensure that all badges were in date.

- Complaints

A complaint had been received about a taxi driver being difficult to a customer over choosing a different taxi not at the front of the rank. JG confirmed that it was the customers' choice as to which cab they wished to use. In response to a question JG confirmed that the customer could be asked but why they did not wish to use a particular cab as long as it was in an appropriate manner.

A Forum member raised the issue over short fares with some taxi drivers refusing them but then taking the big fares.

SW had heard that unlicensed taxis were operating in town on certain evenings. JG asked that any information relating to this be forwarded to him for possible action.

Action: JG to look in to short fares issue and alleged unlicensed taxi operating in town.

6. Update on Taxi Policy

JH asked for 3 people from the taxi trade to go through the fine details of the current policy and proposed changes. It was suggested that TR, AJ & SW be involved in reviewing the policy. JH confirmed that the policy would be open to consultation before it was finalised.

Action: Forum to advise if they wished to be involved in reviewing the policy document.

7. Taxi Budget

JH confirmed that there had been a £15,000 profit and as the Council were unable to make a profit over a 3 year period they would be aiming to make a loss in the next financial year to offset the balance. He spoke about the increased service costs. JH advised that he would be happy to show representatives a detailed breakdown of costs.

Action: In response to a request JH to include a paragraph in the renewal letter regarding recycling of plates.

8. Any Other Business

There was a discussion around the parking rules and regulations as stipulated by John Burns. JH asked that any information on regular parking infringements by buses be passed on to him so that they would ensure that parking enforcements officers could monitor the situation.

TR asked for more regular updates of new streets/roads. JH confirmed that this was a Highways issue.

Action: JH to approach the Highways Authority about posting more regular updates (maps) on new roads.

Date of the next meeting: To be confirmed. JH to set the date of the next meeting once a meeting has been set up with the taxi representatives to discuss policy changes.