

TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE CAR CONSULTATION GROUP

ABERDEEN, 4 September 2024. Minute of Meeting of the TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE CAR CONSULTATION GROUP. Present:- Councillor Al-Samarai, Chairperson; and Councillors Clark, Delaney, Henrickson and Lawrence; and Alan Catto (Independent), Chris Douglas (Private Hire Trade), Russell McLeod (Licensed Taxi Offices), Luke Hulse (Independent), Hussein Patwa (Disability Equity Partnership) and Peter Campbell (Railway Station and Unite) .

In attendance:- Sandy Munro, Alexa Last and Daniel Wright (Licensing Team); Derek Jamieson and Kevin Flannigan (Fleet Services), Vycki Ritson (Engineering Team); Lucy Simpson (Development Officer); Dave Brown and Anna Beatham (Open Optimised Environments, External Consultants) and Mark Masson and Gogo Okafor (Committee Services0.

Please note that if any changes are made to this minute at the point of approval, these will be outlined in the subsequent minute and this document will not be retrospectively altered.

WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of John Weir, Fleet Manager.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST OR TRANSPARENCY STATEMENTS

2. There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements intimated.

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING OF 2 MAY 2024 - FOR APPROVAL

3. The Consultation Group had before it the minute of its previous meeting of 2 May 2024.

The Consultation Group resolved:-

to approve the minute, subject to adding Mr Patwa's first name to the attendees on page 1.

ENFORCEMENT OFFICER REPORT

4. The Consultation Group had before it for consideration, the Enforcement Officer's report which provided details relating to Taxi/Private Hire Car issues and information.

The report provided details of (a) the current numbers of licensed vehicles and drivers compared to August 2023; (b) street knowledge test statistics during the period 30 April to 20 August 2024; and (c) the Council's medical provider.

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Daniel Wright provided a summary of the key findings of the report, noting (1) that the Council was in the process of changing its medical provider, therefore drivers should be advised that those not submitting their own medical certificates were likely to face a delay in their licence/renewal being granted; (2) that there was a historical high number of private hire vehicles; (3) that taxi driver numbers were still decreasing, however the rate had slowed down; and (4) that the number of people passing the street knowledge test had risen.

In terms of the 'Number of Tests Passed (Excluding Re-Tests)', Daniel indicated that the percentage figure should read 21% and not 9% as outlined within the report.

In relation to drivers submitting their own medical certificates, Mr Sandy Munro, Legal Adviser indicated that correspondence should be provided by a medical professional e.g. GP, stating simply that the driver meets DVLA Group 2 standards and that guidance in this regard would be updated on the Council's website.

The Consultation Group resolved:-

- (i) to note the information provided; and
- (ii) to note that the Chairperson would liaise with the appropriate Director to determine the timescale for changing its medical provider, and would advise members in due course.

MIXED TAXI FLEET - RUSSELL MCLEOD

5. The Consultation Group had before it a paper which set out the Taxi trade's proposals for a mixed fleet.

The paper (1) advised that in their view the split should be 60% saloon vehicle and 40% WAV vehicle, noting that this could not be achieved immediately and that they were conscious of LEZ restrictions applicable to Taxis which would come into effect in June 2025; (2) indicated that the number of current WAV vehicles would need to be replaced prior to June 2025, noting that if they were not, the WAV numbers could drop; (3) intimated that they would prefer to retain the policy that all new taxi licences were WAV, noting that WAV vehicles were extremely expensive, therefore there may be an opportunity for new applicants to purchase vehicles that drivers were replacing with saloons; and (4) advised that they would also advocate some form of incentive by the Council to encourage and to help drivers when they first licence a WAV vehicle, possibly with a reduced cost (£40) test fee,

In addition, the paper suggested (a) that the Stage 1 aim would be to initially get to a 50/50 split in 12 months, noting that if there was potential to achieve this instantly, there would be a need for 53 WAV drivers to convert to saloon, which in their opinion was too many, therefore it should be done in a controlled manner; (b) that from the outset, the licensing authority should allow 25 WAV drivers to convert to saloon giving them 12 months to make that switch, noting that by this time next year (2025) any loss of WAV

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vehicles due to LEZ would be apparent and a clearer picture would emerge, then move to Stage 2, which aimed to reach a 60% - 40% split by October 2026; and (c) that drivers who had held a WAV Licence the longest (from 1995 forward) would get the option to convert to saloon first, as this would be the fairest way, noting that this option should only be available for individual licence holders and not companies.

Russell McLeod spoke in support of the paper submitted by the taxi trade and responded to questions from members explaining the rationale for a 60% - 40% split.

The Consultation Group resolved:-

to note that the Taxi trade's submission for a mixed fleet would form part of the officer's report to the Licensing Committee.

TRANSPARENCY STATEMENT

At this juncture, and given that there was mention of the Aberdeen Alcohol and Drug Partnership, Mr Hussein Patwa advised that he had a connection in relation to the following item by virtue of him being a Vice Chair of Aberdeen Integrated Joint Board and a Non-Executive member of NHS Grampian Board. Having applied the objective test, he did not consider that he had an interest and would not be withdrawing from the meeting.

FIRST AID KIT REQUEST - LUCY SIMPSON

6. The Consultation Group had before it a paper from Lucy Simpson, Development Officer which provided details in relation to a request for taxi and private hire drivers to carry Naloxone within their first aid kits.

The paper (1) provided details in relation to the numbers of drug related deaths in Aberdeen City; (2) explained that Naloxone was a quick acting and safe medication which could reverse opioid overdose and buy time for an ambulance to arrive; (3) indicated that Naloxone was available as a pre-filled syringe, or as Nyxoid, which was a nasal spray and was safe to administer even if you did not know what substance had been taken; (4) explained that the Alcohol and Drug Partnership (ADP) had been looking to widen the reach of Naloxone across the city, beyond alcohol and drug services, to ensure that naloxone was available in the vicinity of anyone experiencing an overdose; (5) advised that having Naloxone in taxis could serve as a crucial first response, complementing existing emergency medical services and improving overall community resilience; and (6) intimated that the ADP requested that drivers carry Naloxone nasal spray within their first aid kits.

The Group heard Lucy Simpson advise that the Council would provide drivers with free Naloxone nasal spray kits and training (90 mins) to administer the medication would be provided in-person or online.

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Taxi trade members were very supportive of the initiative, noting that they would feed this information back to their drivers and would liaise with licensed operators.

It was noted that should drivers require to restock their Naloxone kit due to it being used, damaged or expired they could do so by contacting Lucy Simpson at lumcnicol@aberdeencity.gov.uk

The Consultation Group resolved:-

to encourage all taxi and private hire drivers to sign-up to carry Naloxone nasal spray within their first aid kits.

**PROCEDURE FOR TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE LICENCE HOLDERS -
REMOVING AND REINSTATING METERS IN HIRE AND REWARD VEHICLES -
CHRIS DOUGLAS**

7. The Consultation Group had before it a paper from Chris Douglas which sought clarity on the procedure for taxi and private hire vehicle licence holders relating to removing and reinstating meters in hire and reward vehicles.

The paper (1) sought details in relation to current regulations and whether all operators were compliant in insisting that any driver who was recruited must install a meter in their car in order to do their job; (2) noted that another recent licensed operator in the city did not insist that their drivers install meters and this had created inherent challenges for the other operators as they would always require drivers to have meters which we believe protected both the customer and the driver to a fair and transparent pricing structure; (3) explained that this would result in a two tier system of pricing which was not something they we subscribe to; (4) indicated that given this was a new way of working, suggested that they would also expect to see a disclosed list from the Council as to which licenced drivers were operating with a meter installed so they could be aware of the drivers we could not work with explaining that they could not have drivers working for two operators where one had an expectation of the metered rate being charged and the other did not, without disclosure of those licensee's to the trade.

The Group heard from Sandy Munro, Legal Adviser who advised that there may be a requirement to amend current procedures/regulations. He explained that taxis were required to install meters and to use them for all journeys/fares, however private hire vehicles do not have to install meters, noting that if they did, they would need to use them, but if they did not have meters installed, they would be required to agree a fare up front with the passenger for their journey.

It was acknowledged that that any suggested changes to the procedures in this regard or to the taxi inspection manual would be considered by the Group.

The Group resolved:-

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to note the information provided.

QUEEN STREET PROJECT - ANNA BEATHAM

8. The Consultation Group had before it by way of a late circulation, details relating to the redevelopment of Queen Street to create the opportunity to introduce new uses into the area, as well as new public spaces.

The Group heard from the consultants, Anna Beatham and Dave Brown, Open Optimised Environments who provided a presentation on the proposals of the project which would improve the amenity of the area and encourage economic and environmental sustainability in this key City Centre location.

The Group were asked to consider the existing taxi rank usage on Queen Street and the proposed parking proposals i.e. the feasibility of one rank instead of two or if a drop-off zone would be better suited.

The Group were advised that the Council's design team were now finalising their designs for the urban park in advance of a planning application being submitted in September 2024.

During discussion, the following was noted:-

- that a taxi rank in the vicinity required to be larger (4 or 5 spaces) given the nearest alternative rank was some distance away at Back Wynd;
- that due to the developments for a new Market and given Hadden Street rank was closed at this time, could the location of a rank on Exchequer Row or at the Castlegate be considered;
- that a holistic approach was required to identify suitable options for taxi ranks in the city centre;
- that a rank of only one or two spaces would unlikely be used by drivers;
- that there was no scope to provide additional taxi rank bays in the Queen Street project due to safety issues and current loading bays/disabled parking/car club bays; and
- that there was a need to keep disabled parking bays and drop-off points for taxis separate.

Sandy Munro, Legal Adviser indicated that the Taxi Demand Survey would include details of taxi rank usage and potential for additional ranks in the city centre.

Given the concerns expressed by the Group with regards to the very short time they had been given to discuss and consider the taxi issues in terms of the Queen Street project, there was general agreement amongst members that the planning application should not be considered by the Planning Development Management Committee in September. It

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was suggested that officers should enter into meaningful dialogue with the taxi trade in this regard.

The Consultation Group resolved:-

- (i) to note that Vycki Ritson would investigate whether the Hadden Street taxi rank would have reduced bays following completion of the new Market development and would circulate a response to members in due course; and
 - (ii) to note that the views and concerns of the members would be considered by the design team, noting that if the planning application could not be delayed, consideration would be given to amending the wording to include deliberations around taxi rank provision in the surrounding area and whether some flexibility could be built into the application.
- **COUNCILLOR GILL AL-SAMARAI, Chairperson**