

Taxi Licensing Task and Finish Group – 23 July 2019 at 6.15pm

Meeting Notes

T&F Group Members Present: Chris Bowring, Rachel Burgess, Lindsay Ferris, Jim Frewin and Barrie Patman

Officers Present: Karen Court, Sean Murphy, Julia O'Brien and Callum Wernham

Trade Members Present: [REDACTED]

1. Election of a Chairman

RESOLVED That Barrie Patman be elected Chairman of the Taxi Licensing T&F Group.

2. Apologies

There were no apologies for absence.

3. Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Terms of Reference

Members considered the proposed terms of reference (appendix a) and queried whether they covered the main focus points that the full Licensing Committee had requested at its June 2019 meeting. An Officer stated that the proposed terms of reference set out the suggested framework for Members to follow, and gave the T&F Group the option of sending recommendations back to the full Licensing Committee to make amendments to current policies and licence arrangements.

RESOLVED That the terms of reference (appendix a) be approved.

5. Issues Raised by Trade Members and Officer Comments

Members received and reviewed a number of written comments from trade members, outlining concerns with the current licence arrangements and taxi licensing policies.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points and clarifications were raised:

- [REDACTED] Twyford Illuminated "Taxis 24/7" Signage – Officers clarified that Planning had confirmed that planning permission was not required and the trade members had been advised of this. Highways advised that as the signage was on private land this not a highways matter. The Twyford station manager had responded to say that from her understanding the Loddon Cars building is on

Network Rail land, and Officers had asked if there is anything they can do to resolve the situation. As [REDACTED] have a licensed hackney carriage vehicle they were able to use this wording. Officers hoped that the intervention of the Wokingham conservation Officer (via Cllr Lindsay Ferris) would also assist.

- Regarding the Henley Regatta, what would Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) be doing to assist drivers in the future? Officers stated that there was a temporary suspension of the double yellow lines for WBC licenced taxi drivers to use and that Officers had previously asked about a sign to be erected to state 'WBC Licensed Vehicles Only', this would be raised again due to the ongoing issues with many RBWM taxis and illegal ranking taking place within Remenham Lane. Officers added that for next years' Regatta, Officers would speak to the civil parking enforcement (CPE) lead to request more CPE Officers to police this area. Officers clarified that if trade members wanted a higher minimum fare for the Regatta (or other such events), they could place a formal written request to the joint service asking as such which would then be put to the full Licensing Committee.
- What were Officers proposing to do to assist with issues regarding the Henley Festival? Officers stated that they were not currently aware of issues relating to the festival, and would subsequently seek advice from Highways Officers and feedback to trade members.
- What improvements were being made to the complaints procedure and general levels of communication between members of the trade and Officers, with trade members previously having to involve the Chief Executive to resolve complaints? Officers clarified that there had been issues with staffing levels across the joint service in recent times. However, 2 new Licensing Officers would be joining the service which would help boost resilience and assist with communication between trade members and Officers. Officers stated that a benefit of moving to a joint service was that more resilience could be provided, as an Officer from West Berkshire for example could deal with an issue relating to WBC.
- What was being done to address the increase to the drivers badge licence charges? Officers explained that the fees were based on an hourly charge model, with a 5 hour per vehicle per year workload used. Officers stated that a number of years ago the fees dropped significantly as the hourly charge figure was changed to only reflect the Officer time component. When the service changed to a full cost recovery model the hourly rate was designed to include additional costs incurred on the service such as financial recharging and legal advice. This had subsequently raised the hourly cost to £57 per hour which would recover the costs that the service incurred. Officers stated that these costs were not comparatively high to that of other Local Authorities. Members asked that internal audit look at the methodology behind calculating the hourly rate and the 5 hour per vehicle per year value. Members also asked that Officers look into the financial implications to WBC of phasing in the increased charges on a 3 year basis.
- Were there plans to raise the fare tariff as this had not been done for many years? Officers confirmed that there had not been an increase to the fare tariff

for some time, and clarified that this figure was the maximum fare. Officers stated that it was up to the trade to present a business case to the joint service setting out the request for an increase of the fare tariff and the financial pressures (e.g. rising price of fuel) that had been placed upon the trade since the last increase. Officers commented that many other Local Authorities were beginning to see requests for fare tariff increases, as this had not been looked at for some time in many areas. Officers stated that on receipt of a suitable business case, a covering report would be written with a series of recommendations to be taken to the next available full Licensing Committee, currently scheduled on 1 October 2019.

- Were there plans to review the age limit of Hackney Carriage (HCVs) and Private Hire vehicles (PHVs), in addition to the imposed 54 inch height of HCVs? Trade members stated that other Local Authorities had limits of 15 to 20 years for well-maintained vehicles. Officers stated that it was up to the trade to put forward a business case asking to review the age limit and vehicle height. Members commented that there was a mechanism in place so that vehicles above the age stated in policy (8 for PHVs and 10 for HCVs), whereby operators can undergo an RAC MOT to determine if the vehicle is still in exceptional working order. Trade members commented that a known vehicle had passed this test, however it had still not been granted a licence to continue as a HCV.
- What was being done with regards to online hailing companies? Members clarified that this was outside of the remit of the Licensing Committee, as those vehicles had licenses under Transport for London.
- What was the current situation with regards to the bus lane from Cemetery Junction to Kings Road Reading? Officers stated that Reading Borough Council had confirmed that as of the 1st July 2019 only buses and authorised vehicles could use the in-bound bus lane at Cemetery Junction, Reading. The only authorised vehicles permitted to use the bus were Reading Borough Council licensed Private Hire and Hackney Carriage vehicles.
- Was there any possibility of an additional taxi rank in Denmark/Peach Street, or a new one near the new cinema to replace the lost Elms Road rank?

Traffic Management/Town Centre Regeneration Response:

Through the planning and design process for the Elms Field scheme, the impact of losing the taxi rank on the old Elms Road and was considered and it was decided that there was sufficient provision elsewhere within the town centre and/or the potential to extend capacity on Broad Street (which was not a long long walk from the cinema (etc.) should the cut through at the top of Elms Road be used).

The area immediately outside the cinema would not be a public highway going forward, and would be pedestrianised with vehicular access restricted only to vehicles servicing the development between specific hours, therefore a taxi rank could not be directly situated outside the cinema entrance.

Should traffic management look at the overall provision across the town centre, they could consider looking at the potential of using some existing highway space on the remaining section of Elms Road (adjacent to the entrance to Elms Rd MSCP) for a taxi rank. This would be the closest suitable area to the cinema entrance in the northern part of the development.

However, Traffic Management have stated that the town centre area was to be subject to further public realm improvements, and therefore they were not looking to make any changes to the parking restrictions until such time as this master plan is published.

- Could a Wokingham taxi rank be installed near the Wokingham train station? Was the road owned by WBC or was all of the surrounding land owned by the station?

Highways have confirmed that the Station Approach was not an adopted highway and was therefore outside of WBC control as the land was privately owned by the station.

- Could additional signage be installed up at the Henley Royal Regatta temporary rank that stated 'Wokingham drivers only', to stop the arguments by other drivers parking there to pick up pre booked passengers?

Highways have stated that there was no additional budget to provide more signage for the Regatta however this signage could be incorporated within the TM plan if the appropriate temporary signs were procured. A meeting has been arranged between Highways/WBC parking enforcement and Licensing enforcement to discuss further in September.

RESOLVED That:

- 1) Members of the T&F Group be thanked for attending;
- 2) Trade members be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 3) Officers be thanked for attending the meeting;
- 4) Officers ask internal audit to look at the methodology behind calculating the hourly rate and the 5 hour per vehicle per year value;
- 5) Officers look into the financial implications on WBC of phasing in the increased charges to the Driver Badge 3 Year Licence, on a 3 year basis and report back the findings to the T&F group;
- 6) Officers await receipt of any business cases submitted by the trade relating to fares, age and height of vehicles, with a view to write a covering report and present them to the full Licensing Committee.

6. Date of Next Potential Meeting

RESOLVED That the next meeting of the Taxi Licensing T&F Group be scheduled for 9 September 2019, commencing at 6.15pm.

7. Any Other Business

There were no items of any other business.

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