

TAXI CONSULTATION GROUP

MINUTE OF MEETING OF 4th MARCH 2013

Present: Councillor Marie Boulton (Convener), and Councillors Forsyth and MacGregor; and Steve Robertson (Substituting for Tommy Campbell (Unite the Union), Gordon Anderson (Independent Drivers), Graeme McColl (Aberdeen Taxi Group), Bill Price (Railway Taxi Drivers) and Alastair Williamson (Disability Advisory Group).

In Attendance: Eric Anderson (Senior Solicitor, Litigation and Licensing), Paul Connolly (Solicitor, Litigation and Licensing), Vycki Ritson, (Senior Engineer, Enterprise Planning & Infrastructure), Charlie Turton (Taxi Inspection Centre, Fleet Services), Sergeant Keith Middler (Grampian Police) and Mark Masson (Legal and Democratic Services).

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING OF 6 NOVEMBER 2012

1. The Consultation Group had before it the minute of its previous meeting of 6th November 2012.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to approve the minute, subject to replacing “instruct” with “request” where it reads in the resolutions.

MATTERS ARISING

2. (A) Fire Extinguishers

With reference to article 3(A) of the minute, the Consultation Group had before it correspondence from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), dated 24th January 2013, which provided details in relation to fire extinguishers in work vehicles.

A website link to the guidance was as follows: -

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/workplacetransport/faq.htm#fireextinguishers>

The advice from the HSE was that fire extinguishers would be best placed in the cab rather than the boot.

Sergeant Keith Middler indicated that there had been no reported incidents of passengers wilfully discharging fire extinguishers or using them as weapons.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

(B) Roof Signs

With reference to article 3(B) of the minute, the Consultation Group had before it (a) a copy of a letter issued by licensing officers to all Taxi Booking Office licence holders, dated 15th January 2013 of the Conditions Applicable

to Taxi Licences (both City & Airport) relating to roof signs on taxis; (b) a response from Russell McLeod, Rainbow Cars Ltd, dated 1st March 2013; and (c) details of the Testing Supplement relating to roof signs.

The copy letter advised the relevant section of condition 16 was, as follows:-
“The holder of this licence shall display upon the roof of the taxi a sign of a type approved by the licensing authority for the purpose of identifying the vehicle as a taxi, which sign shall be capable of being illuminated, shall work automatically in conjunction with the taximeter fitted to the vehicle, and must be extinguished on the meter being switched to the “hired” or “stopped” position;...”

Also outlined were the types of roof signs permitted by the Taxi Inspection Centre, as follows:-

- (a) Standard roof sign – full width of car roof;
- (b) Fiat Doblo style sign (for sloping roofs) – 2 different sizes; and
- (c) Smaller style roof sign (for airport taxis).

The Consultation Group agreed to recommend to the Committee that:-

- (i) it instructs a a report on the issue of roof signs for consideration at a future Licensing Committee; and
- (ii) it agrees to a moratorium on the specific usage of the roof signs until after consideration of the report.

(C) Appropriate Extra Load Rated Tyres for Taxis

With reference to article 14(A) of the minute, the Consultation Group had before it a copy of the letter issued by licensing officers to all taxi licence holders, dated 9th November 2012, which provided information and advice relating to the use of appropriate tyres for their taxi vehicle.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the correspondence.

(D) Remit of the Group – Roads (other than Taxi Ranks Issues)

The Convener reminded the Group that items 5-7 were matters outwith the remit of the Group and were appropriate to be considered by Environment, Planning and Infrastructure. Whilst she would take these matters forward to the appropriate parties herself on this occasion in future such matters outwith the remit of the Group will be either forwarded to the appropriate service for consideration or returned to the sender.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VEHICLES

3. With reference to article 4 of the minute of the previous meeting of 6th November 2012, the Consultation Group had before them the following question which was submitted by Unite the Union in relation to accessible vehicles:-

“In terms of the new policy, what happens to drivers who already have an exemption, do they have to reapply for exemption under the new policy?”

The Consultation Group had before them (a) a copy of the letter issued by licensing officers to all taxi licence holders, dated 3rd December 2012, which provided details of the Accessible Vehicle Policy, including recommendations on timeous substitution of taxis; and (b) a copy of the letter which is to issued to taxi and private hire car drivers whose licences are due for renewal.

The Group heard Paul Connolly, Solicitor, Litigation and Licensing make reference to the letters and advise that in terms of the decision taken by the Licensing Committee, all taxis in the Aberdeen taxi fleet must be wheelchair accessible from 6th June 2017. He recommended that drivers currently operating saloon cars should plan ahead and take steps to either substitute or renew their licence with an accessible vehicle at the earliest opportunity.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the correspondence and the information provided.

TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE CAR DRIVER'S LICENCE CONDITIONS

4. (A) Exemption from the Requirement to Carry a Wheelchair Passenger

The Consultation Group heard Paul Connolly provide information on medical exemptions from the requirement to carry a wheelchair passenger. He explained that these exemptions are set out in the Equality Act 2010.

Stevie Robertson sought advice in relation to waiting times, and specifically the appropriate time to start the taxi fare meter when waiting for passengers.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

- (i) to note the position; and
- (ii) to note that officers would clarify the position in terms of the activation of taxi fare meters at the next meeting of the group.

(B) Exemption from the Requirement to Carry a Passenger's Assistance Dog

The Consultation Group heard Paul Connolly advise that taxi and private hire car drivers are required to carry guide dogs unless the driver has a medical exemption from doing so.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

- (i) to note that a report on the issue of exemptions from the requirement to carry a passenger's assistance dog had been submitted to the Licensing Committee and a further report on the matter would be considered by the Licensing Committee on 26 March 2013; and

- (ii) to note that a copy of the first report had been submitted to the Disability Advisory Group for information and that the 26 March 2013 report would also be submitted for its information.

GUILD STREET/VIRGINIA STREET ACCESS

5. The Consultation Group had before them the following question which was submitted by Unite the Union and Aberdeen Taxi Group in relation to Guild Street/Virginia Street vehicle access:-

“Is the closure of the access from Virginia Street to Guild Street going to be made permanent?”

In response to the question, Vycki Ritson, Senior Engineer, Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure advised that a decision was taken by the Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure Committee on 22nd January 2013 to instruct officers to commence the necessary legal procedures (including consultation) for the introduction of a permanent ban on the movement of vehicles westbound from Virginia Street into Guild Street; and to extend the Temporary Traffic Regulation Order until 30 September 2013.

The Consultation Group heard Steve Robertson advise that there continues to be problems at the east entrance to Union Square as a result of the short slip road on Market Street. He explained that traffic was tailing back to the junction of Market Street/Virginia Street. In response, Ms. Ritson advised that alterations had recently been made to the lighting phase in the area, which should improve access and traffic flow.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

ACCESS TO RAILWAY STATION

6. The Consultation Group had before them the following request which was submitted by Aberdeen Rail Transport Drivers Association:-

“ARTDA drivers have certain issues that they would like to be discussed at the meeting regarding the access road into the Railway Station.”

The Consultation Group heard Bill Price advise that vehicles driven by members of the public still use the access road to the Railway Station which causes problems for the taxi drivers. He explained that there were only 60 spaces within the station for taxis, disabled drivers and blue badge holders and at times there was up to 100 cars entering/exiting the station particularly at the weekends. He also advised that taxi drivers not authorised to ply for trade after they have dropped off passengers at the station were still doing so.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note that the Convener would liaise with the Convener of Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure in relation to the above matter and would report back to the next meeting of the group.

ACCESS TO ABERDEEN ROYAL INFIRMARY

7. The Consultation Group had before them the following question which was submitted by Unite the Union:-

“Will the decision be revisited by the City Council in relation to the taxi vehicle restriction at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary?”

In response to the question, the Convener advised that although the Traffic Order was processed by the City Council, the initiative was developed by Nestrans and Aberdeen Royal Infirmary. She explained that Ken Neil, Senior Engineer, Planning and Sustainable Development was to provide her with more details, although a final decision on this matter would be taken by NHS Grampian Health Board.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE

8. The Consultation Group heard Graeme McColl advise that he had requested that this item be considered today as correspondence regarding the consultation exercise had been circulated and that a response was required by 15th March 2013.

The Consultation Group were advised that officers were preparing a response to the consultation and that the taxi trade should respond directly in terms of their own specific interests.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

TAXI RANK ISSUES

9. The Consultation Group had before them the following issue which was submitted by Unite the Union:-

“Continued problems with access to Union Street ranks because of the location of the bus stop at/near to Back Wynd and Chapel Street”

The Consultation Group heard from Steve Robertson, who advised that the Safety Partnership Group, which included officers from Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure had discussed the above issue and that various options to alleviate the problems were being considered, including the suggestion of moving two bus stops further up Union Street, employing temporary barriers and the use of Back Wynd as a feeder rank.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

CASTLE STREET/UNION STREET TAXI RANK

10. The Consultation Group had before them the following question which was submitted by Unite the Union:-

“There is still no Taxi Marshalls at this rank, will there be in the near future?”

The Consultation Group also had before them the following issue which was submitted by Aberdeen Taxi Group:-

“Night time taxi ranks: 4th rank on Union Street and extension of rank on Union Street.”

The Convener advised that the Council, at their meeting on 14th February 2013, had agreed to include two Taxi Marshalls for the Castle Street Taxi Rank as part of the budget process.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

AVAILABILITY OF PRE-BOOKING SERVICE AT PEAK TIMES

11. The Consultation Group had before them copies of two anonymised emails from members of the public about problems experienced in pre-booking taxi/private hire cars.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

TAXI ACCOUNTS UPDATE

12. With reference to article 9 of the minute of the previous meeting of 6th November 2012, the Consultation Group heard from Paul Connolly, Solicitor, Litigation and Licensing in relation to taxi accounts.

Mr Connolly explained that a report on the matter would be submitted to the next meeting of the Licensing Committee on 26th March 2013.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

TAXI INSPECTOR

13. The Consultation Group had before them the following question which was submitted by Unite the Union and Aberdeen Taxi Group:-

“In terms of the Police Service reorganisation, will there be a Taxi Sergeant, and if not who will test new taxi drivers?”

The Consultation Group heard Paul Connolly, Solicitor, Litigation and Licensing advise that alternative arrangements for the testing of taxi vehicles following Sergeant Keith Middler's departure have not been finalised. He indicated that there was no intention at this time to change the testing requirement and that it was anticipated that provision would be made to cover his duties.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

- (i) to note the information provided; and
- (ii) to request that the group be kept updated on the situation.

ABERDEEN CITY TAXI TEST

14. The Consultation Group had before them the following question which was submitted by Unite the Union and Aberdeen Taxi Group:-

“Aberdeen City Test: With hackney sergeant leaving, is it a good time to look at adding more to the Aberdeen City test?”

Graeme McColl advised that there may be an opportunity to improve the taxi test and suggested that officers investigate the possibility of including customer care and disability awareness as part of the test. He explained that the taxi trade may not be averse to raising costs to improve the quality of the test for drivers.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

15. (A) Fare Structure

The Consultation Group heard Paul Connolly, Solicitor, Litigation and Licensing advise that it was intended that a report in relation to the fare structure including details of the fare review would be submitted to the next meeting of the Licensing Committee on 26th March 2013.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

(B) Taxi Meter

The Consultation Group heard Graeme McColl suggest that appropriate notice be given to taxi drivers in relation to the change over of the taxi meter tariff.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note that the taxi trade would provide officers with date options for the two day process.

COUNCILLOR MARIE BOULTON, Convener