

TAXI/PRIVATE HIRE LIAISON GROUP

Tuesday, 15th August, 2006 at 6.00 p.m.

Conference Room at the Council House, Walsall

Present

Councillor Anthony Harris
Councillor Cath Micklewright
Councillor Robbie Robinson
Councillor John Rochelle
Councillor Keith Sears

Mr. B. Corlett, Public Protection
Ms. S. Allman, Public Protection

Mr. K. Hussain, Walsall Private Hire Association
Mr. P. White, Walsall Private Hire Association

Mr. Z. Ali, Walsall Taxi Federation
Mr. M. Yaqoob, Walsall Taxi Federation

Mr. M. Pleadon, Fleet Services

Appointment of Chairman

It was **AGREED** that Councillor Sears be appointed Chairman of the Taxi/Private Hire Liaison Group for the 2006/2007 Municipal Year.

Apologies

There were no apologies submitted for non-attendance.

Minutes

It was **AGREED** that the minutes of the last meeting held on 15th December, 2005, a copy having previously been circulated to each Member of the Group, be approved by the Group as a correct record.

Issues outstanding from previous meeting

(a) Taxi rank

Mr. Corlett reported that the rank had now moved back to its original location in Bridge Street. There were still major problems with building works in the area. Highways Section were unable to indicate when the works would be completed.

The Group **AGREED** to invite Highways officers to the next meeting on 25th September to address this issue.

(b) MOT pass rate performance

An overall failure rate of 43% was reported which was an improvement on previous figures. It was not possible to obtain the exact figures due to a computer problem.

The Group **AGREED** to defer this matter to the next meeting on 25th September.

(c) Renewal of badges every three years

It was reported that Birmingham had changed over to this system and an evaluation had not yet been done.

The Group **AGREED** to defer consideration of this issue until the system had been in operation in Birmingham for at least a two year period.

(d) Reduction in fees paid to the Council

It was noted that a report on this issue would be submitted to the Group some time after 1st September, 2006.

Proposed changes to licensing and testing of private hire/hackney carriage vehicles

A report was submitted:-

(see annexed)

Concerns were expressed regarding various issues in the report, in particular, the proposed costs of MOT tests and extra checks for private hire/hackney carriage vehicles and the proposal to charge a booking fee of 33% of the next test fee. The suggestion was made that rather than a 33% booking fee, drivers should be required to pay the full amount within 7 days of the test. Clarification was sought regarding item 15 of the additional test relating to bodywork/paintwork - condition, dents, inferior repairs and rust and the suggestion was made that there should be

some criteria set to identify what constituted a minor dent or scratch. Mr. Corlett made the point that the legislation referred to anything which 'materially affected the appearance of the vehicle' and that it would be at the discretion of the tester. The point was made that there should be consistency of approach between all of the testers on this issue.

The insurance element of this was also discussed and the point was made that most insurance companies dealt with digital images of damage to vehicles, but, if a vehicle was forced to be kept off the road due to excessive damage, there were a number of companies in Birmingham that would provide replacement vehicles (black cabs only).

With regard to getting work done to rectify damage to bodywork, the point was made that drivers were usually given a period of grace, but there was also an appeal process.

Reference was also made to the proposal for drivers to contact the Licensing Office to get vehicles re-licensed and the trade representatives had indicated that they were not in favour of the proposed appointment system. The Licensing Officer suggested the possibility of a free phone service to the Licensing Office to enable appointments to be made with no cost to the drivers.

There was also a further discussion regarding MOT costs and re-tests and Mr. Pleadon, from the garage, indicated that there were likely to be Government changes in the near future on these two issues.

It was subsequently **AGREED** that the report be referred to Licensing and Safety Committee, unamended, for consideration and implementation.

**Amendments to conditions attached to the grant of licences in respect of:-
(1) Base operators; (2) Private hire/hackney carriage drivers; (3) Private hire vehicles; (4) Limousines; (5) Hackney carriage vehicles**

A report on this issue was considered:-

(see annexed)

Reference was made to the colour of MPV style vehicles and the point was made that the Committee had already re-affirmed its preference as white. Mr. Corlett made the point that operators were given a period of 5 years in which to change the colour of their vehicles.

It was **AGREED** that the report be referred to the Licensing and Safety Committee, unamended, for consideration and implementation.

Issues raised by Walsall Taxi Federation

(a) MOT tests (reduction on number of tests per year)

The point was made that hackney carriages had improved and that the number of tests should be reduced to every six months.

Mr. Corlett indicated that the new testing procedure would provide for a full MOT on each test and suggested that a reduction in the number of tests to 2 per year would cause no problem.

It was **AGREED** to recommend this course of action to the Licensing and Safety Committee for consideration.

(b) Taxi ranks

The point was made that due to the increase in the number of hackney carriages, there was a need to look at the Walsall Town Centre ranks. Also, the rank outside the station was not officially marked.

Mr. Corlett undertook to discuss the situation with Highways to see if it was possible to have more ranks. An officer from Highways would also be asked to attend the next meeting of the Group.

(c) Private hire touting

It was reported that this issue was still causing a problem and it was suggested that, in line with Birmingham and Solihull Councils, taxi marshals would be employed. Their presence would reduce the number of incidents and they would be given the right to witness and report offenders. The possibility of imposing fines was also discussed, although the point was made that the suggestion would, initially, have to be checked out with the Council's Legal Section.

It was **AGREED** that officers be requested to speak to the Birmingham and Solihull Councils regarding the operation of a 'taxi marshals' system and to report to the next meeting of the Group, the report to include the Council's Legal Section's view on the suggestion regarding imposition of fines.

(d) De-regulation

The point was made that there were now 112 hackney carriages operating in Walsall, with 47 applications still to be considered. In addition, there were 589 private hire vehicles operating. The suggestion was made that there was a need to revert to regulation.

Mr. Corlett indicated that for this to be done, there would need to be a survey of unmet demand carried out which would be very costly, in the regional of £30k, which the Council was not in a position to fund.

Mr. Ali, on behalf of the Taxi Federation, undertook to take this information back to his members.

It was **AGREED** that the position be noted and that officers be requested to prepare a report for submission to a future meeting on the income received from fees.

(e) CRB checks

The question was raised as to why CRB checks carried out in respect of applications to a neighbouring Authority a few weeks before, could not be used in relation to an application made to Walsall Council, when Birmingham, Solihull, Cannock and Coventry accepted them up to three months old.

The point was made that Authorities did not share information and the Criminal Records Bureau best practice says that every Authority should have its own CRB check. In addition, the information contained in the CRB check provided to Walsall Council differed to that provided to the applicants in that an enhanced check was requested and the information might contain sensitive information not supplied to the applicant.

Walsall Council carried out CRB checks every three years but were processed within a fortnight of receiving them.

It was **AGREED** that there would be no change to the current system of CRB checks.

(f) Proposed move of Taxi Licensing Office to Challenge Buildings

It was **AGREED** that consideration of this issue be deferred to the next meeting on 25th September.

Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Group would be held on Monday, 25th September, 2006 at 6.00 p.m.

Termination of Meeting

The meeting terminated at 7.38 p.m.

Chairman

Date