

## **TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE CAR CONSULTATION GROUP**

ABERDEEN, 8 February 2023. Minute of Meeting of the TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE CAR CONSULTATION GROUP. Present:- Councillor Al-Samarai, Chairperson; and Councillors Boulton, Clark, Crockett, Delaney and Farquhar; and Peter Campbell (Unite), Alan Catto (Independent Taxi Operators Group), Chris Douglas (Aberdeen Taxis), Stewart Duncan (Airport Taxis), Luke Hulse (Independent) and Russell McLeod (Rainbow City Taxis).

In attendance:- PC Ian Duthie (Police Scotland), John Weir (Fleet Manager, Operations), Sandy Munro, Dave McKane and Arlene Dunbar (Licensing and Planning Team), Vycki Ritson (Engineering Team, Operations) and Mark Masson and Gogo Okafor (Committee Services)

### **WELCOME AND APOLOGIES**

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Councillor Henrickson.

### **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST OR TRANSPARENCY STATEMENTS**

2. There were no declarations of interest or transparency statements intimated.

### **MINUTE OF MEETING OF 12 OCTOBER 2022- FOR APPROVAL**

3. The Consultation Group had before it the minute of its previous meeting of 12 October 2022.

#### **The Consultation Group resolved:-**

to approve the minute as a correct record.

### **ENFORCEMENT REPORT**

4. The Consultation Group had before it for consideration, the Enforcement Officer's report which provided details relating to Taxi/Private Hire Car issues and information.

Mr Dave McKane highlighted the main issues from his report, making reference to (a) current numbers of licensed vehicles and drivers; (b) the street knowledge test statistics during the period 1 October 2022 to 31 January 2023; and (c) overcharging and card payments.

Mr McKane advised that a number of public complaints had been received in relation to overcharging from taxis at the Railway Station rank, which would be investigated in due course.

During the discussion, Mr Russell McLeod made reference to the 6-8 week waiting list for applicants to undertake their street knowledge test if they had failed one part of the

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test and sought clarification as to whether this waiting list could be accelerated. In response, it was confirmed that applicants have a 3 month period to resit the section they failed previously.

**The Consultation Group resolved:-**

to note the report and the information provided.

**PROPOSED TAXI RANK- ST FITTICK'S ROAD- VYCKI RITSON**

5. The Consultation Group heard from Vycki Ritson, Engineering Team Leader (Roads) who sought the views of the taxi trade in relation to a proposed taxi rank being established at St Fittick's Road in April/May 2023, near the new Aberdeen South Harbour, particularly to transport cruise ship patrons to the city centre and beyond.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:-

- it was suggested that access should be given to taxis to collect and drop off on the harbour site, although due to health and safety reasons and given that the site was owned/managed by Aberdeen Harbour Board, it was acknowledged that this would be unlikely at this time;
- that a drop off area would also be beneficial for Private Hire Vehicles;
- that the layout of the road and footways were being constructed at present; and
- that a site visit would be beneficial for the members of the Consultation Group and include Police Scotland.

**The Consultation Group resolved:-**

- (i) to request that Vycki Ritson make arrangements to undertake a site visit of the area, and that the invitation be open to all members of the Group, including PC Ian Duthie;
- (ii) to note that Vycki Ritson would raise the issue of taxi access to the harbour site at the next meeting of the Visit Aberdeenshire cross party group, which also included representatives of Aberdeen Harbour Board; and
- (iii) to otherwise note the information provided.

**TAXI FARE REVIEW- RUSSELL MCLEOD**

6. The Consultation Group had before it a request by Russell McLeod to commence a Taxi Fare Review earlier than scheduled.

Mr McLeod suggested that a Taxi Fare Review commence in March and not April 2023 as scheduled, which would provide a chance of any changes being implemented before the summer recess. He explained that for almost a year now, drivers have had to absorb the huge increase in fuel costs and although the prices were starting to reduce, they were unlikely to return to pre-February 2022 levels, never mind 2019 levels. He indicated that

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there was a cost of living issue and there was a perception that Taxi Operators/Drivers, when asking for an increase, were just looking for a wage increase, which was not the case.

In addition, Mr McLeod advised that since the last very modest fare increase in 2020 (agreed in 2019), the world changed and prices have not reduced since, namely fuel, repairs, insurance, running costs, vehicle costs and the cost of living.

Sandy Munro provided information in relation to the process for a Taxi Fare Review including the consultation period.

**The Consultation Group resolved:-**

to request that the Licensing Committee consider whether to accelerate a Taxi Fare Review at their next meeting in March 2023.

**TAXI KNOWLEDGE TEST- RUSSELL MCLEOD**

7. The Consultation Group heard from Russell McLeod who sought a change to the Street Knowledge Test.

Mr McLeod made reference to the previous changes made by the Committee in September 2022, specifically that applicants, when sitting the test, could if they passed three out of four modules, could return and only re-sit the one part that they had failed. He requested that the Committee should consider allowing an applicant who has passed two out of four modules, to be able to re-sit only the 2 that were failed at the first attempt. He also suggested that consideration should be given so that the Routes Module was reduced from five routes to four, which would make the pass rate of 75% uniformly over the whole test. He explained that this would have a positive impact on those who were currently awaiting dates for their test. It was also his opinion that this would increase the number of applicants and also the number of test passes, but would not dilute the test, as the applicants would still be required to pass all modules.

It was noted that the Licensing Committee had considered a review of the Street Knowledge Test in September 2022.

**The Consultation Group resolved:-**

- (i) to note that officers would review the practical arrangements to potentially reduce waiting times for applicants; and
- (ii) to take no action at this time in terms of amending the Street Knowledge Test as requested above and that a review be considered in one years' time.

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### **WAV VEHICLES- RUSSELL MCLEOD**

8. The Consultation Group heard from Russell McLeod who made reference to the cost of wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV) at present.

Mr McLeod advised that the cost of WAVs had increased substantially over the past three or four years outlining the costs as follows:-

- December 2022 price was £31500 + VAT, that's £37800, against £23k for a Toyota Corolla Hybrid. £15k + interest, equates to over £340 per month extra over a four year period, total monthly payment would be over £1000.

Mr McLeod made reference to the current WAV fleet ages and explained that there would be an issue of affordability for drivers, given that in the past six months, Rainbow Taxis alone had six drivers convert from WAV to Private Hire saloon vehicles. He advised that he wanted to bring this trend to the attention of the members highlighting that there would be a reduction of WAVs on the road.

Sandy Munro, Legal Adviser made reference to the Public Sector Equality Duty and also advised that a report would be considered by the Licensing Committee in March which would seek approval to cancel the backstop date by which all taxis were required to be WAVs and would provide an update on the options for implementation of a mixed taxi fleet.

Councillor Delaney intimated that the views of the taxi trade and all other stakeholders would be welcomed during the consultation process of a mixed taxi fleet.

It was acknowledged that Taxi Operators/Booking Offices also had a responsibility to ensure that a percentage of their taxi fleet vehicles were WAV.

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

### **MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR DRIVERS- STEWART DUNCAN**

9. The Consultation Group heard from Stewart Duncan who raised the issue of current medical requirements for drivers.

Mr Duncan advised that whilst it was of course laudable, and necessary to have medical standards for all drivers, that due to external factors such as back logs and waiting lists, he was aware of drivers, otherwise healthy, who were unable to renew their taxi driver's licence. For instance, he explained that he was aware of a driver who had failed the DVLA group 2 standard medical due to a cataract and was currently on a waiting list with a wait of up to two years for NHS treatment. He advised that the driver was left in the position

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of finding a considerable amount of money to pay for private treatment or being off the road and having to jump through administrative hoops to get back on the road.

He intimated that this seemed like an unnecessary pressure on the trade, while they were looking at opportunities to increase driver numbers in the city and wondered whether anything could be done in these type of cases.

Councillor Delaney intimated that although he was sympathetic to this particular driver, he advised that the licensing authority must respect the outcome of a DVLA Group 2 Standard Medical Certificate for safety reasons.

Sandy Munro, Legal Adviser reminded the taxi trade representatives that as a condition on their licence, drivers would be required to declare medical conditions, which would be submitted to the Licensing Committee for consideration on a case-by-case basis.

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

## **TAXI PLATES- LUKE HULSE**

**10.** The Consultation Group had before it a request from Luke Hulse in relation to Taxi Plates, as follows:-

(A) Front Taxi Plate Proposal

Propose the possibility of including a slim front taxi licence plate, to be attached to the front of the vehicle. Similar to the front plates found at the front of Private Hire vehicles and which was already done in Edinburgh and Glasgow. I believe this would help customers identify licensed Aberdeen City (ACC) vehicles and help stamp out the illegal plying for hire of Aberdeenshire plated vehicles.

(B) Zeros on Taxi Plates

In recent times, any taxi plate number, starting with a single or double digit has had a zero included in the front of the taxi number. It is my opinion that it is unnecessary and would make it harder for members of the public to identify plate numbers, given there are more characters. Why is this the case, is there any requirement for it?

During the discussion, the following was noted:-

- there would be a financial impact for the driver if the front taxi plate was introduced on all taxi vehicles at a current cost of £19;
- there would be logistical issues in terms of fitting front plates on all taxi vehicles;
- unaware of any strong public views in terms of the current taxi plate numbering;
- it may be difficult to distinguish between Private Hire Vehicles and other taxis if front plates were added to all taxi vehicles;

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- illegal plying of trade required to be reported to Aberdeenshire Council or Police Scotland for investigation, noting that any reported to ACC would be passed to Aberdeenshire Council to be dealt with; and
- acknowledged that there was an issue where six plates had been issued by Fleet Services in error 18 months ago, where the plate number started with a zero.

PC Ian Duthie made reference to a recent serious incident involving a female victim being picked up by an illegal taxi at a non-active taxi rank on Dee Street and encouraged all taxi drivers to report any suspicious un-plated vehicles to the police.

**The Consultation Group resolved:-**

- (i) that in terms of the serious incident referred to by PC Duthie, to note that Vycki Ritson would review the current signage at the taxi rank and would liaise with colleagues to highlight the issue of suspicious vehicles with Taxi Marshalls;
- (ii) to request that a representative of the Taxi Marshalls be invited to attend a future meeting of the Group, noting that Vycki Ritson would make arrangements in this regard; and
- (iii) that PC Duthie would investigate whether there were any issues in terms of front number plates being introduced, specifically whether there would be any impact on the Automatic Number Plate Recognition System and would advise the Group via email in this regard.

**ZONING ISSUES- LUKE HULSE**

11. The Consultation Group heard from Luke Hulse who requested a discussion on Zoning Issues, as follows:-

(A) Night Ranks - Green Plated Airport Taxis

Green plated Airport taxis should be allowed to use the Castle Street Night Rank and Union Street Night Ranks, seven days a week. Between the hours of 00:00 and 05:00. This would help clear the queues quicker. In recent times, the media highlighted the "misery" of getting a taxi at night-time and may prevent people visiting the City Centre, due to the worry of not being able to get a taxi home.

(B) Night Ranks - Modification

Propose that the Night Rank Signs/Bollards were modified, to include two additional lights. A green light, to inform the taxis at the rank that the airport needed help clearing the queue. This was especially useful/good for independent street taxis, who would not get notified from an office. Once the light goes off, taxis would still be allowed access to the Airport for 30 minutes to account for travel time from the City Centre to the Airport. A Yellow light, to inform the taxis that TECA needed help clearing the queue. Again, this would especially be useful/good for independent street taxis, who may not otherwise get a booking from TECA.

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(C) TECA - Green Plated Airport Taxis

Events at TECA with thousands of people in attendance trying to get home, just like the City Centre Night Time ranks, green plated airport taxis should be allowed in to pick up from the TECA rank(s).

(D) TECA - Rank Sign/Bollard

There should be yellow illuminated TECA rank signs/bollards placed at the entrances to the TECA site on Dyce Drive, Inverurie Road and Wellheads Drive alerting taxis that TECA needed help clearing the queues.

Luke Hulse explained the rationale behind his requests.

During Discussion, the following was noted:-

- that the zoning issue for taxis was considered as part of the consultation process recently undertaken to review the Taxi Policies and the overwhelming response was that the zones should remain separate;
- the location and management of pick-up points at TECA was currently the responsibility of the TECA Operator, although taxi ranks would be reviewed as part of the Taxi Demand Survey later in the year;
- that in terms of the Night Time Rank posts/bollards, this amendment would not be possible with the current posts as they have no external links;
- that future consideration of taxi zoning should include the Railway Station and Aberdeen South Harbour; and
- Act-Up Forum and Disability Equity Partnership representatives would be involved to consider the possibility of using new digital technology signage at taxi ranks.

**The Consultation Group resolved:-**

- (i) to request that Vycki Ritson provide feedback to a future meeting of the Group on any discussions being held with the TECA Operator regarding the taxi operation on site; and
  - (ii) to otherwise note the information provided.
- **COUNCILLOR GILL AL-SAMARAI, Chairperson**