

## **TAXI CONSULTATION GROUP**

### **MINUTE OF MEETING OF 29 OCTOBER 2013**

Present: Councillor Fraser Forsyth (Convener), and Councillors Boulton, Delaney (as substitute for Councillor Malone), Graham and MacGregor; and Tommy Campbell (Unite the Union), Stewart Duncan (Airport Drivers), Gordon Anderson (Independent Drivers), Graeme McColl (Aberdeen Taxi Group), Bill Price (Railway Taxi Drivers) and Alastair Williamson (Disability Advisory Group).

In Attendance: Alyson Mollison ((Legal Manager, Litigation and Licensing), Eric Anderson (Senior Solicitor, Litigation and Licensing), Paul Connolly (Solicitor, Litigation and Licensing), Sergeant Barry Skinner and Sergeant Gillian Flett (Police Scotland), Richard Wheeler (People First - Article 12 of this minute refers), Alex Catto (RC Cabtech Ltd – Article 11(B) of this minute refers) and Mark Masson (Legal and Democratic Services).

### **MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING OF 4 JUNE 2013**

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

**The Consultation Group agreed:-**  
to approve the minute.

### **PROVISION OF TAXIS AT ABERDEEN AIRPORT**

2. The Consultation Group had before it correspondence from Stewart Duncan, Airport Site Manager, ComCab Aberdeen, which: (1) enquired whether or not it would be possible for private hire cars (red plates) to pick up at the airport at peak times, or to transfer their licences to airport zoned taxi licence (green plate) status. The reason for the proposal was that by 6 June 2017 all Taxis require to be wheelchair accessible taxi vehicles; (2) referred to anecdotal evidence, which suggested that taxi licence holders may opt to apply for private hire car licences to avoid the requirement to provide a wheelchair accessible vehicle; (3) advised that if this was the case there would be less taxis available to assist during busy periods thus increasing passenger waiting times

The group were advised that (a) at present passengers arriving at the airport can utilise the ComCab Aberdeen taxi office at the airport and request a private hire car should they so wish. Although, private hire cars can only pick up pre-booked hires therefore they cannot wait at a rank for passengers; (b) at present, there were currently 1049 taxi licences in Aberdeen and a long waiting list of prospective applicants; (c) the existing policy requires that all taxis I require to be wheelchair accessible by 6 June 2017; (d) explained that the standard taxi saloon car costs are equivalent to those for accessible taxis, with some standard saloon cars being more expensive; (e) taxi licence holders can apply for a private hire car licence if they wish; and (f) that if the

airport authorities wished to operate the taxi service in another way, then they could submit a request to the licensing authority.

**The Consultation Group agreed:-**

to note the information provided.

## **MEDICAL EXEMPTION IDENTIFICATION**

3. The Consultation Group had before it a letter dated 11 October, 2013 from Stephanie Dunsmuir, Clerk to the Disability Advisory Group (DAG).

The letter (1) referred to discussions between DAG and the Consultation Group relating to the transportation of assistance dogs in taxis; (2) indicated that one of DAG's visually impaired members had pointed out the difficulty for people with a visual impairment in being able to read/identify where a medical exemption applies to a taxi driver; and (3) suggested that it would be extremely helpful if there was a raised marking somewhere on the exemption certificate so that they would be aware that an exemption was in place.

**The Consultation Group agreed:-**

to request that officers contact other local authorities and determine what they use in this regard and report back to the Group on their findings.

## **TAXI FARE REVIEW**

4. Tommy Campbell advised that there had been no demand for a taxi fare increase amongst members at a recent Unite the Union branch meeting and suggested that, if there was to be a future fare increase proposed, then it should be based on the agreed fare formula or Retail Price Index (whatever the greatest).

Graeme McColl advised that he had yet to receive a copy of the proposed fare formula produced by Halcrow.

The group was thereafter advised that the taxi trade had been involved in the process and that the formula was the same as had been circulated and agreed at officer/taxi trade meetings.

The fare formula report had been deferred from the Licensing Committee meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> September, 2013 therefore a request for deputation at the next meeting was still an option for the taxi trade.

Furthermore, one of the Taxi Fare Review report recommendations was to maintain the tariff and surcharges at their current level.

**The Consultation Group agreed:-**

to note the information provided.

## **METER CHANGE**

5. The Consultation Group were advised that the recalibration of taxi meters has been arranged for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2013 at Calder Park, Aberdeen. Two years of information would be applied to the meters.

Graeme McColl reported that the Calder Park site was not suitable for taxis to access due to nails, pieces of metal, rubble, pot holes and some farm animals wandering within the location.

### **The Consultation Group agreed:-**

to request that officers investigate the condition of Calder Park as a matter of urgency and ensure that taxis are able to access the location safely.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW AND IMPROVED TAXI RANKS**

6. The Consultation Group were given an update in relation to the implementation of the taxi ranks in Aberdeen. It was explained that one of the ranks had been extended, that signage had been updated across all the ranks so that they provided the same information and that a new rank would be introduced on George Street.

### **The Consultation Group agreed:-**

to note the information provided.

## **ABERDEENSHIRE TAXIS**

7. The Consultation Group heard Tommy Campbell advise that he had received reports that Aberdeenshire registered taxis were operating out of Aberdeen taxi offices.

The group was advised that it is a criminal offence for Aberdeenshire taxis to ply for hire in the city or to wait on city ranks.

Sergeant Barry Skinner advised that Police Scotland had investigated only one complaint since June 2013 whereby an Aberdeenshire licensed taxi driver was reported for operating in the city. However the investigation revealed that the driver had been operating legitimately. He reminded taxi trade representatives that if Aberdeen taxi drivers witness an offence, they should note the taxi plate number and provide sufficient evidence to report it to Police Scotland, and be able to back up the complaint with a statement.

### **The Consultation Group agreed:-**

to note the information provided.

## **FINANCIAL RECORDS – LICENCE FEES**

8. The Consultation Group heard Tommy Campbell advise that a meeting had been arranged with a Licensing and a Finance officer for 6<sup>th</sup> November, 2013 to discuss financial records relating to licence fees.

**The Consultation Group agreed:-**

to note the information provided.

**TAXI INSPECTOR**

9. The Consultation Group heard Sergeant Barry Skinner advise that there was no longer a Taxi Inspector, and there would be no replacement Police officer in that role. He explained that the police role was now administrative, dealing with applications and complaints. He indicated that there is a robust database in place to properly administer the taxi application process including the identification of offences and incidents relating to taxi drivers.

The group was also advised that Aberdeen City Council had recently appointed a Civic Licensing Enforcement Officer.

**The Consultation Group agreed:-**

to note the information provided.

**TAXI PLATES**

10. Tommy Campbell sought feedback from officers in relation to increased delays (up to 3 weeks) incurred by taxi drivers when they undertake a change in taxi plates.

It was explained that there is a statutory consultation period of 28 days in respect of new and renewal taxi licences applications. For example, Police Scotland would use such period to carry out criminal record checks. Licences cannot be issued until after the 28 day period expires. However temporary taxi licence applications are not subject to the 28 day period.

**The Consultation Group agreed:-**

to note the information provided.

**TAXI ROOF SIGNS**

11. (A) Saloon Car Taxi Signs Smaller than Dimensions Set by Aberdeen City Council

Tommy Campbell advised that he had received reports that there were taxis operating within the city with small signs similar to those being used by Aberdeenshire Taxi Drivers. He sought clarification from officers in relation to the permitted taxi roof sign dimensions.

The group was advised that there are 3 types of taxi roof sign approved by the licensing authority. The position with roof sign requirements could be reviewed in liaison with officers from Fleet Services and a report provided to the group at the next meeting.

**The Consultation Group agreed:-**

to note that officers would report to the Licensing Committee in relation to the taxi roof signs.

(B) Roof Signs – Presentation by RC CABTECH LTD

The Group received a presentation from Alex Catto, in relation to a new taxi roof sign.

Mr Catto advised (a) that RC CABTECH LTD were a local supplier for the taxi trade in Aberdeen and the main part of their business was the supply and installation of taxi meters and related equipment; (b) that due to numerous requests from taxi drivers, a more aero dynamic roof sign for vehicles had been produced (24 inch LED) which could replace the previous 20 year old design; (c) that trials of the new roof signs have been undertaken which revealed that they were less noisy and eco friendly; (d) that the extra 2 miles per gallon of fuel would be beneficial for reducing the carbon footprint within the city; and (e) that the signage is easily switched on or off and would have the “City of Aberdeen” and “Taxi” compliant wording displayed on them.

**The Consultation Group agreed:-**

to note that officers would consider the information as part of the overall investigation of roof sign standardisation.

(C) Amended Taxi Licence Roof Sign Condition

The Consultation Group had before them for information, the amended taxi licence roof sign condition which had been agreed at the Licensing Committee on 17<sup>th</sup> September, 2013 as follows:-

Condition 16 - 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 must be illuminated when the vehicle is available for hire and must be extinguished on the meter being switched to the “hired” or “stopped” position; and while the taxi is available for shared hire the licence holder shall display on the taxi in a position approved by the licensing authority a sign of a type approved by the licensing authority for the purpose of indicating that the taxi is available for shared hire, which sign shall be visible from the front of the vehicle, shall display the words “shared hire” on an orange background, shall be illuminated, and shall be extinguished only when the taxi is being engaged in the exclusive mode.

**The Consultation Group agreed:-**

to note that officers would be writing to all licence holders in relation to the proposed variation to the condition.

## **TAXI DRIVER TRAINING/QUALIFICATION – ABERDEEN GOLD STANDARD**

12. The Consultation Group had before them details of a customer service initiative, for taxi and private hire drivers, known as Aberdeen Gold Standard (Taxi and Private Hire).

The programme involves a one day course costing £90. It was designed to help raise the overall quality, knowledge and skills of those working within the taxi industry, and would also contribute towards the city's ambition to become a Worldhost Recognised Destination.

The Consultation Group heard Richard Wheeler speak in support of the training course.

Dates, venues and booking details were available by accessing the following link: [www.aberdeengoldstandard.eventbrite.co.uk](http://www.aberdeengoldstandard.eventbrite.co.uk)

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

### **2014 MEETING DATES**

13. The Consultation Group had before them the dates and times for the 2014 meetings of the Group as follows:-

- 4<sup>th</sup> March at 10am
  - 16<sup>th</sup> June at 10am
  - 6<sup>th</sup> October at 10am
- all to be held in the Town House.

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

### **ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS**

14. (A) Taxi Test

The Consultation Group heard Graeme McColl (a) make reference to the current taxi test, specifically the changes that have occurred since Council officers made arrangements for the test; (b) indicate that applicants are now required to pass all four parts in one go before they pass their test, when previously, if they failed on a specific part, they were allowed to “bank” the parts they have passed until they resit their test; (c) explain that applicants were not told which parts they had failed on, so would not know how they could improve on their previous test; (d) advise that examples of ‘places of interest’ during the street knowledge test have included pharmacies; and (d) intimate that the route test no longer gives you alternative options to travel to a destination, given that there may be two or three correct routes to travel.

The group was advised that the general format of the test had not been changed. However, in an attempt to raise standards, they had introduced the

“pass all four parts of the test in one go”, which was being used by Edinburgh City Council. She advised that the list of ‘places of interest’ produced by the former Taxi Inspector was currently being used; that a common sense approach would be taken in terms of the route test and that applicants would be given the scores for each of the four parts of the test..

**The Consultation Group agreed:-**

- (i) to note that the Licensing Enforcement Officer would undertake a review of the taxi test in due course and would welcome feedback in this regard; and
- (ii) that a meeting could be arranged with taxi trade representatives and the Enforcement Officer.

(B) Bridge Street Taxi Rank

The group was advised that there is no longer a Bridge Street taxi rank, therefore taxis are not permitted to wait there.

**The Consultation Group agreed:-**

to note the information provided.

(C) Hailing Taxis

The group was advised that taxis could not stop and pick-up members of the public within 50 metres of an operational taxi rank. Otherwise they could pick up on the street.

**The Consultation Group agreed:-**

to note the information provided.

(D) Child Seats

The group was advised that taxis and private hire vehicles have an exemption to allow: 1) children under the age of three to travel in the back seat without a child’s car seat or seatbelt; and that 2) children over the age of three may travel in the back seat of their vehicle without the use of a child’s car seat provided they use the adult seatbelt.

**The Consultation Group agreed:-**

to note the information provided.

- **COUNCILLOR FRASER FORSYTH, Convener.**