

Minutes of taxi forum 14 March 2011

Attendees:

David Pattison (DP) Director of Legal & Public Health Protection Services
Jenny Rhodes (JR) Environmental Health Manager
Graham Colling (GC) Senior Environmental Health Officer
Michael Sullivan (MS) Food Safety & Licensing Enforcement Officer
Lee Jamieson (LJ) Environmental Health Officer
Joan Cox (JC) Licensing Officer
Representatives of the Private Hire/Taxi trade

1. Introduction

DP opened the meeting by introducing JR & GC to the trade and explaining their involvement with Licensing.

2. Service Plan

Information was provided with regard to this year's service plan and DP explained that he did not plan to do anything different from the previous year with the key priorities still being:

- Unlicensed limousines
- Educating the trade

DP informed the trade that as a result of enforcement officers attending school prom events 2 unlicensed drivers were convicted in the Magistrates Court. It was felt that this sent out a message to other unlicensed drivers and ensured the safety of children by making sure that vehicles and drivers are properly tested.

With regard to education the trade were informed that Lee Jamieson would be joining the forum later to talk about Health & Safety and how drivers can protect themselves given the dangers they face.

The train to gain programme is to proceed at the moment, but the funding is likely to be withdrawn again in the future due to the severe nature of the cuts being experienced from Government. The Council will not be able to provide any funding, but will support any training initiatives that present themselves.

3. Age Limit

DP confirmed that he has prepared a report for approval by the Licensing Committee with regard to the suspension of the age limit of 10 years for a trial period of one year. The proposal also seeks to revise the charging

structure so that those vehicles aged over 10 years meet the cost of the additional test carried out on them.

The reason for the proposal is to compensate for the impact of the recession with the high cost associated with changing a vehicle. It was also felt that the quality of vehicles had improved, partly due to a more serious approach towards enforcement & the testing at the garage. For this reason DP was happy to make the recommendation on the basis that any vehicle 10 years or older must be regularly maintained with regular garage maintenance checks every 4 mths.

4. Garage

DP advised that the contract for the Council test had been awarded to Shires Garage, they had been the only garage to tender. This is despite invitations for tenders being made to other garages in the District and also on the Council website. This included K Transport Services, who will continue to test the larger vehicles at the moment. However, Shires Garage are considering upgrading to a Class 7 MOT testing station, if it is proven to be financially viable, which would mean all vehicles would then be able to be tested at the same garage.

DP asked the trade whether they were happy with the service provided by the garage and despite minor issues with retests, which will be addressed, everyone appeared generally satisfied with the service provided.

5. V Festival

DP confirmed that he is trying to improve the situation with regard to taxis and private hire vehicles given the problems incurred last year, particularly in view of the fact someone was hurt whilst walking on the A5.

Reports of people wandering around trying to find parents or taxis/private hire vehicles that had been booked created problems with the situation on Sunday being much worse than Saturday.

DP reassured the trade that he was in discussion with the police & County Highways department etc... with a view to try and improve the situation at this year's event.

6. Licensing Committee

DP explained that the Licensing Committee are now making decisions with regard to 'fitness' with his recommendation, where applicants do not meet Council criteria.

So far there had been 4 cases referred:

- One was an alleged sexual assault involving a female passenger who made accusations of “touching”. However, the complainant did not attend the hearing and there was insufficient evidence to suggest that anything improper had taken place. The driver was therefore allowed to continue, after having been suspended for a period previously whilst the matter was being investigated. The advice given by the Committee was that in future it was advisable to make sure that lone female passengers sit in the rear of the vehicle.
- Another driver had his licence revoked for acts of domestic violence.
- One driver had his licence revoked on health grounds as he had been unable to provide the necessary information with regards to whether he is medically fit.
- A driver who struggled with his English was granted a licence provided his English was improved to a standard acceptable to the Environmental Health Manager.

7. Taxi Tokens

DP explained that the authority for concessionary travel had been taken away from the District Council and the County now had responsibility for this area.

This means that the taxi token system will no longer be operated. Whilst the concerns of the trade were appreciated it was explained that there were no other options available to the Council.

8. Cash Desk

The trade was advised that the cash desk was closing in the Council offices on 28 April 2011.

If payments are made by card they will still be receipted as normal. However, if payments are made by cash or cheque they will have to be placed in an envelope for depositing in the cash box.

9. Health & Safety

Lee Jamieson, Environmental Health Officer spoke to the trade about Health & Safety and a copy of the HSE Violence at work, a guide for employers was provided to those present.

The key risks were discussed such as transporting passengers who are under the influence of alcohol; lone working; late nights, early mornings etc...

Recommendations included:

- Establish problems by talking to staff and keeping open house and informal discussions;
- Keep a record log of violent incidents to include date, time, people involved;
- Log/review key areas consider what to do & what action to implement;
- Control risks by providing training, instruct drivers not to fight back and refuse jobs if appropriate

The trade were also asked to consider sharing information with each other.

10. Any other business

The trade brought up issues with the phones and DP advised that if they kept a record of any problems such as date & time, how long they are kept waiting, he will investigate as all calls are logged and can be tracked.

Concern was expressed with the delay in the money from tokens being credited to their bank account and the fact that this can cause cash flow problems. DP explained that this is something that should be addressed with the Finance department.

DP confirmed that he was reviewing fees and anticipates that if there is an increase it would only be slight based on the way the budget looks. At the moment he did not anticipate that there would be any need to make any substantial changes. However, some changes would definitely need to be made to cover additional fees, such as the cost of plating a vehicle over 10 years old to reflect the increase in the number of vehicle tests required.

JR informed the trade about 'MyPlaceMySay business' forum on the Council website:

<http://www.myplacemysay.co.uk/home/Default.aspx?alias=www.myplacemysay.co.uk/home/business>

You can get help and advice from the Council and post messages in our 'Early Warning' forum to tell other businesses about any crime related incidents.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting will be June/July and details will follow.