

TAXI CONSULTATION GROUP

MINUTE OF MEETING OF 4 MARCH 2014

Present: Councillor Fraser Forsyth (Convener), and Councillors Boulton, Graham, MacGregor and Malone; and Tommy Campbell (Unite the Union), Gordon Anderson (Independent Drivers), Graeme McColl (Aberdeen Taxi Group), Steve Robertson (Substitute for Tommy Campbell – Unite the Union for part of meeting) and Stanley Flett (Substitute for Alastair Williamson - Disability Advisory Group).

In Attendance: Paul Connolly and Ruth O'Hare (Solicitors, Team 3, Litigation and Licensing), Sergeant Gillian Flett (Police Scotland) and Mark Masson (Democratic Services).

ORDER OF AGENDA

1. The Convener proposed that item 7 (Request for Feedback on Policing of Night Taxi Ranks), item 8 (Allegation that Aberdeenshire Licensed Taxi Drivers are Operating Through an Aberdeen Booking Office); and item 10 (Proposed CCTV Policy for Taxis and Private Hire Cars) be considered earlier on the agenda to allow Sergeant Flett to leave thereafter to attend another appointment.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to accept the proposal.

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING OF 29 OCTOBER 2013

2. The Consultation Group had before it the minute of its previous meeting of 29 October, 2013.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to approve the minute, subject to (1) amending the heading at article 3 to read "Medical Exemption Identification"; and (2) removing the words "Civic Licensing" at article 9.

MATTERS ARISING

3. (A) Medical Exemption Identification

The Group heard Paul Connolly advise that he had contacted other local authorities, and specifically Coventry City Council to determine whether they use raised markings on taxi exemption certificates to assist people with visual impairments, however he intimated that they did not.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

(i) to note that Mr Connolly would liaise with Alastair Williamson and Stanley Flett in relation to the identification of Medical Exemption Certificates for people with visual impairments; and

- (ii) to otherwise note the information provided.

REQUEST FOR FEEDBACK ON POLICING OF NIGHT TAXI RANKS

4. The Consultation Group heard Steve Robertson express concern in relation to the continuing use of Bridge Street as an unofficial taxi rank since the decision was taken to close the rank, particularly during the operation of the night time ranks. He indicated that there appears to be no enforcement in place and suggested that spot checks be undertaken.

Sergeant Flett reiterated the need for trade representatives to submit formal complaints on such matters, in order that they can be investigated by the Police.

The Group was also advised that there is also an Enforcement Officer who is investigating and taking enforcement matters in relation to such complaints.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

- (i) to note that Sergeant Flett would liaise with police colleagues in relation to the above concerns; and
- (ii) to note that Graeme McColl would raise the issue at the next meeting of the City Centre Weekend Partnership Group.

ALLEGATION THAT ABERDEENSHIRE LICENSED TAXI DRIVERS ARE OPERATING THROUGH AN ABERDEEN BOOKING OFFICE

5. With reference to article 7 of the minute of the previous meeting of 29 October 2014, the Consultation Group heard Tommy Campbell make reference to an allegation that Aberdeenshire licensed Taxi Drivers were operating through an Aberdeen Taxi Booking Office.

Sergeant Flett explained that there had been two allegations of Aberdeenshire Taxi Drivers operating within the city, However neither of these were in relation to them operating through an Aberdeen Taxi Booking Office. She reiterated that a formal complaint requires to be submitted if such breaches are taking place.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

To note that in future, the appropriate process should be undertaken, namely that any complaint in this regard should be submitted directly to Police Scotland, and should therefore not be discussed at the Taxi Consultation Group.

PROPOSED CCTV POLICY FOR TAXIS AND PRIVATE HIRE CARS

6. The Consultation Group heard Paul Connolly advise that a report on CCTV in Taxi and Private Hire Cars was to be submitted to the next meeting of the Licensing Committee on 18th March, 2014 and that full consultation would be undertaken thereafter, including with all licence holders who may be affected by the proposals.

Mr Connolly indicated that both Glasgow and Edinburgh City Councils had agreed a policy in respect of CCTV in taxis and private hire cars.. It is recommended in the report that Aberdeen City Council takes a similar route. It was noted that the installation of CCTV systems in taxis and private hire cars would be on a voluntary basis.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

TAXI FARE FORMULA – EXPLANATION OF THE FORMULA

7. With reference to article 4 of the minute of the previous meeting of 29 October 2013, the Consultation Group had circulated the formula prepared by Halcrow in consultation with the taxi trade, which was used to calculate the appropriate rate fairly for city taxi fares.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

- (i) to note that a timescale for any future process to consider city taxi fares would be communicated to the Group; and
- (ii) to otherwise note the information provided.

REQUEST FOR FINANCIAL INFORMATION IN RESPECT OF TAXI DRIVERS APPLICATION FEES FOR 2013/14

8. With reference to article 8 of the minute of the previous meeting of 29 October 2013, the Group were advised that a copy of the proposed application fees had been previously circulated to taxi trade representatives for comments.

Paul Connolly indicated that a report in relation to the Licence Application Fees would be considered by the Licensing Committee at their meeting on 18 March, 2014.

Graeme McColl acknowledged the proposal for a 20% overall reduction in fees, however he had concerns that the costs for any future work, e.g. Taxi Demand Survey and Fare or Rank Reviews may not be projected, and would therefore result in an increase in application fees the following year. Paul Connolly explained that the expenditure costs for the Taxi Demand Survey were incorporated within the 2014/15 budget.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

REPORT ON ENFORCEMENT BY COUNCIL OFFICIALS IN RESPECT OF TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE CAR LICENSING

9. The Group had before them details of the number of suspension hearings and complaints received in relation to Taxi and Private Hire Car Licensing, as prepared by the Council's Enforcement Officer.

The paper outlined the following:-

- 9 taxi licence suspension hearings;
- 4 private hire car licence suspension hearings;
- 7 taxi driver's licence suspension hearings;
- 56 complaints received, including illegal parking, bad driving, rude/abusive behaviour, advertising and dangerous driving; and
- Up to 3 serious offences had been notified to Police Scotland directly.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

CLARIFICATION ON PERMITTED ROOF SIGNS IN TERMS OF STANDARD SIZES

10. With reference to article 11(A) of the minute of the previous meeting of 29 October 2013, the Group were advised that a number of Taxi Drivers were ignoring the condition of their licence in relation to the permitted roof sign size by replacing the approved sized sign with one which is not approved.

Paul Connolly advised: (a) that if a complaint providing full details was submitted then the Council's Enforcement Officer would investigate the matter; (b) enforcement has been carried out in respect of this problem already; and (c) that a report on the issue of taxi roof signs was to be submitted to a future meeting of the Licensing Committee.

It was suggested by Group Members that the Council could recruit an additional Enforcement Officer, with the costs coming from a slight rise in application fees.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to recommend to the Licensing Committee that they consider receiving a report on the possibility of recruiting an additional Enforcement Officer to include options, potential use of City Wardens, costings and police advice.

FOLLOW UP REQUEST FOR CHARGES FOR METER RECALIBRATION IN OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITY AREAS

11. Paul Connolly advised that he had contacted all 31 local authorities requesting that they provide details of the charges they make for recalibration of taxi meters. He indicated that he had received the following five responses:-

- East Dunbartonshire - £10 to £15
- Highland - £58.68
- Inverclyde - £43.50
- Perth and Kinross - £37.50
- Orkney - £60

He indicated that Aberdeen City Council charge £30 to £35 for the service with no separate fee for checking meters thereafter.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

During consideration of the following item, the Convener declared a non-pecuniary interest by virtue of him being a work colleague of Gordon Anderson, who had requested that this item be considered by the Group. He did not feel it necessary to leave the meeting during consideration of the item.

ADVERTISING ON TAXIS, REQUEST FOR CHANGE OF POLICY

12. The Group had before them for consideration, correspondence from Gordon Anderson who sought the Group's views on removing the condition to prevent have advertising to the rear window of taxis.

The Group also had before them the policy on advertising on/in taxis and private hire cars which included the following:-

“Advertisements must not (a) be placed on any of the vehicle's windows, or (b) obscure any identification plates, notices or roof signs provided by the Council.”

Paul Connolly advised that the reason for the above condition was for safety reasons and to protect the public, including passengers.

The DAG representative advised that obscuring windows with advertisements can be disorientating, claustrophobic and/or confusing for passengers with visual impairment or mental health problems.

During the discussion which followed, it was noted that there was little support for any change to the policy on advertising.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

TAXI DEMAND SURVEY

13. The Group heard Paul Connolly advise that the general legal advice, based on best practice, recommends that a Taxi Demand Survey be undertaken every three years. He indicated that a report in relation to a survey would be submitted to the Licensing Committee later in the year. Finally, he explained that officers have delegated powers to undertake a tender exercise to commission the work and officers were currently progressing this.

Steve Robertson made reference to the previous survey which revealed that only 2% of the public had been consulted. He suggested that efforts be made to ensure that a greater number of the public are consulted in the any future Taxi Demand Survey.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note the information provided.

ENQUIRY ABOUT LETTER NOTIFICATION OF TAXI INSPECTION CENTRE APPOINTMENTS

14. Graeme McColl advised the Group that he had received comments from a number of Taxi Drivers indicating that they had not received a letter of notification relating to their Taxi Inspection Centre appointment. He also explained that the letterhead still refers to teh previosu Taxi Sergeant who had since retired from Police Scotland.

The Consultation Group agreed:-

to note that the Convener would contact the Fleet Manager, Enterprise, Planning and Infrastructure to address the above issues.

- COUNCILLOR FRASER FORSYTH, Convener.