

LICENSING AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 25th February, 2015 at 6.00 p.m.

In a Conference Room at the Council House, Walsall

Present

Councillor S. Fitzpatrick (Chairman)
Councillor Barker
Councillor Clarke
Councillor Douglas-Maul
Councillor D. Hazell
Councillor Murray
Councillor Nawaz
Councillor Sears

1621/15 **Apologies**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Anson, Hussain and Sarohi.

1622/15 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

1623/15 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th January, 2015, a copy having been circulated to Members of the Committee, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

1624/15 **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

Resolved

There were no items to be considered in private session.

Taxi Licensing – Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency Wheelchair Assessments Course

The report of the Interim Head of Communities and Public Protection was submitted:-

(see annexed)

The Principal Licensing Officer (Mr. Knapper) enlarged upon the report for the benefit of the Committee and drew Members attention to the salient points contained therein.

Councillor Fitzpatrick asked if Walsall's drivers could be trained by Dudley's Officer. Mr. Knapper replied that this would not be possible.

Councillor Douglas-Maul commented that he supported the training of new drivers in wheelchair use but added that experienced drivers also needed refresher courses to prevent the sort of problems which were regularly referred to the Taxi Licensing Sub-Committees.

Referring to Paragraph 3.7 of the report, Councillor Douglas-Maul asked if it would be possible for the local authority to provide a vehicle at the testing station which drivers could use for a practical wheelchair test.

Referring to Paragraph 3.8 of the report, Councillor Douglas-Maul felt that continuity of training was important so if Walsall could obtain an Officer to train drivers in the wheelchair protocols then liaison with Dudley might help.

Councillor Hazell commented that if drivers supplied their own vehicles then they were conversant with where the locking points were in that vehicle. If a strange vehicle was used then they might struggle to anchor the wheelchair correctly.

Members expressed concern that they were only being asked to note the report and refer the matter to the Taxi/Private Hire Liaison Group for consultation with the trade. They felt that more proactive action was required.

Councillor Barker referred to the fact that with the reduction in the Ring and Ride Service it was likely that more disabled people would be using taxis to access district and town centres so it was essential that wheelchair training was carried out as a matter of urgency to avoid the local authority being criticised should an accident occur to a wheelchair user who was not strapped in correctly.

Councillor Murray referred to the fact that the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency Wheelchair Assessment would add £13 to the cost of a practical driving test. He asked whether Walsall Adult Community College would be able to undertake the wheelchair assessment on behalf of Walsall. Mr. Knapper replied that this was unlikely. He

continued that Walsall Adult Community College was currently looking at the cost implications of providing the existing service of driver training on behalf of the Council. He added that in the past Council Officers used to provide practical training on wheelchairs using a vehicle borrowed from a local taxi base but this had been discontinued some time ago due to lack of resources.

Two wheelchair users were in attendance at the meeting as members of the public and Councillors asked if they used taxis a lot and whether motorised wheelchairs caused more problems for the trade than manual ones. Linda (a wheelchair user) replied that she regularly travelled in taxis without being strapped in correctly. The ramps she used to access the vehicle were placed in the vehicle beside her and she was often overcharged for the journey because she was in a wheelchair.

Dave, a second wheelchair user, stated that he too was not secured correctly in the vehicle. He indicated that the ramps used were too narrow for motorised wheelchairs which had a wider wheelbase and chunkier tyres. He knew of at least one occasion where a motorised wheelchair had tipped over because the ramps were too narrow and it had taken four people to right the wheelchair and get the user into the vehicle.

Linda added that drivers seemed to struggle to push manual wheelchairs into their vehicles and she was concerned that some older drivers could suffer a cardiac arrest trying to get a wheelchair into their vehicle. She reported that on a visit to Stratford upon Avon she had been winched into a taxi. This had been simple and hazard free.

Councillor Hazel asked if drivers drove more carefully if they had a wheelchair passenger on board. Linda replied that, in her experience, they did not.

Dave confirmed that wheelchair users got very poor quality service, in his opinion, and were often overcharged as well. He added that often the meter was not engaged when he was taken in a taxi in his wheelchair so that the driver could charge more than the standard fare.

Linda informed the meeting that she had reported her concerns to a Licensing Officer called Bruce Corlett but nothing had changed.

Mr. Knapper informed the meeting that Mr. Corlett had left the authority some seven years ago. He added that he had not met Linda or Dave before this evening. Members requested Linda and Dave, and other wheelchair users, to report drivers who did not secure them correctly or overcharged them to the Licensing Unit so that appropriate action could be taken.

Members felt that in view of the information provided by the wheelchair users at the meeting urgent action should be taken as follows because safety of the travelling public was paramount:-

- Note the report.
- Refer the matter to the Taxi/Private Hire Liaison Group for the comments of the trade on the allegations made.
- Contact Ring and Ride and Walsall Community Transport to ascertain whether they would be able to assist the local authority with Wheelchair Assessment Courses.
- All new drivers to undertake the Wheelchair Assessment Course as part of the practical driving test and existing drivers to undertake the course on renewal of their driver's licence.
- Agree further action with the Chairman to avoid unnecessary delay in implementing necessary action.

After further discussion it was

Resolved

- 1) That the report be noted;
- 2) That the matter be referred to the Taxi/Private Hire Liaison Group for the comments of the trade on the allegations made;
- 3) That the Ring and Ride Service and Walsall Community Transport be contacted to ascertain whether they would be able to assist the local authority with Wheelchair Assessment Courses;
- 4) That all new drivers be required to undertake the Wheelchair Assessment Course as part of the practical driving test and existing drivers be required to undertake the course on renewal of their driver's licence;
- 5) That further action be agreed with the Chairman to avoid unnecessary delays in implementing necessary reforms.

1626/15

Delegation of Powers to Officers

The report of the Head of Democratic Services was submitted:-

(see annexed)

The Chairman advised the meeting that this report was being withdrawn as Officers already had delegated authority to suspend licences under Paragraph 25.5 of Part 3.5 of the Council's Constitution.

A revised report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee to consider authorising the Head of Communities and Public

Protection to deal not only with drivers not supplying Disclosure and Barring Service Certificates, but also Medical Certificates and other matters.

Resolved

That the report be withdrawn and a revised report be considered at the next meeting of the Committee.

Termination of meeting

There being no further business, the meeting terminated at 6.55 p.m.

Chairman

Date