

MEETING OF THE LICENSING COMMITTEE

held 8th March 2012

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PRESENT: Councillors John Campbell (Chair), Jenny Armstrong, Diane Leek, Ian Saunders, Clive Skelton and Philip Wood.

1. WELCOME AND HOUSEKEEPING ARRANGEMENTS

1.1 The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and outlined basic housekeeping and fire safety arrangements.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2.1 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Isobel Bowler, Simon Clement-Jones, Vickie Priestley, Gail Smith, Geoff Smith and Frank Taylor.

3. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

3.1 There were no items identified where the press and public were to be excluded from the meeting.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

4.1 The minutes of the meetings of the Sub-Committee held on 16th, 17th, 19th, 23rd, 26th, 30th and 31st January 2012, and 6th and 7th February 2012 were approved as correct records, and there were no matters arising.

5. PRIVATE HIRE AND HACKNEY CARRIAGE LICENSING

5.1 Drivers' Vehicle Interior ID Badges

5.2 The Committee received a report of the Chief Licensing Officer to review the current policy relating to the provision of an interior badge within a licensed Private Hire Vehicle or Hackney Carriage, and in attendance for this item were Clive Stephenson (Principal Licensing Officer), Marie-Claire Frankie (Solicitor to the Sub-Committee), Gillian Capewell (Democratic Services), Steven Yeardley (taxi driver) and Hafaes Rehman (Sheffield Taxi Trade Association).

5.3 Mr. Stephenson reported that the Licensing Board introduced a new type of badge in 2007, but, after receiving complaints through the trade representatives about the possibility of identity theft, the Licensing Board decided to allow drivers not to display the secondary badge, until the Licensing Section had looked at a way of removing the drivers' names from badges.

- 5.4 The Licensing Section then started to issue the display badge without the drivers' names being detailed; therefore alleviating the potential perceived problem of identity theft.
- 5.5 However, a change in the software and the new style main badge created problems with removing drivers' names from the display badge. Some drivers have now been issued with interior display badges that have their name and licence number on them.
- 5.6 It was further noted that work had been carried out by the Licensing Section to overcome this problem and there were now several designs of interior badges to be used that would conform to the criteria set by the Licensing Sub-Committee at its meeting of 9th December 2008. These designs were circulated at the meeting for Members' consideration.
- 5.7 Mr. Rehman commented that there had been issues with customers mispronouncing taxi drivers' names and being racially offensive when drivers' names were displayed on these badges, so he was in favour of the design which just displayed the drivers' ID number.
- 5.8 Members were satisfied with the new improved badges, and agreed that the design where the font was the largest showing the drivers' ID number was the preferred design.
- 5.9 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee;
- (a) notes the contents of the report now submitted, and
- (b) recommends that the vehicle interior badge design now presented by the Chief Licensing Officer with a large font displaying the drivers' ID number be implemented across all taxi fleets as soon as possible.
- 5.10 **Licensed Vehicles' Emissions Policy**
- 5.11 The Committee received a report of the Chief Licensing Officer to consider the need for Sheffield City Council to introduce an Emissions Policy in relation to the vehicles it licenses as Private Hire or Hackney Carriages.
- 5.12 Mr. Stephenson reported that vehicle emissions were a major part of CO2 emissions within the City, and that the Council did not currently have a specific policy in relation to its licensed vehicles. It was noted that current licensed vehicles were tested for emissions at every compliance test attended by the vehicle, and that the vehicles were tested to the levels required by the age and type of vehicle.
- 5.13 It was also noted that, currently, Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles had to be less than five years old, when first licensed, which meant that vehicles purchased by applicants would meet certain levels of emissions standards introduced since 2005.

- 5.14 It was reported that many other major cities were in the process of introducing an Emissions Policy to try and make their licensed vehicle fleets more environmentally friendly; the most publicised of these being the Transport for London policy of reducing carbon emission from their Hackney Carriage fleet of 20,000 plus vehicles.
- 5.15 Mr. Stephenson commented that some of the incentives for licensees to change vehicles potentially included lower licence fees if a greener vehicle was purchased, but that this suggestion carried with it major legal implications.
- 5.16 Mr. Stephenson added that, although an Emissions Policy would have no financial implications for the Council, it could have major financial implications for taxi drivers, who may have to replace their vehicles.
- 5.17 Mr. Stephenson commented that a consultation paper upon the proposals had been circulated to all taxi drivers in January 2012 and that, although no written representations had been received, the taxi trade representatives were present at the meeting.
- 5.18 With regard to incentives that other local authorities had offered, Mr. Stephenson stated that the offer of lower fees had been the only one offered to date, but, as previously stated, this carried with it legal implications, although there had been no legal challenges to date.
- 5.19 Mr. Yeardley commented that, as a taxi driver, this Policy, if introduced, would cost him approximately £1300, plus VAT, plus installation fees, and that this was money which was not available at present to most drivers, as trade in the taxi business was currently poor. He believed that all taxis should be able to run their 15 year duration, which was the policy at present.
- 5.20 Mr. Yeardley added that, by adhering to the constantly changing requirements of the Euro emissions policy, this meant constantly changing goalposts, and taxi drivers being penalised by ever increasing costs. He added that other forms of public transport such as buses were not subject to the same proposed policies, and that buses often had their engines running for much longer than taxis on rank. He believed that taxis should be fit for purpose for the fifteen years they currently operated for, and he added that all taxis were already subject to current emissions tests at every annual or bi-annual compliance examination.
- 5.21 Mr. Rehman added that the taxi drivers he had spoken to about the proposals were extremely concerned about the potential cost of replacing vehicles, and Mr. Rehman felt it was inappropriate to compare Sheffield's situation to that in London, where there were over 20,000 taxis, and the City of London had recently been fined for air quality standards by the European Union.
- 5.22 Mr. Rehman added that it was regrettable that all taxis could not be

replaced and be more environmentally friendly, but that it was was not the appropriate financial climate to be making such changes at present.

5.23 **RESOLVED:** That the Committee;

(a) agrees that all licensed vehicles must be Euro 4 compliant by 2020;

(b) indicates that any vehicle that needs replacing due to the Emissions Policy, or is Euro 3 standard or below currently, must be replaced by a vehicle that is under seven years old, and must meet at least Euro 4 Emission standard, and

(c) requests (i) the Chief Licensing Officer to provide more detailed information regarding the Emissions Policy before making any further recommendations, and (ii) that this additional information be made available for a further review at the next meeting of the Licensing Committee.