

# **TAXI & PRIVATE HIRE FORUM MEETING**

## **MINUTES**

**WEDNESDAY 2 September 2020 – 10:00AM (Zoom)**

### **Attendance**

Steve Eckton  
John Fairey  
Akeel Khan  
Imran Khan  
Marouane El Mamouni  
Cllr Jackie Porter – Cabinet Member for Built Environment and Wellbeing  
Carol Stefanczuk – Licensing Manager

### **Apologies**

Barry Hussey  
Claire Humphreys – Licensing Officer

#### **1. Welcome**

Carol Stefanczuk welcomed all attendees to the meeting and gave apologies from Barry Hussey and Claire Humphreys.

Unfortunately, Steve Eckton had poor signal so he listened in to the meeting but was unable to participate. Carol spoke to Steve after the meeting and has added points raised under 'any other business'.

#### **2. Policy Review – draft proposals. Cllr Porter attending to discuss.**

Carol referred to the minutes of the previous Forum meeting held on 8 July 2020. John Fairey made contact with Licensing in advance of today's meeting to highlight his concerns about the proposal to introduce an 'end of life' age of 12 years for private hire vehicles. He operates vehicles for school contracts only and this change in policy could see him go out of business if he needed to replace vehicles more often. John explained that he regularly has his vehicles inspected to ensure that they are maintained to a high standard and therefore reliable and safe for transporting children to school. John's vehicles are often older but with low annual mileage (depending on the route) and has witnessed much newer vehicles fail MOT's because they are not looked after. John asked Licensing to gain feedback from the approved testing stations about MOT failures.

Cllr Jackie Porter stated that she regularly spoke with Martin Goff at Hampshire County Council and would speak to him regarding vehicle standards for school contracts. It was noted that vehicles with more than 8 seats, and therefore unlicensed, were often much older, polluting vehicles (PSV's and buses).

Marouane El Mamouni, Akeel Khan and Imran Khan all spoke about the proposal to introduce permanent signage and plates on licensed vehicles. They reiterated the concern by many drivers that vehicles would be targeted by thieves who would take a chance on there being small change or PDAs in the vehicle worth stealing. This would take vehicles off the road whilst being repaired and at a cost of several hundred pounds for repairs. Cllr Porter asked the group if they had any alternatives suggestions. Akeel explained that most drivers would be happy if the signs could be magnetic and the council carry out more compliance checks and issue points where signs/plates are not correctly displayed. Following further discussion it was agreed that Licensing would try to obtain crime statistics from Hampshire Constabulary to identify how many licensed vehicles had been broken into and give an idea of how much of a problem this is. Carol suggested that she could ask other licensing authorities what their policies are on signage/plates at the Hampshire and IOW Licensing Officers Group meeting on 3 September 2020.

### **3. Expressions of interest to speak at L&R Committee.**

Carol reminder the Forum members that should they wish to speak at the Licensing and Regulation Committee on 15 September 2020, that they are required to email Licensing by close today (2 September) to ensure that Democratic Services can invite them to the meeting by email. Carol also explained that it would be useful for the drivers to get together and nominate a spokesperson so that the same concerns are not repeated. It is understood that Jaleel Iqbal has notified Licensing that he wishes to speak.

*UPDATE: any person wishing to speak at the Committee meeting must let Licensing know by midday Wednesday 9 September 2020 - apologies for the confusion.*

### **4. Sunday Market**

Further to an email sent to all hackney carriage drivers, Wessex and Wintax on 13 August 2020, Carol notified the Forum members that the Sunday market in the Broadway was due to start this Sunday, 6 September. Additional signage has been requested to prevent public vehicles parking on the temporary rank. Carol asked drivers to feedback any major issues arising from this weekend so that they can be forwarded to the relevant team.

### **5. Great Minster Street/The Square**

Carol made the Forum members aware of a new proposal to prevent vehicles travelling to The Square, Winchester by placing a bollard at the turning from Symonds Street to Great Minster Street. It is understood that a safety assessment will be taking place to decide if the proposal is possible. If implemented, this would mean that the traffic on The Square and Great Minster Street would be two-way. Drivers expressed concern at the potential problems with vehicles try to make U-turns in this area and wanted to ensure that access for them was kept so that they can continue to provide a service. Cllr Porter stated that she would not sign-off this project without ensuring that the taxi and private hire trade have been consulted on the proposals.

## **6. Return of Students**

Following a recent multi-agency meeting in relation to the return of students to the University of Winchester, Carol explained to the Forum members that students will be returning from 13 September 2020. Carol explained that additional information was being provided to students to remind them of expected behaviour and responsibility for ensuring that they comply with government guidance for social distancing when visiting the city centre. This could increase the number of customers for the taxi and private hire drivers and operators in the coming weeks. The Forum members were pleased to hear that the students would be returning and hoped that this would bring more work to the trade, as it is so quiet.

## **7. New Department for Transport Standards**

Carol made the Forum members aware of the new Statutory Standards that had been issued by the Department for Transport in July 2020. Carol explained that Licensing were intentionally keeping this document separate from the current Policy review to prevent confusion amongst the trade and Councillors when making a decision at the Licensing and Regulation Committee meeting on 15 September 2020. Once the phase 2 review of the Policy had been agreed, Licensing will look at the Standards in detail and how this will impact the trade and Council's Policy. It was agreed that this would be discussed in more detail at the next Forum meeting.

## **8. Any other business**

### UBER

Imran and Marouane raised the issue of the increasing number of UBER vehicles in Winchester city centre. Reports of vehicles being stationary for long periods without picking up a customer, in particular on Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings. Drivers expressed their frustration that UBER are clearly under cutting Winchester fares and taking work away from local drivers when there is already a significant loss of work during the Covid-19 pandemic. Carol explained that Licensing Officers would arrange compliance checks and asked for drivers to provide details of vehicles that are regularly spotted in areas such as the railway station and Broadway.

### Christmas Market

John asked if the Winchester Christmas Market was due to go ahead this year. Carol stated that she believed it was due to go ahead but with changes.

*UPDATE: the Cathedral are considering their event but in a different format and will produce plans in line with Covid-19 risk assessments and government guidance for agency consideration.*

### Instalments

Carol mentioned to the Forum members that there had been no agreed end date for allowing payment of licence fees in instalments and expected the trade to still want that option to help financially. The Forum members agreed that it would be helpful to allow payment in instalments for several months longer.

### Comments from Steve Eckton

Steve agreed with the concerns about the proposal to introduce permanent plates and signs. Steve added that it was a particular problem for drivers who only have one vehicle and use their licensed vehicle as a private vehicle also (with plates and signs removed). Some drivers lease their vehicles and are unable to fix anything permanently to the vehicle under the leasing agreement. Steve also stated that many of the vehicle break-ins are unreported as drivers just replace broken windows etc. at a cost to them and do not go through their insurance. Carol asked Steve to put his concerns in writing so that they could be provided to the Licensing and Regulation Committee in advance of the meeting or read out in his absence at meeting.

**Next meeting: Wednesday 30 September 2020, 10am via Zoom.**