

Taxi forum Minutes

Wednesday 22nd September 2021

1030 – Online

Attendees

Cllr Jenny Webb (Cllr W), Trevor Ford (TF), Julian Postlethwaite (JP), Paul Coombes (PC), Paul Duddy (PD), Sue Whybrow (SW), Alison Simmonds (AS)

Agenda

Vehicle age limit – PD

PD raised the current policy requirement of age limits for licensed vehicles. He noted that other boroughs have different requirements, with some not having any specific age limit. He stated it is possible to have an older vehicle with low mileage in good condition that is financially more viable to the trade. AS read the policy requirement and explained extensions are given on a case by case basis on the aesthetics of the vehicle. PD also stated bringing on a 7 year old vehicle in excellent condition should be possible. TF advised there is a perception by the public that vehicles should be of a certain standard based on condition and age, and that older vehicles typically have higher emissions. PD stated that certainly with some Mercedes models, the emissions are negligible regardless of their age.

TF stated that in Autumn 2022 the Taxi Licensing Policy is due to be renewed so if the trade support exploring this change, a case must be put forth by the trade that adequately considers a number of factors (including but not limited to) how 'green' the vehicle is, vehicle condition implications, aesthetics and public safety perception

Due to the Government's move for improved air quality, ABC and members would have to consider the impacts of lowering such a standard on the councils Air Quality and Carbon Neutrality aims, and whether the grounds put forth outweigh such considerations..

Any case made by the trade as part of the future policy consultation will need to be considered, justified, and proportionate

SW raised the move to electric vehicles in general and spoke in concern of the costs. Cllr W advised this should be addressed in the policy consultation if required, and TF highlighted that there was no proposal to make electric vehicles mandatory.

Booking/Dispatch staff – Policies on the Employment of ex-offenders – TF

To assist private hire operators with new licensing requirements there is an example 'Employment of Ex-Offenders in Booking/Dispatch Roles' policy on the website for operators to utilise as part of their renewal applications.

Please see <https://www.ashford.gov.uk/licensing/taxis/taxi-operator/>

Fares

TF advised the annual fare review is in January 2022, with the consultation taking place in October for 1 month. This will be emailed to the trade shortly. Historically, engagement with the consultation from the trade is poor on this matter but to give you a guide on where Ashford sits in the county and country; we are midway in Kent for fare charges and in the top third for the country.

AOB

PD asked why vehicles require 3 MOT's in a year (2 compliances and 1 MOT). AS advised they don't as the Secretary of State exempts Ashford Borough Council's licensed vehicles from requiring a standard MOT as they have a compliance every 6 months. PD advised if you want to pay your car tax online by direct debit, you have to provide an MOT certificate. SW advised Ashford MOT can provide an MOT certificate on request at compliance but the forum were unsure if or what the costs were. **JP to investigate and confirm**

TF noted the introduction of new conditions for new operators and renewing operators as part of the national statutory standards. As these conditions make the responsibilities placed on the Operator's more onerous, Licensing will be conducting operator checks at the operator base to ensure compliance. Where public safety is not compromised, we will work to educate and advise operators on compliance with these conditions. However, immediate public safety risks, or disregard for these conditions will result in enforcement action. SW asked if all operators are expected to comply with new conditions regardless of the size of their fleet. AS advised all operators must comply regardless of fleet. However, this only applies to new operator licences (issued/renewed since January 2021). Therefore some operators will not be expected to comply until their operator licence is renewed but we strongly advise you to consider this and the steps needed to comply before your renewal is due.

Next date for forum – Late January 2022, date TBC.