

Minutes of the Taxi & Private Hire Forum Meeting
12th March 2020 – 10:30

Attending

Briony Appletree – Licensing Officer
Steve Eckton
John Fairey
Barry Hussey
Akeel Khan
Marouane El Mamouni

Apologies

Carol Stefanczuk – Licensing Manager
Claire Humphreys – Licensing Officer
Imran Khan

Briony welcomed all attendees to the meeting, and explained that she was covering in Claire's absence.

Consultation Survey and Focus Group – Feedback

- Briony asked the forum for their opinions and feedback on the consultation process, being conducted by SMSR Research, relating to the proposals for the Statement of Licensing Policy.
- Steve said that he thought the process had been good and professional, but was concerned that the views of drivers wouldn't be considered by Winchester City Council when final decisions were made.
- Barry said that he was concerned that the opinion of the public would outweigh the opinion of licensed drivers, and that this would result in changes which drivers didn't agree with.
- John said that the turnout at the focus group on Thursday 25th February 2020 was poor, with approximately 13 attendees.

Worthy Lane Toilets

- Briony explained to the forum that this matter would be added to the agenda for the next meeting, as Carol had all of the necessary information to discuss this topic.
- The forum agreed as a whole that there was a need for toilets to be open and accessible to licensed drivers, and that a potential solution could be a radar key or access code.

Wheelchair Accessible Assessment – multiple drivers using one vehicle

- Briony explained to the forum that concerns had been raised by drivers that multiple people were visiting the Blue Lamp Trust in one vehicle, and using that vehicle to complete the assessment. She stated that the principles of safely loading and unloading a wheelchair applied to all accessible vehicles and that the licensing authority had no issue with drivers sharing vehicles for the purposes of the assessment.
- Barry said that he was concerned for drivers who aren't particularly talkative, as they can fail the assessment for not talking through the process of loading/unloading.
- The forum agreed as a whole that there was no issue with drivers sharing vehicles for the purposes of the assessment, as the principles apply to all vehicles.
- Briony reminded the forum that the Blue Lamp Trust are the experts in this field and that if any driver has any question specific to the capabilities of their own vehicle they should direct these to the assessor at the time of the assessment.
- Steve said that he knew of one driver who had failed the assessment because of his vehicle not being suitable, despite it being a purpose-built wheelchair accessible vehicle. Briony advised that the licensing authority was aware of this and is currently conducting enquiries into this specific vehicle model.

Temporary badges

- Briony advised the group that, due to enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificates taking a long time to be processed and sent to the driver, the licensing authority has decided to now send out renewal reminder letters 12 weeks in advance of the licence expiry date. This is to ensure that drivers have adequate time to apply for and receive a DBS, and prevent the need for temporary badges to be issued.
- Marouane asked whether, if a DBS took longer than 12 weeks to be sent to the driver, a temporary badge would be issued. Briony said that if this situation arose, the driver should contact the licensing authority for advice.
- Briony advised the forum that the licensing authority was hoping to send renewal reminders via email in the future, and that this was being looked into by Carol.
- Akeel suggested that drivers receive their renewal reminders via text message instead of email, as not everybody checks their emails. Briony advised that this suggestion would be passed to the licensing authority for consideration, but that she was uncertain whether this technology was available.

- John suggested that sending reminders via post and email would ensure receipt by the drivers, and therefore there is no excuse not to renew.
- Briony reminded the forum that the responsibility for renewing licences is that of the licence holder, and that reminder letters are only sent as a courtesy.

Reporting of Incidents

- Briony advised the forum that the licensing authority has recently been receiving lots of report of accidents/damage to licensed vehicles. These reports are being received outside of the 72hr timescale stated in the Statement of Licensing Policy, and points can be (and have been) issued for late accident/damage reports.
- Barry said that this is clearly specified in our policy and therefore all drivers should already be aware of this requirement.
- Briony explained that reporting accidents/damage is essential as it ensures that potentially unsafe vehicles are kept off the road, in the interests of public safety.

Any other business

- Steve said that he had heard from a friend that Operators must have an address in Winchester, and wanted to understand the reasons for this. Briony explained that due to a recent re-interpretation of the legislation, Private Hire Operators either had to make provision for bookings from an address in the Winchester District, or prove that they made all provision for bookings within the Winchester District (i.e. answering the phone within the District).
- Akeel asked how the recent reinterpretation of the legislation relating to Private Hire Operators affected app-based companies. Briony said that she would refer this question to Carol, as she had a better understanding of how app-based operators can comply with this.
- Marouane asked whether drivers have to report penalty points for speeding to the licensing authority, and within what time frame. Briony said that this was stated in the Statement of Licensing Policy, but could not recall the exact time frame and would confirm this via email.
- Barry asked whether the requirement to attend a driving awareness course or similar by the police should also be reported to the licensing authority. Briony explained that these courses are used by the Police as an alternative to convictions, and that the policy only requires reporting of convictions/cautions to the licensing authority.
- John raised the issue of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and how this should be managed by licensed drivers. He said that he had put hand sanitiser and tissues in his vehicles, and asked whether other drivers should

be doing the same. John also asked whether licensed drivers could refuse a passenger on the grounds that they have coronavirus or are exhibiting similar symptoms, and requested that this was clarified as soon as possible. He has requested a response from Hampshire County Council regarding school contracts and had no response.

- Briony explained that Winchester City Council had issued national guidance to all licensed drivers regarding coronavirus via email. She said that she was unsure whether drivers could refuse passengers on the grounds that they have coronavirus or are exhibiting similar symptoms, and that she would check the relevant legislation and consult with senior colleagues immediately after the forum meeting.
- Steve said that he was concerned that, if the Council did advise that drivers could refuse passengers on the grounds of having coronavirus, drivers would use this as an excuse not to take passengers for other reasons.
- Barry said that drivers were struggling with the lack of business as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Akeel suggested that the licensing authority reduce the renewal fees for licences, because drivers weren't making as much money.
- Marouane asked whether there was any protection available for licensed drivers from complaints, and gave an example of a customer reporting a taxi driver to the licensing authority for no good reason. Briony explained that all complaints received by the licensing authority are investigated, and that where there is no evidence to substantiate the complaint then no further action would be taken. Briony advised the forum that, should a customer tell them that they are going to complain to the licensing authority, that they are transparent with giving their licence details and to contact us if they have any concerns.
- The meeting ended at 11:25hrs.