

Taxi and Private Hire Trade Forum

Weds 23rd May 2018

Attendees:

Councillor Kelly Durdan – Licensing Committee - *Chair* (KD)
Councillor Patrick Berry – Licensing Committee (PB)
Councillor Gary James - Licensing Committee (GJ)

Licensing:

John Rendell – Licensing Manager (JR)
Brad Fear – Licensing Assistant - *Minutes* (BF)
Alison Evens – Licensing Officer (AE)
Leigh-Ann Fumagalli – Licensing Officer (LF)
Fern Avis – Licensing Officer(FA)

Taxi / Private Hire Trade:

Mike Davis – A1 Ace Taxis (MD)
Seb Toon – TLC Taxis (ST)
Steve Toon – TLC Taxis (STN)
Donna Bell – TLC Taxis (DB)
Dave Hurford – TLC Taxis (DH)
Jared Colclough - Grab-a-Cab (JC)
Robin (Bob) Colclough – Trade Association (RC)
Jason Baxter – Independent (JB)
Nigel Swift (NS)
Daniel Abbott (DA)
John Bolton (JB)

Meeting Minutes:

1. Introductions and One-Minute Silence

Introductions of attendees.

Attendees held a one-minute silence for Martin Jones – who sadly passed away in recent months – and for John Hussey – who is currently battling cancer.

2. Transformation & Formation of a New Council

- JR read attendees the joint statement from Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council regarding the formation of a single council. Highlighted the work that the Licensing service will be putting into this – legal work, reviewing of policies, etc. Mentioned that whilst it is conceivable that the new council will keep two taxi zones, it is currently hard to see how this would be in the public interest. Will be looking to update trade as decisions are proceeded with; emphasised that there are likely to be potential problems with creating a single taxi ‘zone’ as well as problems with keeping two.
- JC referenced Cornwall and how they currently operate six zones, a system which is working comfortably for them. JR has contact in Cornwall that can work with and will look to discuss this further with them.
- RC expressed concerns by trade that creation of a single zone will lead to an influx of Minehead drivers operating in Taunton, which will have a devastating impact on Taunton drivers. Suggested that, whilst bringing licensing procedure and policy in line for both areas would be fine, two zones should still remain for TDBC and WSC trade. JC questioned if creating a single zone was really in public interest.
- NS addressed difference in WSC fee structure – which believes to be lower than TDBC.
- MD suggested that would need facts on how many drivers in Minehead. LF pointed out that Minehead drivers have expressed the same concerns about Taunton drivers operating in Minehead under a single zone.
- JR updated attendees on TDBC ‘Transformation’ project and what this would mean for the future: specifically, that there would be no single ‘licensing’ team and a stronger emphasis would be put on online customer self-service. KD asked what effect this would have on future of Forum meetings. JR felt this depended on structure; possibly with ‘specialists’ arranging, but will push for Forums to be kept in place moving forward. KD will also push for this to remain in some form.
- Due to a lack of finer details currently, JR not certain who will be looking after each area of licensing, moving forward. Mentioned Licensing team’s recent commitments involving reviewing of current processes. Informed trade of LF’s upcoming departure from the Licensing Team and how this may have a short term impact on turnaround times.
- RC expressed concerns with planned online self-service and the impact this might have on time scales, commenting that turnaround times of late

have been brilliant and wondering how that level of service will be maintained. Also wondered how this will be affected by Somerset County Council's proposed vision of a unitary council. JR stressed that Council is trying to be more efficient, utilising technology to allow applicants greater control, ease of use and easy access to updates on the progress of their licence, cutting out a lot of the admin that currently exists. With regard to the SCC unitary council; Transformation will continue regardless of proposals. RC asked if fees will be cheaper if less admin is required and JR responded that he expected this to be the case.

- MD asked if TDBC's proposed structure is in place anywhere else. JR responded that a number of councils have started taking a customer-oriented approach, as close as in Devon. PB talked about software which has been in development over the last few years, specifically to fit this sort of structure.
- DA noted that whilst there was likely to be a period of uncertainty, he believed that this would ultimately benefit customers.
- MD asked when are likely to be the months worst affected by this. JR answered that Phase 1 of Transformation currently ongoing, with Phase 2 commencing in August/ September and 'go live' from 1st April 2019.
- RC and ST have volunteered to test new processes before this. KD asked if anyone else would like to volunteer for this and JC expressed an interest in this.

3. Knowledge Test

- LF discussed work she has been doing on creating a more robust and multi-faceted knowledge test, running briefly through planned sections of the test, including a map-based geography test with boxes pointing to destinations a driver would be expected to know. Volunteers will test this to ensure fit for purpose.
- RC expressed concerns that a blank map is not being used for the test; which would require applicants to have a more thorough knowledge of Taunton and surrounding areas. Also expressed concerns in relation to over-reliance by new drivers on sat-navs – specifically where 'shortest route' should be being selected and isn't.
- DB asked if this new knowledge test will be implemented on existing drivers and if everyone will need to resit this. JR responded that this currently isn't the intention, due primarily to existing delays expected on resources and how carrying out these extra knowledge tests might add to

this. However, suggested that Licensing team would be looking to focus on 'drivers of interest' (e.g. those attached to complaints or of whom issues or concerns have been raised). ST pointed out that WSC implemented a new geographical test a few years back and these had to be carried out on renewal of their licence.

4. Taxi Roof Signs

- ST emphasised how a few years ago taxis were required to have roof signs and that these needed to meet certain standard requirements. Most councils still do enforce this and ST believes TDBC should look to introduce this policy. MD asked if this was not already a condition and JR confirmed that it was not.
- JR will check policy, as believes that PH vehicles can also have top hats if state 'Advanced Hire'.
- JB pointed out that a number of PH vehicles appear to be operating without plates; ST suggested that a number of these do have exemptions which allow plates to be attached to inside of the boot. However, concerns were raised by the trade on unlicensed individuals advertising PH services via social media. RC expressed concerns that these young unlicensed drivers were acting illegally even if escorting friends, as they were charging more than 46p per mile. KD needed to clarify with trade in what circumstances these individuals would be operating illegally and attendees confirmed that legally only able to charge price of fuel – with any payment requested over this requiring them to be licensed by the local authority. JR asked trade to be sure to report any such unlicensed drivers advertising online, so that these individuals can be advised of legal obligations etc.
- Action Point: JR will add taxi roof signs to list for review. Note, however, that transformation will likely effect speed of completing the report, going to committee etc.
- RC suggested that these signs should be of uniform size.

5. Practical Driving Test

- Mark Banczyk-Gee in Licensing currently working on/reviewing the implementation of practical driving tests with Blue Lamp Trust; as TDBC currently only local authority which does not have one in place. Could be

mandatory for all drivers, however, implementation of this will again be affected by transformation and expected strain on resources.

- NS expressed concerns about review if five points received on licence. JB agreed that this might be a bit harsh on drivers. JR responded that Licensing would be looking to suspend licences rather than revoke them should such circumstances arise, and drivers will be required to re-take the test. Ensures that measures are being taken towards protecting the public. JB noted that Licensing should have driving history on record and wondered if this would not be taken into consideration if, for example, a driver with years of good driving suddenly had points applied to their licence. JR confirmed that policy acts as a guide to Licensing, but each case will be judge on its own merits and past record will be taken into consideration.
- DA noted that £75.00 extra on fee was quite substantial and would need to be recouped.
- RC believes this has been a long time coming and is satisfied that this will slow down entry of new drivers and will highlight any problems with potential drivers who have difficulties communicating in English. With regard to price, RC satisfied that sincere drivers will pay the extra fee. NS also noted that he was surprised that practical tests hadn't been considered before.
- ST believes this is a great idea, as has recently had to report a number of drivers for poor driving. Will ensure more professional services.
- JB noted that taxi driving requires a variety of skills – lots of potential circumstances to deal with, different requirements for different customers. JR responded that the ability to multi-task is something that they have highlighted to be covered by the test.

6. Extra Charges for Card/ Mobile Payments

- MD summarised changes in law relating to charging for payments made by card. Cost can no longer be recovered in the way they were previously; however, if National PH Association have advised that if these become a chargeable item by the Licensing authority, costs can be legally covered. Requested that this be considered by TDBC.
- GJ asked if customers could be advised of extra charges if paying by card and MD advised that this would be on the fare card.
- DA wondered if customers would appreciate this extra charge, as it doesn't fall in line with their expectations. RC also expressed concerns that this would reinforce a negative image of taxi drivers.
- JC suggested TDBC add this to their policy/guidelines and then let drivers choose if they wish to implement it or not.

- JR advised that Licensing will liaise with MD to discuss further. This can also be brought up as part of the review on tariffs going in to the formation of a single council.

7. VAT Registration

- Reports made to Licensing of drivers/operators evading tax. Two reports have already gone to HMRC in relation to this. This obviously raises concerns about drivers/operators being 'fit and proper'. Operators and drivers who should be VAT registered and they will be written to. Further reports will be made to HMRC and, where necessary, licences revoked.

8. Medical Policy

- AE currently reviewing medical policy. Want to be ensuring that drivers are being checked regularly, with medicals being implemented on application and on renewal.
- RC expressed concerns that medicals were already expensive to acquire. JR suggested that these can be carried out by registered medical practitioners and not necessarily GP, so may not need to incur extra charges.
- MD asked if this would be required every three years. AE responded that if drivers had applied for one year then this medical would need to fall in line with renewal dates, but would expect these to be repeated every three years, with normal driver renewal.
- ST advised that medical test be brought in line with driving standards, as current test is too broad, not in-depth enough. JR confirmed that format would be looked at to ensure fit for purpose. Would be looking for recommendations from medical practitioner; e.g. should the driver be reviewed more frequently?

AS MEETING CLOSED, JR ADVISED THAT LICENSING WILL BE LOOKING TO BOOK ANOTHER FORUM MEETING TO TAKE PLACE IN A MONTH'S TIME, SO THAT ANY MISSED POINTS/ BUSINESS CAN BE RAISED THEN/ EXPLORED IN MORE DETAIL.

Meeting End Time: 19:30
