

# Taxi Consultation with SCC Licensing

**10am Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2020**  
**Conference Room 4**

**Attendees:** Cllr Catherine McEwing (Chair), Cllr Beryl Harris, Cllr Graham Galton, Sam Shahid (S.H.O), Simon May (PH/ Radio Taxis), Ali Haydor (PH Rep), Les Slater (HC Rep/ SHPHA), Phil Bates (Licensing), Russell Hawkins (Senior Licensing Officer), Rosie Zambra, Mohammed Sumra – listening aid for Sam Shahid.

**SHPHA – Southampton Hackney and Private Hire Association**

**RDA – Radio Taxis Drivers Association**

**GMB – GMB Trade Union**

**SHO – Southampton Hackney Organisation**

**Apologies from:** Pat Ross (PH/ Radio Taxis) and Clive Johnson

**Absent:** Cllr Blatchford, Cllr Sally Spicer, Cllr Matthew Renyard, Cllr Toqeer Kataria, Faisal Iabal (S.H.O),

**Minute takers:** Áine Rand and Jas Plaha-Juttla

**1. Introductions and Apologies (Cllr M)**

As listed above.

**2. Minutes from Previous Meeting and Action points (Cllr M)**

Minutes were agreed by all parties and signed off.

**3. Code of Conduct for Trade Reps (Cllr M)**

The Code of Conduct has been circulated to the members. Clarity was sought on number 6 Representatives contact with the Media and what had to be put past the council before going to the press. PB informed the meeting that nothing had to be passed through the council's media team but they could be contacted if individuals wanted some assistance.

**4. PH Driver Bespoke Knowledge Test (Licensing/AH/SS)**

RH stated that Pat Ross spent time discussing the knowledge test. The test is evolving, it is robust and user-friendly. RH confirmed the new test would be in by 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020. SM asked if he could see it and provide feedback. RH stated feedback is welcome and he could even take the test. PB stated that when the new test is ready we will get the reps in to test it. RH stated he would like the reps in during the draft phase of the planning. Pat Ross has already had an input. Cllr M requested that RH and AH continue to talk about this outside the meeting.

LS stated that one particular trade rep put forward items for the Agenda. Cllr M stated that if the same items come forward time and time again then the response will already have been given. The minutes of the meeting will be agreed at the next meeting. Cllr M stated that LS needed to have clear instructions from his representatives for discussion when an item is put forward for the Agenda.

Cllr M sought clarity that SS could understand her due to hearing difficulties. Mohammed Sumra was in attendance as SS's hearing aid.

**5. Medical Checks (Licensing/SS)**

PB confirmed he is looking into driver medical checks, he met with GP practices two weeks ago and explained they were under extraordinary pressure at the moment. GP's feel it is important that a GP with full access to the full medical report of the driver does the check. There are a number of surgery's in the Southampton area to help with the taxi driver medicals. PB is looking at the form to ensure clarity when a driver is signed as fit by the

GP, as sometimes there are ongoing medical issues that could impact on their ability to drive. At present SCC can send medical forms to another service by Portsmouth for review, however they are trying to find someone locally. At the previous meeting it was mentioned to use First Bus for driver medicals who employ an external company who do the medicals. SCC are concerned that they would not have access to the full medical history of the driver. An additional concern is that the driver will be the client of the external company and the outcome of the medical could be in the drivers favour. SCC want to ensure that only the drivers who should pass the medical actually pass. When considering referrals SM recommend that the GP makes them. PB stated that drivers could go to their own GP for the medical if they do not sign it can be sent elsewhere. Cllr H was concerned that the medical paperwork was not banded about. RH stated if referred to another GP then the GP making the referral holds the liability towards it. PB mentioned this came about due to drivers paying between £60 and £160 for a medical. AH stated that a newspaper did an undercover report on GPs signing off reports and he thought it should be the drivers own GP. PB stated the frequency of the medicals was on application, then once an applicant reaches 45 years of age every 5 years under 65 years and annually on reaching 65 year. It was suggested that the driver could claim the money back through their tax returns for the medical. SM stated he had to wait 6 months to see his GP and managed to see another GP within 2 weeks. RH explained this was the reason behind the referral. SM thought this was a great idea. SS believed the driver should be given the choice, to go to their own GP or the one appointed by SCC. RH stated that there needs to be anchor back to somewhere with accountability. Cllr M thought it was important that drivers had the appropriate paperwork when they were signed up. Cllr H suggested exploring BUPA and other private companies, who charge £50 for a full medical that takes about 30 minutes. RH stated the issue is that the GP has not time to refer the client properly.

#### **6. In-house Council English Test (Licensing/AH)**

PB has been talking to a company regarding an English test using a laptop, this could be used in-house at the SCC. It takes approx. 30 minutes and covers; a reading test, repeat sentences, short answers to questions, sentence building and storytelling. This is an online test and it is scored online. PB stated he is impressed by it so far and suggested discussing it at the meeting to gather views and to address any concerns around English language. The test is good value at a cost of £30, the test would be used for both new applicants or if there are concerns with existing drivers regarding English language. AH gave his support and asked if it was to replace the BTEC. PB confirmed this would not replace the BTEC.

AH informed the group of issues in Liverpool and other cities regarding the quality of the BTEC qualification and he believed the English test would safeguard the drivers. Cllr M stated that going forward this test is about safety and not discrimination. AH considered his customer complaints, that limited English can cause misunderstandings between the customer and the driver. Cllr M stated that it was not just about the command of the English Language but about safeguarding and improving the standards.

LS asked who needs to do the English test as in different places in Southampton people speak differently. PB referred to the previous minutes when it was raised to return to the old assessments. The SCC staff are not qualified to assess English. PB assured that all new applicants will do the English test regardless of their nationality. SM questioned if drivers have a good level of English would they have to do another test or could this be pushed back on BTEC. AH reminded SM of the poor quality of BTEC qualification. RH continued by saying that Pearson's are the examining board and once they have the qualification they are qualified. PB and Cllr M are attending the LGA national licencing conference next month and hope to raise training and the BTEC qualification. RH thought BTEC is not through or rigours enough.

SS believed the face to face knowledge test was helpful as you can talk to the person and ask them questions. SS was concerned that using a computer they could cheat. RH reassured SS that there was a qualified person in English languages on the other end of the phone ensuring it was not subjective. SM queried that even with a GCSE in English do drivers have to do the test. Cllr M stated yes, as it is about equality. LS raised a concern that some people are hard to understand or are quietly spoken. PB requested that comments and concerns are required in writing as if there is going to be a change to the policy it will need to be put before the full committee.

#### **7. Downside Train Station Development (SS)**

SS raised that in the past 15 years, this has been pushed back. The West Quay rank facing Asda is very busy on Saturday's. SS thought that the developers must not have considered how taxis use this area. There are problems on the upside as certain taxi firms will wait for the job rather than the person. Public safety has to be the number one priority and there have been several accidents and customer complaints made when turning the taxi around.

Cllr M respond that these are private developers and SCC have cannot influence them. PB confirmed that SCC are aware of the issues regarding the developers. Network rail charge in the region of £700 to rank up on their land so there with limited space, there are restrictions on what can be done. It was thought that the feeder ranks on the other side of the road would not work. SS stated his main concern was taxis crossing the road. RH requested for all concerns to written down formally so that SCC can address them. Cllr M reiterated to send in an email to RH and he will ensure it goes to the right area.

SM raised the concern around the 20 minute waiting bays and asked if they could be looked into. RH added that there is also a pick up drop off area. SM questioned if the pickup and drop off could be extended. AH thought that the downside should be similar to the upside. AH added his concern regarding drivers without bookings, that without verification it is unclear if they have a job or not. LS stated that as trade rep, he thought the waiting area should be signposted not for taxis. LS believed there was no need for a taxi to wait for 20 minutes.

**Action: PB to pick this up with highways**

#### **8. Abuse of Taxi Ranks (PH's and private cars) (AH/SS)**

AH raised the issue of on Friday and Saturday night private hire taxis are using the bay by the Switch Club. There have been cases where taxis overload the area and have gone past the layby and blocked part of the road. The private hire taxis completely gridlocked this massive area. AH stated that the difficulty is that the taxi driver cannot ask the client to walk further to be picked up. SS stated he had been in touch with licencing and that Hackney's have had a record number of parking tickets in the past few months. SS suggested that they are reported if they are seen double parking. SS questioned who would patrol the nights as private hire and private cars should not be stopping in taxi ranks. SS suggested that as trade reps, they need to work together, the licencing will be strong and tough and action will be taken. AH thought that as trade reps they should be educating the drivers that once the area is full, drivers should not block the road or park on the pavements. This is dangerous for the customers and difficult for the taxis to pick up. West Quay rank is abused a lot by private hire vehicles and members of the public.

There was an additional concern raised around Portland Terrace as the only place private hires can pick up is between the bus stop and a double yellow line as there is no other area along that stretch to pick up. SM agreed with AH that private hire taxis have no pick up and drop off anywhere and telling passengers that they will pick up behind Boots is not safe at night. In response to the question on where they can pick up PB agreed that it was difficult at night and the road design around shopping centre is not ideal. PB suggested that private hire taxis could pick up around the bottom by Harbour Parade. SM was concerned that this is asking passengers to walk to be picked up. Cllr M considered that this could be dangerous for the customer. LS suggested that picking up by Boots was less problematic in the evening around 11pm as there are not that many buses running.

SS stated that he was raising it as his members are complaining. AH and SM can tell people where they will pick up. SS informed the meeting that times are changing and taxi drivers can pull two shifts, they want to work both in the day and at night. Cllr M was very concerned about drivers doing split shifts or long shifts and believed that safety is paramount.

#### **9. Taxi Ranks - Boat Show 2020 (SS)**

Regarding the Boat Show Cllr M stated it is a private enterprise and SCC do not have anything to do with it. PB confirmed that the Boat Show has been around for a long time. SCC have a process they need to go through. This is different to other events in the city and SCC are working with the Boat Show to bring in line although it will take time. A rank at Herbert Walk Avenue was suggested however the trade complained that it never gets used as it is far away. Issues of safety were also raised. SS stated that in the past there always had been a rank except for this last Boat Show. PB stated that over time the layout of the Boat Show has changed and referred to the discussions around the Boat Show in the previous minutes. Cllr M reiterated that the Boat Show is a private

enterprise and PB will do all he can to work with them. PB confirmed that they had been blindsided this year he will go back to Boat Show and seek clarity.

**Action: PB to discuss taxi ranks with the Boat Show.**

#### **10. Bus/Taxi Lanes (CAZ) (SM/LS)**

LS understands that there is nothing SCC can do regarding taxis from outside coming into Southampton, although the taxis in Southampton have moved on and are responding to the clean air agenda. RH confirmed that the taxi owners have responded positively to the clean air agenda by changing their cars. RH stated that restricting Southampton bus lanes to Southampton licensed vehicles only went to consultation and there was no universal support for it. There was opposition from a lot of Eastleigh Borough Council drivers and Southampton drivers as well. It was thought that SCC were not rewarding clean vehicles from out of area. RH met with Steve Guppy and he has indicated that there may be a second consultation. This will introduce the concept of not only SCC licensed vehicles but also clean air compliant vehicles from other areas being able to use them also. LS requested that the consultation was open for a period of time. RH stated it would be open for at least 6 weeks and he will contact all six representatives to cascade it and emphasised the importance that views were captured. SM stated he was against it as he was concerned about wheelchair accessible vehicles being able to drop off in Above Bar Street. RH confirmed that the use of bus lanes okay but not bus routes. Above Bar Street is not a bus lane in the same way that the additional lanes are and so is not part of this. AH stated he was in favour of Southampton taxis using the bus lanes, as the vehicles are much cleaner and safer. The drivers feel a tight squeeze in their pockets. Taxis from outside the city are not as well equipped with cameras or clean cars and two MOT's that ours have. It was suggested that if they want to work in Southampton then they need to get a Southampton licence. SS agreed with AH and considered using bus lanes as a privilege for Southampton taxis and that these licences make the city cleaner.

RH reminded the reps of the importance of their feedback and to make sure they respond to the consultation. RH was surprised that the last consultation did not reflect the opinions of the reps.. AH believed a lot of cities restrict bus lanes for local licenced vehicles only.

#### **11. Itchen Bridge Set Charges (SM/LS)**

Cllr M stated that the set charges on the Itchen Bridge is a non-runner. PB suggested that the taxis get the Smart Cities card. PB considered that taller cars would be charged at the same rate as a standard car, although this would not benefit the standard cars. SM requested a set rate for the taxi drivers on the Smart Cities card. PB believed the technology behind the Smart Cities card is limited. SM stated that the cost to drivers with Smart City cards living in the post code area of the bridge is cheaper than drivers living further away. AH agreed with the idea of set charges and asked if the taxis could be recognised by registration and could there be a set annual charge for private hire and hackney cars. The drivers would take a shorter route benefiting both the customers and drivers.

AH raised an issue with drivers with reduced charges on the Smart Cities card charging the customer the full fee. LS thought that the technology already exists and it could be put in place on the bridge.

**Action: PB to investigate fixed charge regardless of the size of the vehicle.**

#### **12. Safeguarding Training (SS/LS)**

Cllr M stated that she completed the safeguarding training a couple of weeks ago and found there was lots of cross referencing to other areas. It is mandatory that all divers do the safeguarding training and it is worth it. SS stated that both members and non-members have been very positive about the safeguarding training course. Nothing needs to be changed, it is a brilliant course with good feedback. Cllr M confirmed that the test covers lots of everyday issues. AH stated that he is doing the course on Thursday. The feedback from the drivers, is that the test is spot on, they were happy with the way the training was conducted and it raised their awareness. Cllr M considered upscaling as a good word to explain the training. LS mentioned that Mr Hall thought it was not strong enough but not sure why he thought this. Cllr M requested that Mr Hall took the safeguarding training course and then gave his feedback. PB confirmed that Mr Halls members have been critical of the test. AH thought Mr Hall's issues were around the English used. Cllr M confirmed that the safeguarding training puts you at ease that you are doing the right things. RH stated that all reps come and sit in on the training and stated that there was a space of one more person on the next training alongside Ali Haydor and Simon May. Cllr Harris said

that she will attend this session with RH. Hackney reps will be asked to sit in on the next session in February and councillors after this. The next training is on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, from 1.30pm to 4pm in Hedge End. SM informed SCC that their own in house training is planned for their drivers at the end of February and to please let him know if anything else needs to be raised at his sessions. (This is additional training provided to Radio Taxi's Drivers).

LS raised a concern around the meters over the May Bank Holiday, as the holiday has moved to the Friday. The taxi tariff was written prior to knowing about the May Bank Holiday move. **Action: RH has planned to write to every Hackney proprietor to get their tariff updated and a new meter certificate.**

**13. Driversshield (AH)**

Yes. This was approved as long as they are properly fitted.

**14. E-Cigarette/Vape clarity (AH)**

Cannot smoke anything in the cars.

**15. PHD's refusing fares (AH)**

RH stated that he is happy to answer in writing as it might be something to do with the contract. Cllr M considered it to also be a safeguarding issue. AH raised the issue of the taxi's being used by drug dealers to do their drug drop and the importance of protecting the driver. PB confirmed that the only time police get involved is if there is evidence. AH thought that the moment the driver is in close contact with the customer the situation changes. Even if the money was taken first it is still an issue. A description a situation was explained where the passenger had given the driver £10, that meant when the customer was dropped off the clock was still running until they returned. The Police were informed and they wanted a record of where the customer had their multiple drop offs. The driver should have the option to refuse a customer on grounds of safety. RH acknowledged that this is going on and suggested the safeguarding training would help.

**16. Extra Licensing Enforcement Officers (SS/AH)**

PB confirmed that the extra licencing enforcement officers are coming and two vacancies will be advertised. There have been lots of HR and IT issues that prevented this happening earlier. The extra licencing enforcement officers should be done by end of March. Once they are trained in SCC will review to see if an additional officer is required.

**17. Mechanic PHD badges (SM)**

RH stated that it is legal for mechanics to dive once they use trade plates. LS stated that the insurance company informed him that as long as it is a licenced vehicle with trade insurance the mechanic can dive the car. PB confirmed that it is a problem if a driver is diving a private hire vehicle without a private hire licence.

**18. Reduce cost of Adams Morey Test (AH)**

RH stated that the cost of a test has been £55 since 2015. Adams Morey do not profit from the inspections and they are good value for money. AH raised the fact that a MOT costs less than £55. RH confirmed that they are not trying to get business, they are not a loss leader to get business like some MOT test centres are. Adams Morey's premises are well turned out with a quality reception area, drinks, TV etc. LS supported the use of Adams Morey as they do a thorough test. After further discussion around the cost and quality of Adams Morey, Cllr M suggested that AH and LS continue their discussion outside the meeting.

**19. Same day plate issuing (LS)**

RH stated that SCC cannot issue the plate on the same day as the IT process is not instantaneous. It was suggested that it was not needed as drivers receive the renewal paperwork informing them when the test is and so have sufficient time to have their plate issued. LS raised that the drivers have to come in with documents and then again with a plate. BP suggested that if nothing has changed and it is just a renewal, the driver can collect a plate by phone or email. RH believed this could be done with only 10% to 15% of drivers as there are ofern changes. The current system ensures all the information comes in at the same time. In the future technology may well be there to support the same day issuing of plates. RH stated he is currently collecting email addresses to move more to online, although he has not got all of them for renewals yet. AH stated that most drivers will do it if they know they can save money. It was understood that SCC would need a lot more licencing officers if they were to process the applications on the same day and this would be reflective in fees.

## **20. Cashpoints at Docks (LS)**

SS thinks it is a brilliant idea. Cllr M suggested that the drivers get a card machine for customers to pay by card. Cllr M stated that this is not a licencing matter, it is a private matter. Cllr M suggested to SS to talk to the financial providers and stated that LS uses transfers on the persons mobile and SM uses an AP. SS stated that the notice boards in the docks are out of date and are approx. 10 years old. They state white plate taxis only and this causes issues between hackney and private hire cars. RH requested that SS email the issue but must remember that the decision would be ABP's.

## **21. Online Applications (LS)**

Cllr M considered that this was covered in the previous agenda item. Regarding the capturing of peoples emails. RH said that not all the email addresses we have are accurate due to the quality of handwriting. LS bought up the recent call he had regarding the publishing of a list of wheelchair accessible vehicles. RH responded that SCC have to publish a list under the Equality Act.

## **22. Camera Costs (LS)**

LS stated that at previous meetings he has put forward a reasonable cost package. PB stated that the cost covered both the encryption and the integrity of the unit, the standards are set high by local government. £80 for fitting is cheap.

- Date of next meeting: 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020 at 10am, venue TBC