

TAXI/PRIVATE HIRE LIAISON GROUP

Wednesday, 23rd November, 2005 at 6.00 p.m.

Conference Room at the Council House, Walsall

Present

Councillor Keith Sears (Chairman)
Councillor Cath Micklewright
Councillor Robbie Robinson
Councillor Bill Tweddle

Mr. B. Corlett, Environmental Health and Consumer Services
Ms. S. Allman, Environmental Health and Consumer Services
Mr. K. Hussain, Private Hire Association
Mr. P. White, Private Hire Association
Mr. Z. Ali, Walsall Taxi Federation

Mr. S. Johnson, Fleet Services
Mr. M. Pleadon, Fleet Services

Apology

An apology for non-attendance was submitted on behalf of Councillor Rose.
Councillor Tweddle was attending the meeting as substitute.

Minutes

It was **agreed** that the minutes of the last meeting held on 5th July, 2005, a copy having previously been circulated to each Member of the Group, be approved by the Group as a correct record.

New licensing conditions for private hire/hackney carriage licensed trade

The report of the Head of Public Protection was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Mr. Ali, from the Walsall Taxi Federation, indicated that there were certain issues in relation to the conditions which had not been agreed. He referred, in particular, to Paragraph 3.7 of the hackney carriage vehicle licence conditions which stated “for the purposes of hackney carriage vehicles, the London style cab will not be licensed past 15 years from the registration date.” Mr. Ali indicated that the trade wanted 18 years as opposed to 15 years.

In reply, Mr. Corlett indicated that compared to other Local Authorities, the suggested 15 years was reasonable.

Mr. Ali referred to the fact that the manufacturing warranty was 25 years and the trade’s argument was based on that. The trade felt that 18 years was more reasonable.

By way of explanation, Mr. Pleadon advised Members that the 25 years warranty related to the main chassis, not the vehicle as a whole.

Mr. White, from the Walsall Private Hire Association, referred to Paragraphs 2.13 and 2.14 of the private hire driver conditions which stated “The licence holder shall not smoke, drink or eat in the vehicle for the duration of the booking” and “The licence holder shall not play any radio/sound reproducing equipment in the vehicle for the duration of the booking.” He indicated that on occasions, customers had requested that music be played in the vehicle.

Ms. Allman indicated that the conditions referred to had, in fact, been carried on from previous conditions. She expressed the view that it was reasonable to retain Paragraph 2.13 in its entirety but suggested that, in relation to Paragraph 2.14, the words “without express permission of the hirer” be added.

Mr. Hussain, from the Walsall Private Hire Association, made the point that he had not been consulted on the amendments to the conditions and pointed out that he had only received the report containing the revised conditions that morning. He indicated that he had also tried, on several occasions, to contact the Licensing Office unsuccessfully. In reply, Ms. Allman advised Members that she had spoken to Mr. White from the Walsall Private Hire Association on these conditions and had tried, unsuccessfully, on several occasions, to speak to Mr. Hussain about the conditions. Messages had been left on his telephone and with Mr. White, who in turn, had left messages for Mr. Hussain to contact the Licensing Office.

Members felt that there had been sufficient consultation on the conditions and it was **agreed** to recommend to Licensing and Safety Committee:-

That subject to the amendment to Paragraph 2.14 of the private hire driver conditions as detailed above, the conditions, as amended, be considered by the licensing trade as part of the consultation process, and that a further recommendation be made to the Licensing and Safety Committee in January, 2006 following the period of consultation to confirm the implementation of the new conditions.

Walsall Town Centre Taxi Ranks

Members were advised that this item had been placed on the agenda at the request of the Walsall Taxi Owners Association. The representative of that organisation who had requested the item was not in attendance. The problem appeared to be that the rank that had been set up in Bridge Street was too far from the main shops and people were not walking there. Members were advised that the officer dealing with this issue was unable to attend the meeting but he had indicated that there was no alternative location for the temporary rank that would be nearer to the main shops, unless the disabled parking was moved out of the Tesco site at Bridge Street. The scaffolding required for the re-development of the upper floors of those properties fronting Bridge Street was the reason why the rank could not be established in the approved location and this was not something that the Council could refuse or control and, if the rank had been located there, it would have to have been moved to facilitate the re-development. At the present time, there were no dates as to when the development works would be finished to allow their contractors to do the work necessary to re-locate the rank.

It was suggested that consideration of this item be deferred until such time as both the representative from the Walsall Taxi Owners Association and the officer dealing with the issue could be in attendance. Councillor Robinson referred to press reports of potential disruption over the Christmas period which could be caused by a taxi strike, in view of which, it was **agreed** that consideration of this issue be deferred to a meeting of the Group to be held before Christmas to enable further discussion with the trade.

Licence Fees

Members were advised that this issue had been requested by a representative from the Walsall Taxi Owners Association who was not in attendance at the meeting.

Colour of vehicles

Mr. Hussain, from Walsall Private Hire Association, expressed the view that he had had no reply from the Licensing Office regarding applications he had made for MPV vehicles. Mr. Corlett reminded Members that there was a Committee decision and also legislation on this issue which indicated that vehicles resembling hackney carriages should be white in colour. Mr. Hussain was well aware that there are a number of vehicles licensed which are not white and these had slipped through the net. However, owners had been written to to ensure that their colour was changed within a certain timescale. Mr. Hussain asked whether the Committee was prepared to change its decision and indicated that he was not on the Committee when the decision was taken in 1997. Councillor Tweddle made the point that it was a health and safety issue and the safety of passengers was paramount. People needed to know, from the colour of vehicles, that it was a registered private hire vehicle.

The Chairman made the point that a decision had already been made on this issue and asked whether the Group wanted to make a recommendation to Licensing and Safety Committee to change the policy.

At this juncture, Mr. Hussain circulated a letter from Jubilee regarding the difficulty in obtaining vehicles in the colour specified by the Council. In view of that letter, Councillor Robinson expressed the view that the Group should re-consider the policy. Mr. Corlett made the point that it was only the MPV model that the Council decided should be white. Steve Johnson, from Fleet Services, advised Members that there were a substantial number of vehicles which could be used as MPVs and made the point that they could be purchased in white.

In the light of the information given, it was **agreed** that there be no change to the policy regarding the colour of private hire vehicles.

Retest of vehicles

Mr. Hussain made the point that his Members were having difficulty in getting their vehicles re-tested. Steve Johnson, Fleet Services, advised Members that new software was now in operation and indicated that over the last five days, there had been 18 re-tests. He indicated that the garage were trying to fit in the re-tests but also made the point that if vehicles were presented in a reasonable state in the first place, this would remove the need for the high volume of re-tests. He added that the main problems were lights, tyres, brakes and emissions and that taxis/private hire were given priority for tests and re-tests. Martin Pleadon, Fleet Services, advised Members that there were nine MOT testers available and, in some cases, the garage was open until 7.00 p.m. to accommodate the re-tests. Mr. Ali, Walsall Taxi Federation, made the point that one of his members had his vehicle passed late on a Friday afternoon but it was too late for him to obtain his licence from the Licensing Office due to the fact that

it was closed. He had operated his vehicle over the weekend without a licence and had been punished for it. It was suggested that the Licensing Office hours should correspond with the garage hours. It was also suggested by Mr. Hussain that where a vehicle is tested and passed but too late to obtain a licence from the Licensing Office, the vehicle should be allowed to continue to operate. Mr. Pleadon made the point that if a vehicle was not licensed, its insurance would be invalidated.

The view of the members was that there should be no amendment to the current policy and that the onus was on the taxi/private hire owners/drivers to ensure that their vehicles were tested/re-tested in sufficient time to allow them to get their vehicles licensed with the Licensing Office.

Outstanding Issues

(a) MOT pass rate performance

(b) Request for a reduction in the number of vehicle tests

It was noted that these items would be considered further, possibly in March, 2006, when detailed information for six months in respect of MOT pass rate performance is available from the new software.

Date of next meeting

It was **agreed** that a further meeting of the Group be held before Christmas on a date to be agreed, to consider the following issues raised by the Walsall Taxi Owners Association representative who was not in attendance at this meeting:-

- Walsall Town Centre taxi ranks
- Licence fees

Termination of Meeting

The meeting terminated at 7.15 p.m.

Chairman

Date