

TAXI/PRIVATE HIRE LIAISON GROUP

Tuesday 6th September, 2016 at 6.00 p.m.

In a Conference Room at the Council House, Walsall

Present

Councillor S. Fitzpatrick (Chairman)
Councillor Clarke
Councillor D Hazell
Councillor Nawaz
Councillor Rochelle
Councillor Sears

In attendance

Mr P Dutton	- Depot Manager – Clean and Green
Mr D Edwards	- Highways Management
Mr D Elrington	- Regulatory Services Manager
Mrs B Watt	- Director of Public Health
Mr K Hussain	- Private Hire Association
Mr Z Ali	- Private Hire Association
Mr T Ahmed	- Walsall Hackney Carriage Association

Appointment of Chairman

Resolved

That Councillor S Fitzpatrick be appointed Chairman of the Liaison Group for the current municipal year.

Apologies

No apologies were submitted

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Minutes

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6th January, 2016, a copy having previously been circulated to each Member, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

Bus Lanes

The representative of the private hire association (Mr Ali) asked if there had been any developments on the use of bus lanes by hackney carriage and private hire vehicles. Mr Edwards (Highways Management) reported that a meeting had been held between officers and Councillor Nawaz regarding the use of the Stafford Street bus lane by hackney carriage and private hire vehicles. However, concern had been expressed over the bus stop positioned in the bus lane as vehicles could not overtake a stationary bus there because of a solid white line delineating the bus lane from adjoining highway. This matter had been discussed with Transport West Midlands and any future action would depend upon their consideration of the problem. Mr Edwards continued that officers would be carrying out a study of the traffic flow in Stafford Street to see if that suggested any possible solutions.

Driver Training

A report of the Director of Public Health was submitted:-

(See annexed)

The Regulatory Services Manager (Mr Elrington) enlarged upon the report for the benefit of the group and drew attention to the salient points. He drew the group's attention to the options contained in the report and a revised option 2 was circulated to those present.

Mr Elrington referred to the questionnaire (appendix 1 refers) and indicated that 1931 copies had been sent out to hackney carriage and private hire drivers and operators and 232 responses had been returned.

Councillor Rochelle asked if existing drivers would be required to pay for the revised training once the 18 month period of free training provision had expired. The legal representative (Mr Iqbal) replied that all drivers, both new applicants and existing drivers, would be required to pay the appropriate fee for the training course once the 18 month period of free provision for existing drivers had expired.

Councillor Hazell asked whether the proposed new training package could be delivered to all existing drivers within the 18 month period outlined in the report. Mr Elrington replied that it should be achievable.

Councillor Hazell asked what would happen if an existing driver missed his slot. He asked if exceptional circumstances would be considered. Mr Iqbal replied that in order to complete the training for all existing drivers within 18 months exceptional circumstances should not be entertained.

Councillor Hazell referred to the number of questionnaires returned and asked if this was a representative sample. Mr Elrington replied that, in his opinion, it was.

Mr Ali stated that he had discussed the training with his members and the view was that it was acceptable for new drivers but existing experienced drivers felt that it was unnecessary. He asked if there would be a test at the end of the training course with a pass/fail. Mr Elrington replied that this was not what was proposed.

Mr Ali asked if a driver with 20 years experience undertook the training course then failed the test would he lose his licence. It was felt that this would be unlikely.

Mr Iqbal indicated that the existing training for drivers was over 10 years old and needed updating to remain current. He added that other local authorities were also carrying out this exercise. As the Council was the licensing authority it was appropriate to update training as and when necessary.

Mr Hussain (private hire association) referred to the fact that Walsall had been losing drivers to other local authorities because they were training drivers faster than Walsall. Some neighbouring authorities took as little as 2 to 3 months whereas Walsall was taking six months or longer.

Mr Ali expressed concern that he did not have enough information before him to make an informed decision. He questioned if the matter was referred to the Licensing and Safety Committee for consideration whether there was sufficient information for the committee to make a correct decision.

Mr Iqbal reported that, in his opinion, there was sufficient information in the report to enable the Licensing and Safety Committee to make an informed decision on driver training. He felt that revised training was needed if drivers standards were to be raised in Walsall.

Councillor Rochelle asked what the failure rate was for drivers under the existing training regime.

He felt that by attending the training offered drivers would gain additional knowledge.

Councillor Clarke stated that public safety should be of paramount importance to drivers so any training which improved safety awareness should be welcomed.

Referring to CSE training, Councillor Nawaz indicated that attending the training should be sufficient to raise awareness amongst drivers. Mr Ahmed (Hackney Carriage Association) indicated that his members were happy to receive CSE training provided that it was given free of charge in the first instance.

Councillor Hazell asked how long the proposed training would take. Mr Elrington replied that it was proposed to carry out the training in two, three hour sessions.

Members asked how many drivers could be accommodated at the training sessions. Mr Elrington replied thirty.

At this point in the meeting officers and representatives of the taxi and private hire trade left the room so that members could take legal advice.

Officers and the trade were re-admitted at 7.30 p.m. and it was

Resolved

To recommend to the Licensing and Safety Committee

1. That option 2 contained in the report be supported i.e. that only existing drivers be offered free training during the 18 month period after the committee adopts the new policy: and
2. That refresher training must be undertaken by licensed drivers every three years.

MOT and Compliance Test

A report from the Director of Public Health was submitted:-

See annexed

The Regulatory Services Manager (Mr Elrington) enlarged upon the report for the benefit of the group and drew attention to the salient points contained therein.

Councillor Hazell referred to paragraph 3.1 of the report and indicated that wheelchair straps and ramps were only subject to a visual inspection at present. Mr Elrington commented that the trade was concerned that the additional checks would cause delays and make it more difficult to book a vehicle for tests at Brownhills depot.

The garage manager (Mr Dutton) informed the meeting that at present appointments were made lasting 50 minutes. It normally took 42 minutes to complete an MOT test.

Councillor Nawaz stated that he was concerned that the proposal to farm out MOT's to other garages could lead to a price war and the Council losing control of the situation. He felt that for the time being MOT's should be carried out only at Brownhills depot.

Councillor Hazell asked how many MOT bays were available at the depot Mr Dutton replied that three MOT bays were in operation from 6.00 a.m. to 7.00 p.m. Monday to Friday.

Mr Hussain (Private Hire Association) stated that if a car failed the MOT for a minor fault like a broken light or a bald tire it could take two or three days to obtain a re-test. He added that Birmingham City Council had six garages which were authorised to MOT hackney carriage and private hire vehicles. All these garages were required to charge the same amounts for MOT's so that no one garage could undercut the rest.

Mr Dutton reported that many vehicles failed because of defective lights or tyres. If vehicles are maintained properly or checked over prior to the MOT then they would not fail.

After further discussion it was

Resolved

1. That the report be noted;
2. That the group recommends the Licensing and Safety Committee to continue to use the depot for MOT and compliance tests.

Items raised by the Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Organisation

Licensing procedure

Mr Hussain (Private Hire Association) asked why after a vehicle had passed its MOT test, the plate had to be obtained from the licensing office within 5 working days. If a driver attended after 5 days then he was required to MOT his vehicle again before obtaining his plate. He suggested that this requirement should only apply to new vehicles as existing licensed vehicles had a number of days still to run before their licences expired.

After a brief discussion it was agreed

That the existing licensing requirements would be continued.

Termination of meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 8.06 p.m.

Chairman

Date