

Taxi Consultation with SCC Licensing

Notes of Main Points

10am Wednesday 14th December 2022

Conference held via Microsoft Teams

Attendees: Cllr Matthew Bunday [MB] (Chair); Cllr John Noon [JN]; Cllr. Gordon Cooper [GC]; Cllr Sarah Vaughan [SV];

Phil Bates, Licensing Manager, SCC; Russell Hawkins, Senior Licensing Officer, SCC; Josey Meggs, Violence Reduction Unit SCC.

Ali Haydor, Private Hire Rep [AH]; Jamilur Rahman, Private Hire Rep [JR]; Perry McMillan (Unite), Mark Paget, SHPHA [MP]; Ajmal Sudan [AS] SHO; Syed Rahman, Private Hire Rep [SR];

1. Notes of last meeting: agreed, no matters arising.

2. Safe Places - Violence Reduction Unit

The group heard from Josey Vaughn about the work Southampton City Council were doing on safe spaces and how the taxi trade can assist.

3. New Group – PB

The Councillors and Council Staff welcomed new people to the group following the changes adopted by the licensing committee. PB hoped it would bring about some meaningful discussions and overcome some of the difficulties faced, by council staff and more importantly by the trade themselves.

PB went on to advise the group that the meetings will be every quarter and RH will send out for agenda items a few weeks beforehand on behalf of the chairperson. PB advised that Licensing had set the agenda of this first meeting as there were several things that they felt were important to bring the trade up to date with. In future the trade will be asked for agenda items.

4. Fees

Notice of new fees is published. As a courtesy we have included the drivers fee and the other miscellaneous fee. As discussed with a few of you in a previous meeting we reduced the driver fee from £395 down to £295. The fees are based on true costs. We are still having to lose a member of staff to keep fees down to this level. MP said that their costs are escalating, and they are having to do a lot of work to obtain licences. We are sending in pictures of our stuff in emails and so the work is done for licensing already. RH pointed out that this online system is more labour intensive than the office-based system as documents came in at different times and with no meaningful identification on them and this created a lot of admin to get an application all in order. A proper online form is in the advanced development stage and should make applications much easier for the trade and Licensing. RH then went through all the stages that licensing officers take to issue a renewal. MP pointed out that we

are paid to do this but drivers are not paid for their time to put their applications in. PB pointed out that objections for vehicle and operator fees have been received so it is unlikely that these fees will be implemented on 1st January 2023. They will go through the proper process and be referred to senior managers to consider the objections and set the fees. All other fees will be implanted on 1st January.

5. Door Signage/Driver Conditions

PB said that he was working very hard to get the consultation on door signage started by the end of the year so we could fit in a full 3-month consultation before the pre-election period. He went on to explain proposed conditions that will restrict the driver's ability to cancel accepted jobs without good reason. There was a short discussion on the pros and cons of door signage that was rounded off by advising that views should be expressed as part of the consultation.

6. Operator Conditions

RH advised the group of the proposed changes to operator conditions that will go some way to limiting drivers' ability to cancel a job once it had been properly accepted. There was a clause included that dealt with breakdowns and other genuine reasons that a job should be cancelled. It was also subject to the consultation. Additionally, although most operators are reporting safety and behaviour incidents to us, there is no requirement for them to do so. This has been addressed with the new proposed conditions.

7. Central Station

PB advised the group that major works are due to start at central station in February. There will be no access to the rank on the downside during this time. There will be initial access for hackneys only to drop off but this will be removed later during the works.

8. Taxi Cameras

PB brought the group up to date on the authorities' dealings with the ICO and our camera policy. Basically, the ICO were concerned with our policy that cameras were recording at all times in a licensed vehicle and could not be turned off. Whilst our evidence supported such a policy, but the ICO were not in agreement that it was compliant. They have now ended their action on the matter with a reprimand that is published on their website. There is no route to appeal this. A discussion was had regarding supply of cameras and specifications. It was noted that Licensing are in the process of precuring additional suppliers.

9. Additional Stickers in Vehicles (Samaritans)

In a previous meeting the ideal of promoting the Samaritans was mentioned and gained a lot of support. PB pointed out that to enable this would mean that the Council will have to allow any organisation to do the same and vehicles would be inundated with these. Therefore, it would end up with lots of different stickers in cars and the message lost. RH advised of a potential scheme in future of in vehicle advertising on screens and these messages could be there. This technology is being developed and we will look at it in due course.