

MINUTES of a meeting of the HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE GROUP held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Coalville on TUESDAY, 24TH FEBRUARY 2004.

Present: Councillor D Howe (Deputy Chairman) (In the Chair)

Councillor P A Hyde

Officers: Messrs T Beirne, R Eaton and J E Peters and Miss M Lister

Hackney carriage and private hire drivers:

Messrs R Harold, R Ketcher, I Khawaja, G Lavine, G J Marshall, G M Marshall, Miss G Marshall, Messrs D Morris, T Mullahy, S Sear, S Smith, D Underwood, M Yates and T Yates

Apologies: Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J G Coxon and R A Evans and Mr B Ali.

There were no declarations of interest.

663. MINUTES

... Consideration was given to the minutes of the meeting held with licensed drivers and operators on Monday, 22 September 2003 (copy previously circulated and retained with the official copy of the minutes).

Mr Eaton gave an update on the Group's resolutions and follow up action in respect of a traffic regulation order on Ashby Road, Osgathorpe (outside the Stockyard and Jimmy Deans Club), a request to review the operational times on the Market Street taxi rank in Ashby de la Zouch and action arising from a meeting held to discuss the problems of private vehicles parking on the taxi rank/bus clearway in Marlborough Square, Coalville.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be received and noted.

664. THE OFFICE OF FAIR TRADING'S REPORT ON THE REGULATION OF LICENSED TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE SERVICES IN THE UK

... Consideration was given to the report of the Manager of Central Support (copy previously circulated and retained with the official copy of the minutes).

The purpose of the report was to note the contents and recommendations of the Office of Fair Trading's market study and report on the regulatory framework affecting licensed taxis and private hire vehicles.

The study looked at existing regulations on the market for licensed taxis, examined the effectiveness of competition in the market and how well the market was working for consumers. The main focus of the study was the effects of licence restrictions imposed by many local authorities on the supply of licensed taxis.

Chairman's initials

The study looked at quantity restrictions, quality and safety controls and fare regulation in the market. The Office of Fair Trading recommended that the legislation allowing local authorities to limit the number of taxis in an area should be repealed. In the meantime authorities that did have quantity restrictions were encouraged to remove them.

The Office of Fair Trading's report concluded by giving details of how the removal of quantity restrictions, the dissemination of local best practice and a maximum fare cap would benefit businesses, consumers and individuals wishing to enter the taxi market.

RESOLVED:

That the findings and recommendations from the Office of Fair Trading's report into the regulation of licensed taxi and private hire vehicle services in the UK be noted.

665. DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION ACT 1995 - TAXI ACCESSIBILITY REGULATIONS

... Consideration was given to the statement made by Tony McNulty MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport on Tuesday, 28 October 2003 announcing the Government's proposals to implement the taxi provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 in England and Wales (copy previously circulated and retained with the official copy of the minutes).

Mr Eaton reported that it was the Department for Transport's intention to target first those areas where accessible taxis were likely to make the biggest impact in meeting the needs of disabled people and where additional cost would not have a major detrimental effect. These were called "first phase" licensing authorities.

A list of first phase authorities had been identified. Each had to meet at least one or more of the following four criteria.

A licensing authority population of at least 120,000;

A major transport interchange;

A major tourist attraction; or

An existing mandatory policy resulting in 100% accessible vehicles.

It was noted that North West Leicestershire District Council had been included in the "first phase" which would be introduced over the period 2010-2020.

A licensee commented that he believed that the proposals announced would result in a major reduction in the availability of taxis. Taxi numbers in the District had decreased since November 2001 and there was a danger that the additional cost of approved vehicles for the use by disabled passengers would further limit the number of licensed taxis. In general, models of vehicle which met detailed specifications for accessibility were significantly more expensive than saloon cars allowed by many licensing authorities.

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Furthermore the licensee pointed out that local authorities would need to carefully consider the effect of having accessible vehicles on appropriate parking provision. There would need to be appropriate parking sites for the taxis to safely pick up and drop off people with physical disabilities, wheelchair users and other disabled consumers.

666. HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARE TABLE

... Consideration was given to the current hackney carriage fare table and a proposal from Coalville Yellow Cabs that no price increase be made to the hackney carriage fare table this year (copies previously circulated and retained with the official copy of the minutes).

David Underwood spoke in support of the proposal from Coalville Yellow Cabs. His company recognised that taxis provided an important service for the public generally and especially those on lower incomes who were most reliant on them. He felt that the District Council fare table was set at the correct level and pointed out that the majority of local companies chose not to charge the maximum level of fares for taxis in order to protect the interests of their customers.

Several drivers spoke in support of an increase to the fare for up to and including one mile. There was a need to balance the interests of consumers with the extra costs that drivers were faced with. These included an increase in the Criminal Records Bureau enhanced disclosure fee, an increase in licence application fees, increased insurance costs and fuel costs.

With regard to the soiling charge, the majority of drivers believed that £20 was an inadequate charge especially since the soiling of a vehicle meant that the vehicle would be withdrawn from service for a considerable period of time. Although the District Council could not assist in the pursuit of the soiling charge payment, drivers argued that they would be more willing to pursue a claim through the small claims court for a larger charge.

RECOMMENDED:

THAT THE HACKNEY CARRIAGE FARE TABLE BE INCREASED AS FOLLOWS:

- (A) THE MINIMUM DISTANCE OF UP TO AND INCLUDING ONE MILE BE INCREASED TO £2.80.
- (B) THE SOILING CHARGE BE INCREASED TO £40.

667. CRIMINAL RECORDS BUREAU

Licensees noted the Government's announcement of an increase to the enhanced disclosure fee from £29 to £33 taking effect from 1 April 2004.

Although the Criminal Records Bureau was currently complying with its aim to process 90% of enhanced disclosure applications within 3 weeks of the CRB receiving a completed application form, there had been a few instances where applications had not met that service standard.

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Drivers noted that the District Council was no longer issuing short term licences when a satisfactory CRB disclosure was still awaited. Drivers were reminded to apply for the enhanced disclosure in good time and that claims for compensation or loss of income could be made to the Criminal Records Bureau.

668. THE DISABLED PERSONS TRANSPORT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (DPTAC) - GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

It was noted that DPTAC had published a 27 page good practice guide to make private hire services more accessible to disabled people. The guide gave practical advice on measures to help private hire vehicle operators and drivers improve their service to disabled people. A copy of the guide would be sent to each private hire operator.

669. JOINT POLICE/DISTRICT COUNCIL ENFORCEMENT EXERCISES

There was a general discussion about the system for the testing of vehicles at the last two joint police/district council enforcement exercises in April and November 2003. Several drivers were concerned at the short notice given to proprietors to present a vehicle for testing. Companies were worried about the direct affect on any pre-bookings and inconvenience to their customers. In addition, a number of drivers felt that the current inspection system meant that some drivers could easily avoid being called for an inspection and others would also avoid testing if the exercises did not coincide with a driver's regular work patterns.

Officers defended the random testing of vehicles but accepted that it was obviously important that all vehicles were regularly inspected especially those with concerns affecting their safety. It was an extremely useful provision and was essential for ensuring that vehicles operating within the Council's area were satisfactory and safe.

RESOLVED:

That officers review the organisation of joint police/council enforcement exercises and the inspection and testing of vehicles.

670. MARLBOROUGH SQUARE TAXI RANK

Mr Eaton updated licensees and members on the follow up action arising from the meeting with councillors, drivers, Leicestershire Constabulary and Arriva.

Mr Underwood stated that the presence of a traffic warden during the day had improved matters. However, the problem persisted after 4.00pm each evening and at weekends when there was no enforcement presence.

671. LICENCE APPLICATION FEES

Licensees noted that the licence application fees were to be increased by the rate of inflation.

The meeting terminated at 7.30pm.

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