

## **TAXI/PRIVATE HIRE LIAISON GROUP**

**Thursday, 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2005 at 6.00 p.m.**

**Conference Room at the Council House, Walsall**

### **Present**

Councillor Keith Sears (Chairman)  
Councillor Cath Micklewright  
Councillor John Rochelle  
Councillor Carol Rose

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. M. Khan, Walsall Taxi Owners Association  
Mr. I. Khan, Walsall Taxi Owners Association  
Mr. Z. Ali, Walsall Taxi Federation  
Mr. S. Hussain, Walsall Taxi Federation

Mr. M. Pleadon, Fleet Services

### **Apologies**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Robinson and Rochelle and Mr. Z. Ali, Walsall Taxi Federation.

### **Minutes**

It was **agreed** that the minutes of the last meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2005, a copy having previously been circulated to each Member of the Group, be approved by the Group as a correct record.

## **Taxi rank - Walsall Town Centre**

With the approval of the Chairman, this item was brought forward on the agenda.

Mr. M. Khan made the point that the current temporary rank was dangerous. There had already been two accidents. With regard to the rank in the Lower Bridge Street, this was on the wrong side of the road. Mr. I. Khan made the point that the rank was not safe from the public/disabled point of view, particularly wheelchair access. He expressed the view that he would like to have the location re-considered, possibly to be put on the left hand side of the road, and that consideration might also be given to increasing the number of spaces. Mr. M. Khan advised Members that the issue had previously been raised with Licensing Officers who had advised him that a decision had already been taken and that taxis would have to pull out into the road to allow wheelchair access.

Councillor Rose expressed her concerns regarding the taxi rank siting, in particular, the problems being encountered by disabled people. She also made the point that the exhaust emissions from vehicles would go directly into the shops.

Mr. Glyn Oliver, Service Manager, Traffic and Transportation, made the point that the problems disabled people were experiencing had not previously been raised but undertook to look into the situation.

Mr. Corlett asked whether there was a possibility of ranks being established in the vicinity of the Art Gallery and Woolworths (at the rear of Woolworths) as there were none at the end of town. Councillor Rose also asked whether there were going to be any new taxi ranks near to the Shannons Mill development.

Mr. Oliver undertook to provide a report on the issues raised for submission to a future meeting of the Group.

## **New conditions for vehicles, drivers and operators**

The report of the Head of Public Protection to the meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2005 was submitted, together with letters from the Walsall Taxi Federation dated 30<sup>th</sup> November, 2005 and the Walsall Private Hire Association dated 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2005:-

(see annexed)

Mr. Corlett outlined the report.

Mr. I. Khan referred 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. Khan indicated that the trade wanted 18 years as opposed to 15 years. This view was endorsed by Mr. S. Hussain. In reply to this, Mr. Corlett indicated that everything, apart from the chassis, could be replaced and he, therefore, had no objection to the 18 year limit as suggested by the trade. Mr. Pleadon indicated that if the standard of vehicles was kept up, he would have no problem with the 18 year limit. He added that, on occasions, second hand parts were put on which was why inspections of vehicles were taking place every four months.

Mr. Khan indicated that if the Council specified that new replacement parts should be fitted, then they would.

On the basis of the comments from the trade and officers, it was **agreed** (Councillor Micklewright voting against) that subject to the amendment to Paragraph 2.14 of the private hire driver conditions previously agreed and subject to the amendment to Paragraph 3.7 of the hackney carriage vehicle licence conditions to read “For the purposes of hackney carriage vehicles, the London style cab will not be licensed past 18 years from the registration date”, 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.

### **Issues raised by Walsall Taxi Owners Association**

#### **(a) One MOT per year for vehicles 1 - 5 years old, six monthly after 5 years old**

The Chairman asked whether the current situation had improved. In reply, Mr. Corlett indicated that there was a lower percentage failure rate overall and, therefore, there had been an improvement. He added that other Boroughs gave age related testing, which resulted in the older the vehicle, the more tests.

Mr. M. Khan advised Members that in Birmingham, the average age of vehicles was 13 years. In Walsall, the vehicles were much newer, 80% of them being around five years old.

Mr. K. Hussain referred to a situation where he had taken a car to two separate garages for a pre-MOT test and the vehicle had not failed but on taking it to the Council garage, it had failed on a minor defect. He felt that the Council should look at how they deal with these minor concerns. In reply, Mr. Pleadon made the point that any vehicles failed by the garage would also have been failed under a Ministry of Transport test. Mr. Corlett suggested that it might help if every driver was given a list of everything that would be tested.

Mr. White expressed the need for the system to be speeded up in relation to taxis and private hire vehicles and pointed out that if there were less tests, this would leave more time for re-tests.

Mr. Corlett made the point that the Group had previously agreed to receive a report in March, 2006 on MOT pass rate performance and a request for a reduction in the number of vehicle tests when detailed information for six months in respect of MOT pass rate performance was available from the new software.

Mr. Z. Ali joined the meeting at this juncture.

Mr. White referred to the roadside checks undertaken and asked whether they were done randomly. Mr. Corlett confirmed that they were done totally at random. Mr. Z. Ali made the point that the last spot check results were favourable. Mr. Corlett confirmed that to be the case and indicated that only one out of four hackney carriages failed. Mr. Pleadon then went on to say that some of the failures were issued with a PG9 which effectively took the vehicle off the road. He added that a vehicle would then have to have a new MOT to remove the PG9. He informed the Group that advisory notices could also be issued.

Mr. White asked whether any faults identified could be graded. In reply, Sue Allman indicated that the report to the Group in March would show how many vehicles had failed and why.

Councillor Micklewright expressed her thanks to Mr. Pleadon and his staff for doing a thorough job and carrying out their duties very well.

It was subsequently **agreed** to hold this issue in abeyance until March, 2006 when it is anticipated that detailed information for six months in respect of MOT pass rate performance will be available from the new software.

**(b) MOT should be put out to tender**

Sue Allman advised Members that the service was looking at a Service Level Agreement with Fleet Services on this issue. Consultants had assessed the fees being charged and they were very low. It was hoped that the Service Level Agreement would improve the service to the trade. She added that the cost in Walsall was relatively cheap.

Mr. White expressed the view that the key to this issue was speed. Sue Allman indicated that the Service Level Agreement would improve this and would be brought to the Liaison Group at the appropriate time. She added that there would be a charge for failing to turn up for tests.

Mr. M. Khan referred to the Christmas period and expressed the need to speed up the service so that with re-tests, vehicles could be back on the road within 48 hours. He added that there would be no problem with getting repairs done. Sue Allman confirmed that the Service Level Agreement would state a 48 hour re-test. Mr. Khan asked what the situation would be with regard to minor items such as bulbs. In reply, Sue Allman indicated that it was a vicious circle. New tests could not be undertaken because of the number of re-tests, but re-tests would still have to be done because of the Regulations. Mr. Khan endorsed the fact that a fee should be paid for failing to turn up. He added that in Birmingham, the Council had two alternative garages who would do re-tests on behalf of the Council so that vehicles could be put back on the road with the minimum of delay. He asked whether Walsall Council could nominate a garage to do the re-tests. In reply, Mr. Pleadon advised Members that partial re-tests must be returned by the end of the next working day. If it was later than that, then there would have to be a full MOT test carried out.

Sue Allman suggested that it might be advisable to see how the Service Level Agreement operated before considering this issue further. She added that the personnel structure in the garage would change. It was anticipated that the Service Level Agreement would be in place by April/May, 2006.

Mr. Z. Ali asked what would happen if the vehicle was brought back within 24 hours but could not get fitted in for a re-test. He asked whether a full re-test would be done and the full amount charged. Sue Allman suggested that this could be built into the Service Level Agreement. Similarly, on the question of partial or intermediate tests and the possibility of nominating another garage, it was suggested that consideration of these issues be deferred to see how the Service Level Agreement operates in relation to these issues.

With regard to the question of opening the garage later over a Christmas period, Mr. Pleadon indicated that it was up to the Fleet Services Manager to decide as to how he wanted to staff the garage over the holiday period. Sue Allman undertook to speak to the Fleet Services Manager on this issue.

### **(c) Renewal of badges every three years**

Mr. K. Hussain suggested that the renewal of badges could be undertaken every three years in line with Birmingham City Council. Mr. Corlett advised Members that badges were currently issued on a date-to-date basis. If they were not renewed within that period, new licences would have to be applied for but they could only be applied for within one month of the renewal and letters were sent out advising drivers of that fact. Mr. Corlett advised Members that legislation prevented the service from doing otherwise. Sue Allman advised Members that if anyone was going away on holiday and that the duration of the holiday was in excess of one month, the office adopted a policy whereby the applicant can bring in their passport to prove that they were out of the country at that time and the licence would be granted there and then. She added that the office did not

penalise people because they were out of the country. She went on to say that the office would only ask for additional money when there had been a lack of communication by the drivers. By way of clarification, she added that Birmingham could give either a one or a three year licence but for a three year licence, a DVLA mandate would be required. She advised Members that the office would have no objection to operating on the same basis but suggested that the introduction of such a scheme be delayed until the necessary software had been installed. Mr. Corlett endorsed Ms. Allman's comments and pointed out that if this was agreed, because of the software implications, this would have to be delayed for implementation by April, 2007 because of the need to undertake CRB checks. He added that CRB checks would be returned quicker if more information was put on the forms.

Councillor Rochelle attended the meeting at 7.20 p.m.

It was **agreed**, in the light of the comments made, the Licensing and Safety Committee be recommended to introduce a system of renewal of badges for every three years, in line with Birmingham City Council.

**(d) Reduction in fees paid to Council**

Mr. Corlett advised Members that the fees were set in line with the budget requirements to fund the licensing system and that they had only been in force from 1<sup>st</sup> September. He suggested that there was a need for the current fees to run for a full twelve months to assess the costs involved. The Chairman endorsed Mr. Corlett's comments and pointed out that the Council do not make a profit on the fees charged.

It was **agreed** that this issue be considered again after 1<sup>st</sup> September, 2006.

**(e) Colour of vehicles**

Mr. K. Hussain referred to Paragraph 4.33 of the private hire vehicle licence conditions which required "if the body style or appearance of a vehicle shall lead any person to believe that the vehicle is a hackney carriage, then that vehicle will be white in colour". He asked the Group to give consideration to changing that policy to allow vehicles to be different colours. The Chairman reminded Members that this issue had been raised several times previously and, at the last meeting, the Group had agreed that there would be no change to the policy regarding the colour of private hire vehicles.

It was **agreed** that the decision of the Group from its meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2005, be re-affirmed and that there be no change to the policy regarding the colour of private hire vehicles.

**Termination of Meeting**

The meeting terminated at 7.40 p.m.

Chairman .....

Date .....