

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE: Licensing

DATE: 23 November 2011

DIRECTOR: Stewart Carruth

TITLE OF REPORT: Review of Night-time Ranks and Closed Ranks
Condition- Taxi Consultation Group Recommendation

REPORT NUMBER: CG/11/140

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee of a recommendation from the Taxi Consultation Group ("the TCG").

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Committee:

- a) note the TCG recommendation; and
- b) instruct officers to review the operation of the night time ranks and closed ranks in light of the information and recommendations in the Taxi Demand Survey ("the Survey") and report back to Committee with further information and recommendations.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

None.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

None.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

a) General Background

- i. Night time taxi ranks ("the night ranks") were introduced on Union Street on 12 September 2008. A fourth rank was introduced at the Castlegate on 17 September 2011. The night ranks operate during the hours of 00:00 to 05:00 and until recently were only open on Friday/Saturday and Saturday/Sunday nights.

The Committee's reason for introducing the night ranks was to improve public safety.

Due to the success of the night time ranks and following requests from the taxi trade, the Committee decided to operate the night ranks 7 nights a week between the hours of 00:00 to 05:00 to create greater consistency on the operating times of the ranks for both the public and taxi drivers.

The taxi trade was advised of the new system by letter. The Transportation, Strategy and Programmes Team provided 10,000 beer mats to licensed premises to advise members of the public regarding operating hours of the night ranks. In addition, over 5,500 leaflets and posters distributed through colleges, universities, major employers and by Transport Marshals.

Posters were laminated and displayed as a short term measure at all Union Street and side ranks. Permanent information signs have been located at the side ranks stating hours of closures and directing users and drivers to Union Street ranks. The new operation has also been advertised on the Council website.

Closed Ranks-

At its meeting on 1 June 2011 the Committee resolved to approve the following variation of condition to the taxi driver's licence: "At any time when any designated taxi rank is closed the driver of a taxi shall not park, stop his taxi, ply for hire or otherwise canvass or importune for employment at that closed taxi rank".

The condition has the effect that a taxi driver picking up at a closed rank is committing an offence, punishable by a maximum fine of £1000. The proposed condition was intended to resolve the problem by clarifying the position for taxi drivers and enabling the police to take enforcement action against drivers who breached the condition.

b) Taxi Consultation Group (TCG) Recommendation

At its meeting on 24 October 2011 the TCG had before it correspondence from Aberdeen Taxi Group (ATG) and Unite Union (please see appendix 1), which alerted the group to the concerns of taxi drivers affiliated to these bodies following the closure of the side street ranks (Sunday to Thursday) to coincide with the introduction of the new weekly night taxi ranks guidelines.

The Taxi Consultation Group agreed i) to recommend to the Licensing Committee that consideration be given to the re-opening of the side street taxi ranks at all times during Sunday to Thursday; and ii) that officers write to members of the group clarifying the position in terms of whether the Taxi Marshals were to operate at the new taxi rank on Castle Street.

The TCG was also concerned that Transport Marshals are not located at the new night rank at Castlegate. However, this had been previously highlighted to the Committee and Marshals cannot be provided due to budgetary constraints. Officers will continue to review this situation.

In relation to the request to re-open the side street taxi ranks at all times during Sunday to Thursday, officers indicated that the Survey would assist in the consideration of this issue.

The Survey, which has been conducted independently, provides information on and makes recommendations in respect of the operation of ranks in the city centre, including night ranks. It is considered appropriate to investigate the recommendations from the Survey before making any decision to depart, or not, from the current arrangement.

Reintroducing variations to the operating times of the night ranks without proper consideration would likely create further confusion amongst members of the public and therefore would have a detrimental impact on the taxi trade. In addition, because the new system has not had time to settle in it is too soon to effectively evaluate how it is operating.

It is recommended that Grampian Police (City Centre Policing) are officially consulted in relation to any future reports as well as the Council's Transportation, Strategy and Programmes and Community Safety officers.

For the Committee's information, the Police have advised that the operating times of the night ranks are now simpler to understand, reverting to the previous position would create greater confusion for all parties involved and therefore continuity in the operation of the night ranks is preferable.

Submissions from Transportation and Community Safety can be viewed at Appendix 2.

For clarification, any amending procedures will require to be considered in conjunction with the general reporting to and statutory procedures for the Enterprise Planning and Infrastructure Committee.

The Committee will also be required to consider the corporate impact on other Council policies.

6. IMPACT

Corporate – the Council's Safer Aberdeen and Night-time Transport Zone policies will be adversely affected if the Committee reverses its decision.

Public - This is of interest to members of the public who take taxis home from the city centre.

Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment- It is not considered that an EHRIA is required, as it appears that there is nothing in the report that discriminates or disadvantages in terms of the equality strands.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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Litigation and Licensing Team

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1. Submission by ATG

NIGHT TIME RANKS

No doubt you are already aware of the reaction to the new Night Time Rank guidelines? For what ever reason what we set out to achieved seems to have been misinterpreted. It is our opinion that we need to address this with the utmost urgency

Aberdeen's Taxi Representatives worked alongside ACC & Grampian Police to introduce Night Time Ranks, and have done all we can to encourage our trade to use these Ranks, even though many of those we represent were against their introduction. It was Aberdeen Taxi Representatives who first floated the idea of opening the Night Time Ranks 7 days a week some time ago (2009). Our thinking behind this was two fold.

- 1) It would allow us to give customers more choice and easier access to Taxis
- 2) It would also overnight create a considerable amount of much needed extra Ranks spaces.

What has transpired is the total opposite:

- 1) Customers have LESS choice as to where to get a Taxi
- 2) Overnight we have LOST half of our Night Time Rank spaces.

As someone who along with others attended every meeting regarding Night Time Ranks since they were first discussed back in late 2005 I can not believe I and others misheard or misunderstood what we were asking for and what we were agreeing to, and got it so wrong.

What we were asking for was that ALL Taxi Ranks would be available for Customers Midnight - 5am, apart from Saturday & Sunday, Midnight - 5am during which times only Night Time Ranks would be operational. As I have already said Aberdeen's Taxi trade are well aware of the safety concerns during weekends, and are were happy to service Night Time Taxi Ranks at these times. Out with weekends there are more Taxis than customers, and by opening all Ranks it would give both customers and drivers more choice. I would ask that we arrange a meeting to discuss where this went wrong and act with speed to rectify a totally unworkable situation.

2. Submission from UNITE

Taxi Ranks

The main concern is the current policy on Sunday to Thursday, midnight to 5am where it's only the Union St ranks open. The most popular request for change is the Bridge Street rank to be included with the possibility of Union

Terrace being used as a feeder rank to Bridge Street, and Back Wynd used as a feeder to the one past the graveyard on Union Street.

The feeder ranks would keep the queue of cars off Union St when business is quiet and away from pedestrian crossings.

The Bridge Street rank being included is a must to fill the void of over half a mile between the one outside Soul bar and the one at the graveyard, where the area in the middle is extremely busy when pubs and nightclubs close.

TCG to recommend --

(i) Taxi Ranks in side streets to be re-opened at all times from Sun to Thurs

(ii) a Bridge Street rank to be established for Fri and Sat nights with a feeder rank from Union Terrace

(iii) that the Back Wynd be a feeder rank for the Fri/Sat night rank on Union Street outside the graveyard.

1. Submission from Transportation, Strategy and Programmes (Aberdeen City Council)

MEMO

Planning and Sustainable Development
Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure
Ground Floor North, Marischal College



ABERDEEN
CITY COUNCIL

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|-------|---|-----------|----------|
| To | Councillor Kirsty West, Convenor, Licensing Committee, Town House | | |
| From | Vycki Shade, Planning and Sustainable Development | | |
| Email | vyckis@aberdeencity.gov.uk | Date | 11.11.11 |
| Tel. | 522704 | Our Ref. | |
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Night Time Transport Zone

Officers from the Transportation, Strategy and Programmes team have worked with representatives from within the Council, Grampian Police and the taxi trade over a number of years to develop options which support safe and secure transport provisions for those visiting and working in Aberdeen City Centre at night time.

We believe that the operation of the Union Street night time taxi ranks between midnight and 5am, 7 days a week, supported by the closure of the 'daytime' side ranks at these times, fully support the objectives for the Night Time Transport Zone as set out in the report to the Licensing Committee in January 2008 namely:

"The overall proposal is to move public transport options into a centralised **transport zone** that is well lit, policed and monitored. Transport should be easily recognised and used, providing quick transfers out of the City Centre. This should enable policing to take place with minimum impact to resources in surrounding areas and enable the transfer of customers to areas outside the City Centre with reduced impact on residential areas. "

We support the recommendation to this Committee to review the results of the recent taxi demand survey and to monitor the new rank arrangements over a period of time, for example 6 months, prior to considering if any further changes to rank operational timings or locations will be necessary.

Vycki Shade
Senior Engineer

2. Submission from Community Safety (Aberdeen City Council)

Night Time Taxi Ranks

"The reasons for introducing the night time taxi ranks remain the same, i.e. improve public safety for customers and taxi drivers by placing the ranks in brightly lit main streets with wide pavements and good CCTV coverage. This allows the Taxi Marshals to operate in a safe and efficient manner in support of the efforts by Grampian Police to reduce crime and disorder. Therefore to make any significant changes at this time could lead to confusion and decrease public safety. However it would seem prudent to carry out a proper evaluation to measure the impact made by the current night time taxi ranks, this would allow for an evidenced based approach to future proposals for change."