

TAXI CONSULTATION GROUP

MINUTE OF MEETING OF 4 JUNE 2013

Present: Councillor Fraser Forsyth (Convener), and Councillors Boulton and Malone; and Tommy Gilchrist (Airport Drivers), 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), Nigel Buchan (Taxi Inspection Centre, Fleet Services), Sergeant Keith Middler (Police Scotland) and Mark Masson (Legal and Democratic Services).

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING OF 4 MARCH 2013

1. The Consultation Group had before it the minute of its previous meeting of 4 March 2013.

The Consultation Group agreed:-
to approve the minute.

MATTERS ARISING

2. (A) Roof Signs

With reference to article 2(B) of the minute, the Consultation Group were advised that a report relating to Taxi Roof Signs is to be considered by the Licensing Committee at its next meeting on 18 June 2013.

The Consultation Group agreed:-
to note the information provided.

(B) Access to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary

With reference to article 7 of the minute, the Consultation Group heard Vycki Ritson provide background information in relation to the original scheme request and traffic order. She explained that major enforcement issues had occurred while the changes to the scheme were implemented and that any increase in the number of vehicles in the area would be detrimental to the benefits experienced by the bus service. She concluded by intimating that NHS Grampian and Council officers were reluctant to make any changes to the success of the new scheme due to the enforcement issues.

The Consultation Group agreed:-
to note the information provided.

FUTURE ROLE – TAXI SERGEANT

3. With reference to article 13 of the minute of the previous meeting of 4 June 2013, the Consultation Group heard Eric Anderson advise that the majority of the duties undertaken presently by Sergeant Keith Middler, would continue to be dealt with by the Divisional Coordination Unit, Police Scotland, however, in the short term, the taxi knowledge test would be arranged by officers from Legal Services. The general format of the test would remain the same, although there would no longer be a requirement for the applicant to undertake a driving test. Correspondence on the procedures would be issued to the taxi trade representatives in early course.

Mr Anderson explained that a review was currently being undertaken in relation to the service provided by the Council's Legal Services, following which a further update on the process would be provided.

The Consultation Group agreed:-
to note information provided.

TAXI FARE REVIEW

4. The Consultation Group were advised that work on the taxi fare review was progressing.

Graeme McColl indicated that there was a requirement to agree a fare formula and that there were matters still outstanding that needed clarified, namely the standard fixed price figure of a new car and the average insurance figures. In response Eric Anderson indicated that progress on these points would be made as soon as possible.

The Consultation Group agreed:-
to note the information provided.

TAXI LICENCE LIMIT – REVIEW UPDATE

5. The Consultation Group were advised that a report on the taxi licence limit process was to be considered by the Licensing Committee on 17 September 2013.

The Consultation Group agreed:-
to note the information provided.

TAXI RANK REVIEW

6. The Consultation Group were advised that various changes to the taxi ranks required to be implemented although officers from the Roads service were still considering the matter. A report would be submitted to the Licensing Committee on 17 September 2013 in this regard.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

REFUSAL BY TAXI DRIVERS TO CARRY ASSISTANCE DOGS

7. The Consultation Group had before them correspondence dated 5 April 2013 from the Disability Advisory Group which provided details in relation to several instances where taxi drivers had allegedly refused to take passengers to their destination due to the fact that they were accompanied by their guide dogs.

The letter also explained that the passengers had reminded the drivers of their duty to transport passengers and their working dogs unless the driver has a medical exemption. However, the drivers in question still refused as they did not want to have a dog in their cars.

Alastair Williamson provided further details, explaining that apparently certain refusals to carry assistance dogs were due to religious reasons.

Paul Connolly explained that although there was a requirement in the licensing conditions for taxi drivers to carry assistance dogs in terms of the Equality Act 2010, there were also protected characteristics relating to religion in the Act. Mr Connolly indicated that he would contact the Equalities and Human Rights Commission for clarification in this regard.

Mr Connolly advised that (1) a notice displayed at Taxi Inspection Centre explaining legal duties on drivers to carry guide, hearing and assistance dogs; and (2) taxi drivers licence conditions with relevant parts underlined had been circulated for information.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note that officers would seek clarification in relation to the above and would circulate a response to members of the Group in due course.

DISABILITY ACCESS TO TAXIS – DISABILITY ADVISORY GROUP (AND ACQUAINTANCES) QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE

8. The Consultation Group had before them correspondence dated 18 March 2013 from the Disability Advisory Group which outlined the findings of the consultation on accessible taxis, the types of vehicles used and the difficulties which some of the vehicles may cause for people who have a disability.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

DIFFICULTY BOOKING TAXIS BEFORE 9AM

9. The Consultation Group heard Alastair Williamson provide information on the difficulties experienced in obtaining a taxi hire between 7am and 9am and sought the Group's advice on the matter.

Graeme McColl indicated that there was no resolution to this, explaining that there were not enough taxis on the road during the above time, and the majority of the taxis working during those hours have repeat business/personal account fares. He also intimated that there was an increase in the number of calls received for taxi hire during this time, although drivers were often reluctant to work at a time when the roads were gridlocked.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

AIRPORT AND CITY TAXI ZONING

10. The Convener advised that correspondence had been received from Kevin Stewart MSP requesting that consideration be given to revisiting the Licensing Committee's decision to have Airport and City taxi zones rather than just one zone covering the whole city.

Members of the Group discussed the matter of taxi zoning at some length and acknowledged that there was a difficult balance to meet, however there was no support in revisiting the current position.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to take no further action in relation to Kevin Stewart MSP's request.

VALEDICTORY

11. As this was the last Consultation Group meeting at which Sergeant Keith Middler would be in attendance, the Convener on behalf of the Committee thanked Sergeant Middler for the work he has undertaken over the past 4½ years and wished him well during his retirement.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to concur with the remarks of the Convener.

- **COUNCILLOR FRASER FORSYTH, Convener.**