

# Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Forum

Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2011

## Present:

Jim Watson, Les Brown, Dave Savva, Paul Duddy, Mark Harrison, Mike Thorn, Steve Faldon, Alison Faldon, Adrian Joy, Ivan Auty, Paul Auty, Tracey Ruck, James Oxley, Norman Warren, Lindsay Groves, Pam Ninham, Darren Bentley

Councillor Goddard	Chair of Licensing and Health and Safety Committee	(CG)
Sheila Davison	Environmental Health Manager	(SD)
James Hann	Licensing Manager	(JH)
Jack Godley	Licensing Officer	(JG)
Ray Wilkinson	Engineering Services Manager	(RW)
Tammy Brooks	(Minute taker)	

## 1. Minutes and Actions from the Previous Meeting

- Jim Watson was at the April Taxi Forum
- Online archive of meeting minutes: JH advised that an online archive for meeting minutes was now available and would be used for future meetings.
- Station Road development - proposed land sale: JH confirmed that this had been shelved at the present time.
- Updates of new streets/roads - JH explained that the Highway Authority only provided updates to the Ordnance Survey. He would look into obtaining the information from the people who name the roads.

**Action:** JH to chase Job Centre regarding grants for DSA tests.

## 2. Finances

JH explained that licensing authorities were unable to make a profit or loss over a three year period from the licensing regime. Last year's budget showed a surplus of £15,000 which meant that there would be no increase in fees this year. The Council would be aiming to make a loss in the next financial year to offset the balance.

## 3. Jack Godley – Issues Arising

### Safety of Drivers

JG had been made aware of incidents involving taxi customers running off before paying their fares. There was no real concern amongst those present at the Forum. Tracey Ruck suggested that it could be someone targeting independent drivers. JG asked drivers to be vigilant and report any incidents to the taxi representatives

including details such as time, date and description of offender. If a pattern emerges, he will take it forward for actioning by the Police.

Am I Safe?

JG advised that a private company had approached the Council regarding a nationwide scheme to help improve the safety of passengers and drivers of taxis/private hire vehicles. The scheme entailed the passenger using their mobile phone to enter the registration of the taxi/minicab they get in to, and it tells the passenger whether the vehicle is licensed or not, and the type of license it holds (eg private hire or taxi). It then creates a footprint of the search, storing time, location, car reg, username, making the passenger traceable.

JH advised that even without agreement from the Forum the information was already available from the public register. JG confirmed however that this particular scheme would require co-operation from the Council. There were no objections.

NVQ's

JG made the Forum aware of the opportunity to undertake a free NVQ Level 2 in Road Passenger Vehicle Driving. The course was being funded by the Government and being delivered via a private company called Skills UK. The aim of the qualification was to improve skills and knowledge of those employed in providing passenger transport by road. Tracey Ruck asked if the qualification could become compulsory. JG confirmed that it was not mandatory and was not linked to school contracts.

Drivers wishing to take part should contact the company direct and JG would facilitate the use of a room.

#### **4. Policy Review**

JH advised that they were in the process of updating the Licensing Policy for Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles. In particular they would be reviewing Driving Standards Agency tests, 3 Year drivers licences, dress policy, penalty system, offences and plate exemptions. JH would be inviting representatives to go through the document in detail. Once this had taken place the document would then be subject to public consultation.

DSA Tests:

JG advised that the current cost is £79.60 or £92.00 including the wheelchair assessment. It was proposed that the test be a requirement for all new taxi drivers. JG had received one objection indicating that this may restrict the number of new drivers. Tracey Ruck suggested that it would be useful to understand what the new test comprised of in order to make a comparison. JG advised that they were unable to obtain clarification from test examiners. Tracey Ruck further suggested contacting licensing officers from other areas that had made the requirement mandatory to see if they were aware of the differences in the tests. JG advised that an officer from the Council would undertake the test and asked for 2 volunteers from the Forum to undertake the test to help evaluate whether it was something Ashford should

introduce. Paul Duddy and Lindsay Groves volunteered and will report back at the next forum. A discussion then ensued around mystery shopping to test the standard of current drivers.

Plate exemptions:

There was some discussion around the need to display plates. JH explained that they had been contacted by the licensing authority for Gatwick to review exemption clauses due to problems with unlicensed vehicles. A member of the Forum advised that from his perspective a lot of problems at Gatwick were caused by illegal touting as opposed to private hire licensed vehicles not displaying plates. Paul Duddy explained that executive customers did not want plates displayed and this is why they applied for exemptions.

Alison Faldon asked if it was possible not to display plates if working for executive customers. JG reiterated that an application for exemption would be required before a plate was removed from display.

A member of the Forum suggested that metered vehicles display plates and private hire vehicles display a sticker in the window.

JH confirmed that they would be including a couple of options in the policy to look at the best way of making it possible for enforcement officers and the public to recognise licensed vehicles.

**Action:** JH to look into inexpensive mystery shopping ideas.  
JH to email those present requesting comments on exemption policy changes.

## **5. Procedural Changes - Renewals, Compliances**

Compliances: JH advised that the tender to carry out compliance tests for the next 2 years had been awarded to Ashford MOT. The cost of the compliance test would be reduced from £32 down to £28. The Council would be changing the way drivers were notified when compliances were due. Instead of letters being sent by the Council reminding drivers that compliances were due, Ashford MOT will be telephoning owners/drivers directly to arrange appointments. The responsibility however remains with the drivers to ensure that their compliance is in date.

Renewals:

JG repeated that he would like driver renewal forms a month prior to the renewal date to ensure appropriate checks were carried out in time for the renewal date. In response to concerns raised by drivers and operators about making payments for vehicles 1 a month in advance, JG proposed that vehicle renewal forms would need to be received 2 weeks prior to the renewal date. He confirmed that it would no longer be acceptable to hand renewals in one day before they were due as there was not sufficient time to process the necessary paperwork. The aim was to ensure that all badges were in date at all times.

A discussion ensued around CRB checks not being transferrable between requesting bodies.

## **6. Fare Consultation**

JH asked for options for hackney carriage fare scales that would be sent out with invites to the next meeting of the Forum to hackney carriage drivers and some operators. Several options were suggested and it was agreed that the following would be consulted on:

Drop Rate:	Option 1 – no change	Option 2 - 10p	Option 3 – 20p
% increase:	Option 1 – no interest	Option 2 – 3%	Option 3 – 5%

JH advised that he would provide details of price increases (such as petrol and insurance) along with the votes of the Forum to Councillors. The Chairman urged the Forum to provide as many responses as possible to give the Committee a clear view from the trade.

## **7. Election Representatives**

JH confirmed that this would be carried out in November. He suggested that representatives stand for 2 years and it was proposed that only those present at the Forum in November would be able to vote.

In order to fully represent the trade, it was suggested that there be 5 representatives, one for each of the following areas:

- Executive
- Companies
- Independent
- Private Hire
- Hackney Carriage

The elected representatives would then have to decide between themselves which two attended the Transport Forum.

## **8. Driver Badge Design**

A discussion ensued around the need for names on badges when each driver can be traced through the licence numbers. JG to explore options.

## **10. Newsletter**

JH stated that he had been asked to raise this at the Forum and was there any interest in contributing to a newsletter and taking some responsibility for the text, if the Council provided means of printing and linking to the website. It was agreed that now past minutes were available on the website, this should give the necessary updates.

## **11. Any Other Business**

Email: JG would like all drivers to submit their email addresses.

MPVs: Subject to queries raised about layout and restriction on MPVs - JG to review policy and forward to representatives.

Age of vehicles: JG confirmed that extensions can be given on the 7 year rule based on the merit of each individual application. Further details would be considered as part of the policy review

## **12. Date of the next meeting:**

Proposed for November, date to be confirmed, but Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday's were preferred.

## **9. Ranks**

RW advised that due to the need for urgent structural works on the Edinburgh Road car park there would be disruption to the taxi rank by Wilkinsons from 10<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> October. He invited the taxi representatives to attend a meeting with the site contractor to discuss ways of minimising the disruption to taxi trade. JH advised that good signage was crucial. JG asked RW to keep him informed.