

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Consultative Forum**

**Minutes of meeting held on  
Wednesday 28 November 2018 at 10.00am,  
Council Chamber, Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth**

**Present:**

Mr. S Cobb	Licensing Manager (Chair)
Mrs. M Shiells	Licensing Officer
Miss H Sweetman (Part)	Senior Licensing Officer
Miss H Tuppin (Part)	Environmental Health & Licensing Apprentice
Mrs. J Thompson (Part)	Service Director - Legal and Community
Ms. C Speck	MSU (Minute taker)

Mr. M Thind	Boxalls Taxis
Mr. K Singh	Tiny's Taxis
Mr. H Singh	Tiny's Taxis
Mr. A Mander (Part)	Mander's Taxis
Mrs. C Grant	Butler Meltax
Mrs. E Page	Owner/Driver

**Not present:**

Mr. B Stewart	Butlers Meltax
Mrs. H Hill	Castle Taxis
Mr. D Khela	B&D Cars
Mr. D Sandhu	Eurocabs and Cabstar
Mr. S Singh	Owner/Driver
Mr. R Lafferty	Castle Taxis
Cllr. B Lovewell	Executive Member for Housing & Environmental Health

**1. Introduction, Housekeeping and Apologies**

SC opened the meeting with housekeeping and thanks to all attendees; all introduced themselves.

**2. Apologies for absence received**

Mr. B Stewart	Butlers and Meltax
Mr. S Singh	Owner/Driver
Cllr. B Lovewell	Executive Member for Housing & Environmental Health

**3. Minutes of the Previous Meeting, including updates on actions**

SC went through the actions as below.

EP previously reported the town taxi rank signage is wrong

**Update: SC said this is now overdue to be remarked but he has spoken to the new director of regulatory services and it has been agreed that a budget will be granted to have the town taxi ranks remarked and signage updated. This will be extended to all taxi ranks in due course. SC will keep all informed on when this is likely to happen.**

CG asked previously if procedures for new drivers has changed as they have been told that they need to pass a verbal test first before the DBS. SC said they can do the verbal and DBS together but should wait until they have put in an application and fee. CG said drivers have had to do a verbal and then a DBS separately.

**Update: SC spoke to the MSU and this has now been corrected and working well, drivers can do DBS and verbal tests together.**

Delay in MT receiving a plate. SC said he will look into this as not acceptable.

**Update: SC looked into this and MT got the plate the next day.**

Introduction of door signage for private hire vehicles.

SC said a date will be set for when this has to be done and SC will write to all operators when date decided.

**Update: a mandatory requirement date has not yet been decided. Any private hire vehicle not displaying the signs after the requirement is introduced will be suspended and will fail a compliance test.**

Return of licence plates and problems with companies not returning the plate at point of collection

**Update: the CSC has been given new scripts and no further issues reported.**

New vehicles – Delay in plate for new vehicle

**Update: now resolved**

UBER – summary of current position to be included in the minutes

**Update: SC was unable to provide this in the minutes due to various cases going through the courts; Uber is on the agenda for this meeting.**

**Additional Action: SC to ensure the minutes are available on the website as soon as possible but no later than two weeks after the meeting.**

It was agreed that the minutes of the previous meeting where a true account.

#### **4. Enforcement update**

SC advised that we have received a total of 16 taxi complaints since the last meeting including the following:

- Driver with mobile phone on lap and texting whilst driving
- Driver not putting the meter on
- Driver refusing to take a passenger with a disability
- Driver almost hitting a person on a crossing
- Driver driving having had alcohol
- Driver wouldn't wait for a vulnerable person after a short period of waiting time
- Driver on motorway speeding at 93 miles per hour
- Drivers leaving cars on taxi rank and going shopping
- Driver injuring a passenger when not stopping as they tried to get out of the car

SC stated that a small minority of drivers are damaging the good reputation of the taxi trade as a whole.

**Action for all: SC asked if all Forum Members could speak to drivers and advise that this is an unacceptable level of complaints. If this continues, SC will have no alternative but to take formal disciplinary action which could include prosecution, suspension or revocation.**

H Singh: wanted to make a complaint about a driver refusing to take a small dog, then refusing to display or show badge when asked. Operator was very unhelpful and refused information and was constantly arguing that the driver can refuse a dog without exemption as it was not for guide purposes. SC advised Mr. Singh to formally report the incident.

Enforcement: SC stated all drivers know when SC, MS and HS are inspecting as they are recognized and therefore drivers are on their best behavior. SC has spoken to other local authorities and it has been decided that each local authority will assist with enforcement activity in each other's district; that way drivers will not know who they are and when enforcement activity is being undertaken in the district.

## 5. Taxi Fares 2019/20

Fares have been increased and all vehicles have had their meters chipped and received their fare cards. Comment was made that John would like some assistance next year.

**Action: SC noted the comment and said John will be given some assistance next time.**

KS said that their meters have changed the date but not changed the year. SC advised KS to give John a ring and ask why that is and if it can be rectified.

EP asked if the Council can recommend a company that can provide meters with receipt capability. SC said we are not allowed to recommend anyone in particular as that would be seen as preferential treatment however we could provide a list of companies that meet the new meter regulations.

CG said the calendar meters show time and a half on a Sunday but their Company Policy is not to charge time and a half on a Sunday. SC said he is assuming that meters can be chipped to take out Sundays and that case law has established that the tariff we set is a maximum tariff but that meters can be set at a lower rate provided that this is made clear in the vehicle.

CG asked about receipts having to provide driver details which may not be possible for vehicles used by multiple drivers. SC clarified that the receipt should identify the vehicle and that companies are required to keep records of who is driving each vehicle at what dates/times.

EP said overcharging is an ongoing problem as customers don't report the issue believing that the Council will not take action. SC said a couple of years ago complainants never received notification of the outcome of complaints; all complainants are now advised of the outcome of complaints which will hopefully restore confidence amongst the public to report issues.

## 6. Council Updates

SC gave an overview of knowledge and verbal tests taken in the last 12 months from 01/11/17 to 31/10/18.

Computerised tests (hackney carriage only)

21 candidates, 10 passed, 4 failed (all 3 attempts), 7 are in progress

Verbal knowledge test (hackney carriage and private hire)

Pre-October 2018: 57 candidates, 28 passed (49.1%), 29 failed

New safeguarding policy section (October onwards): 14 candidates, 5 passed (35.7%), 9 failed

SC noted that since the safeguarding section has come into force the overall percentage has gone down. Starting in 2019, at a date to be advised, all new and renewal applicants will have to attend a safeguarding course prior to a licence being granted or renewed. Drivers have a very important role to play as they are the eyes and ears of what goes on and should report any concerns they may have.

Watford and East Herts already hold safeguarding courses for drivers and MS will be leading on what we are going to do in North Hertfordshire. Once MS has the course set up and ready to go she will give all advance notice of what training session they must attend. The training will occur every 3 years when licences are renewed and MS advised that the training will be constantly changing to meet current concerns. Feedback was gathered from Watford drivers and all felt the course was very useful in aiding them to know what to look out for.

EP said the Police were giving out leaflets at Letchworth Railway Station. SC advised that the Police are currently raising awareness of modern day slavery which is far more prevalent than people realise.

SC thanked the Forum Members for their positive comments in regard to the forthcoming safeguarding requirements.

EP asked if the compliance tests will continue on the Letchworth town centre rank. SC said yes for now but ideally we would like to find somewhere undercover in Letchworth to mitigate

inclement weather.

SC said we currently send out too many letters and we are moving towards electronic ways of engaging with the trade to help keep fees down. We have email addresses for a large proportion of the trade however those that have chosen not to provide emails will receive one last letter. The letter will advise that no further letters will be issued and failure to provide an email address will mean that no further communication will be received from the Council.

In the New Year, an electronic newsletter will be emailed to all licence holders that have supplied an email address advising of forthcoming changes, Council updates and other useful information.

MT asked if we could dispense with the current hard copy application form. SC said the long term aim is to make all application forms and payments available online.

At some point in 2019, all hackney carriage and private hire licence will need to prove to the Council prior to receiving a licence that they are appropriately registered with HMRC for tax purposes.

SC advised that the private hire exemption scheme is being abused therefore the onus will now be on the licence holder to demonstrate the need for an exemption, i.e. booking records, contracts, etc.. The exemption will only be issued for the duration of each licence and will need to be renewed, with appropriate evidence, each time the vehicle licence is renewed. Failure to comply with the private hire exemption scheme will result in a compliance test failure and/or the vehicle being suspended.

Number of current hackney carriage and private hire licences (as of 30/09/2018)

Dual drivers	102
Hackney carriage drivers	138
Hackney carriage vehicles	177
Private hire drivers	147
Private hire vehicles	98
Private hire operators	40

Out of 177 hackney carriages, only 16 are WAVs. Once we reach 10% (currently 18) saloon vehicles can receive hackney carriage plates on a first come first served basis until the 10% is no longer met. The Council website will be updated once saloon applications can be submitted; a waiting list will not be held.

In total, the licensing team has approximately 3200 current licences across a range of activities, not just hackney carriages and private. It is not possible to always speak to a named, or any officer due to workload. SC advised that if callback requests are received with no further details other than a name and number they will be deleted from the call back queue. A way to get a quicker response for genuinely urgent issues is to email the specific question to [licensing@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@north-herts.gov.uk) If you contact the CSC and request a call back you will be placed in queue.

## **7. Task and Finish Group on Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing**

The Government decided to commission a new working group led by Professor Mohammed Abdel-Haq, including representatives of the trade and licensing officers, to review the current licensing regime and make recommendations on the way forward for a safer and more robust licensing regime. The Government has indicated that it will issue a response in the next few months. The professor is confident that some of the recommendations will be implemented.

SC discussed some of the recommendations with the Forum.

**Action: SC to put a link to the full report in the minutes**  
**<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-licensing-recommendations-for-a-safer-and-more-robust-system>**

## 8. Uber

AM has concerns that Uber are operating in North Hertfordshire so asked for this to be an agenda item. Unfortunately SC can not give a definitive update as a number of court cases were ongoing. The current position is determined by a case in Reading; the Court decided that Uber are not operating unlawfully by parking in districts where they do not hold an operator licence provided all bookings are made through the app. An appeal has been lodged and a further update will be issued once the case has been decided. It is intended to make more use of the NHDC website to publish information– SC advised all to regularly check the website.

EP said that private hire vehicles are impacting on hackney carriages as she saw them sitting on the station rank on a Sunday morning. SC said they can not park anywhere that would give an impression of being hackney carriage, for example near a hackney carriage rank, but can park anywhere else that vehicles can lawfully park. An offence is committed if the private hire is not booked directly with an operator by the hirer; the driver cannot book on the hirer's behalf.

**Action for ALL: SC asked all to report any unlawful activity to the Council.**

## 9. Any other business

EP asked when a date will be set for the private hire signage. SC said that he spoke to MOGO and they will be sending SC some designs. SC will then set a date probably by 1 April 2019. Operators can design their own signage if they prefer but it must be approved by the Council.

H Singh raised ongoing issue of plates not being ready for renewal purposes; still waiting on plates that had their compliance test two weeks ago. SC said there was a delay this month but they should all be in Reception ready for collection now.

CG said her plate 283 is still not ready as she asked at Reception before coming to this meeting. SC said he will check before CG leaves today.

AM asked if drivers need to submit their renewals two months before their licence runs out. SC said yes initially but once they had signed up to the DBS update service one month should be plenty of time.

The meeting ended at 12.00

**The next meeting will be Wednesday 20 February 2019 at 10.00am in the Council Chamber.**