

**MINUTES OF PRIVATE HIRE FORUM
HELD ON 27 APRIL 2010 AT ST GEORGE HOUSE**

ITEM		ACTION
	<p><u>In Attendance</u></p> <p><u>Leeds City Council:</u></p> <p>John Mulcahy – Head of Licensing & Registration Martino Deplacido – Operations Manager Martyn Johnson – Licensing Manager Joanna Mingham – Service Development Officer Alison Calvert – Temporary Senior Management Support Officer (Secretary)</p> <p><u>Private Hire Operators</u></p> <p>J Atkinson – Bramham Private Hire D Richmond – Arrow Private Hire K Thackray – Arrow Private Hire M Latif – Speedline T Khan – Speedline T Sandal – 1st Apollo Cars Marvin Hurst – Easy Travel Akhtar Mohammed – Inner city Nadeem Ahmed – Highways Graham – Pudsey B Line Kevin - Stanningley Cars Ltd A Waheed – Gee Gee cars Jason Pearce – Easy Travel Hanif – Ace Cars A Pennock – Amber Cars</p>	
1.0	<p><u>Welcome and Introductions</u></p> <p>John Mulcahy introduced himself and advised that Martino DePlacido had been called to attend Court on another matter and the meeting would deal with any issues or agenda items listed for him when he returned. JM thanked everyone for advising the Section of their attendance. JM asked attendees to complete an attendance sheet so that the Section could keep its records up to date.</p>	<p>All Operators</p>

2.0

Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record of events.

3.0

Action points from the last meeting(not covered elsewhere in the meeting)

Terms of Reference/constitution – JM advised that Legal Services were still in the process of drafting revised/new documentation. He also advised that this may need to go to the Licensing & Regulatory Panel for approval for it to be adopted.

Ticketing/queuing system – MJ advised that initially there was confusion once the new reception area was opened but now drivers were getting used to it and the reception area and MOT/Vehicle examination waiting area were working well in filtering people out of the queue for the counters. MJ advised that he had been looking into queuing/ticket machines; he had seen the one in use at the Post Office in the St. John Centre. He advised that due to the cost of these types of machine he would be looking at other types before a final decision on whether to purchase a machine of this type was made.

MJ

Arrows/signage to show which way to queue should improve things further.

MJ advised that people not completing forms correctly or not completing them at all or not having the correct documentation impacts on the length of the queue. Members of staff were going down the queue to check forms and documentation but this still remains a big problem. MJ asked Operators if they could check that forms have been completed when they put their Operators stamp on the renewal form. MJ also asked if it would help if he laminated dummy forms to give to Operators to help them complete the renewal form.

Discussion took place and JM agreed that a pdf version of a blank renewal form and new vehicle application would be put on the Sections web-site so that Operators and drivers could print them off.

KC

JM advised that unfortunately the Section was unable to provide web-forms but that the Council has a project to look into this and the Section was in the queue for project time.

AGENDA ITEMS

4.0

Unmet Demand Survey - Update

JM advised the meeting that a report on this had gone to the Licensing & Regulatory Panel in March. The report recommended that there was no unmet demand for Hackney Carriage vehicles in Leeds. He also advised that the best practice guidance stated that a survey should be carried out every 3 years. The Trade asked when the last survey was completed and JM advised that it had

been done in 2000. He advised that the survey carried out in 2009 had been very thorough. The outcome of the Panel meeting was that the Panel agreed with the recommendations and advised that the next survey should be conducted in a minimum of 3 years time. JM advised that at the Panel meeting discussion had taken place on the number of wheel chair accessible vehicles (WAV) in the fleet of licenced vehicles. Following this discussion the Section was tasked to review the number of WAV's in the fleet and prepare a Report to go to Panel. MJ advised that the Access Committee for Leeds had been in attendance at the Panel meeting and they had advised that not all people with a disability required a WAV and that a mixed fleet was preferable. He advised that the Panel realised that this review could take 12 months to complete. JM advised that when this report is being prepared he will ask Operators for comments.

JM

Discussions also took place on the choice of manufacturers and vehicles approved for use. MD advised that the Section was not opposed to looking at any vehicle with regard to our conditions but that vehicles needed to be presented to us.

MD advised that a list of approved WAV is on the sections web-site.

www.leeds.gov.uk/Transport_and_streets/Taxis_and_minicabs/Hackney_carriage_and_private_hire_vehicles.aspx

Discussions took place on the VITO and MD advised that he would ask for the vehicle to be presented at the Section so that it could be looked at and approved. MD also advised the meeting of the approval process and said part of that process involved getting the Access Committee for Leeds to look at vehicles. MD advised that it was part of a democratic process.

MD asked the meeting if they could provide the name of the Company so that he could contact the Company himself with a view to getting it presented to us for approval.

MD

5. **Staffing issues**

JM advised the meeting that Des Broster's hearing was now completed and that he was still awaiting on the outcome of the hearing.

Mr Pennock asked JM if he knew that DPB had been cleared, he advised that rumours were circulating amongst the trade saying that DPB had been cleared of all the allegations. JM advised that he couldn't confirm or deny any rumours but that he would provide feedback to Nicola Jackson, Director. Mr Pennock advised that since DPB's suspension that the Section had not moved on and that the Trade needed some clear leadership. Mr Pennock advised that since DPB's suspension that 3 Panel meetings had been cancelled and he thought that it was ridiculous that it had taken this long and still the Section/Trade did not have an outcome. JM again apologised and advised that he couldn't answer any questions about the hearing.

MD gave an update on the current vacancies within his team. He advised that currently there was one Vehicle Examiner position vacant and that Phil Hatch was Acting up as the Senior Vehicle Examiner. MD also advised that under the current structure there were 4 Enforcement Officer vacancies. MD advised that he was revamping the contract for these Enforcement officers to cover other nights of the week and longer shifts, as it is recognised that Leeds centre is a 24/7 city. He advised that the existing Enforcement Officers will have the opportunity to transfer to the new contract. MD gave the meeting an update on the process that any vacancy goes through.

The Trade commented on the fact that more than 8 Enforcement Officers were needed. JM advised that Lacours were reviewing all the legislation relating to Taxi and Private Hire Licensing and that he would prefer to recruit staff for the current 4 vacancies. Once the vacancies were filled then he would look to review the current structure/numbers. The Trade asked how long it would take to get these positions filled, MD advised that he hoped to have the positions filled within the next 12 months but would provide the Trade with an update at each meeting. JM advised that if there were any suitable internal applicant then they could be in place more quickly than external applicants.

6.0

Licensing Update

Discussion took place on the lack of customer service on the counter, at reception and on the phone. JM advised the meeting that the Section did have an issue with the call rate due to the telephone system. He advised that call rates had improved from 15 – 19% to around 39%. He advised the meeting that another way to contact us was by the Sections generic e-mail address which is **taxiprivatetire.licensing@leeds.gov.uk**. MJ advised the meeting that the counter work is a difficult job for staff and that staff were getting professional training i.e. NALEO, NVQ's in Customer Service.

Mr Pennock raised the issue of Group 2 medicals not being done by drivers "own doctor". MJ agreed that Group 2 medicals should be completed by drivers own doctors but that some GP's were unable/unwilling to do Group 2 medicals. MJ advised that as long as a qualified GP completes the form then the Section had to accept the Group 2 medical.

Discussions took place on the new ISA which is in addition to the current CRB. JM advised the meeting that different Council's were handling the ISA differently and that the Section had approached NALEO, who's advice was to seek your own legal advice, which is what the Section has done. To date no advice had been received. MJ advised the meeting that contract work was a separate issue and that anyone undertaking contract work for Leeds City Council required a CRB and ISA check.

MJ advised that that from July/August the new form is being introduced and all new applicants will have to complete both the

CRB and ISA part of the form. For existing drivers we are awaiting legal advice as to whether a ISA check is required, if legal advice advises us to carry out the ISA check then the section has a 5 year period in which to carry out this check for existing licenced drivers. MJ advised that this will obviously impact on waiting times and that when legal advice arrives then staffing resources will have to be considered. MJ also advised that this will impact on the waiting time for new driver appointments as they will take 1 hour to complete rather than 45 minutes as the CRB/ISA form was more complicated. JM advised that once drivers were registered with the ISA then they would receive a number and that the Section would be advised straight away if there were any issues relating to vulnerable adults and/or young children with that driver. Marvin Hurst asked if the Section could look into putting the drivers ISA number on the driver's badge so that Operators were aware that an ISA check had been carried out on drivers. MJ advised that due to the current licencing system then this could not be done.

The Trade asked about controlling the issue of badges until drivers could produce their yellow licence. Drivers often leave operators and leave their yellow licence behind, often Operators are not aware that they have left. MJ advised that this would be hard to monitor and would impact on queue's etc.

The Trade also asked about a tier-ing licencing fee for Operators based on the number of cars. MJ advised that until the Section had a new computer system in place then this was not possible. JM then gave a brief update on the current position with the new licensing system.

The Trade were concerned about the cancellation of the last few Panel meetings. JM advised that the lack of a section Head has not meant that Panel meetings have had to be cancelled it just meant that there were no issues that needed to go to Panel. JM advised that most decisions can be made by Officers who have delegated powers to make such decisions (a delegated decision). The Unmet Demand Survey Report did go to the Licensing & Regulatory Panel.

7.0

Operations – Update

Discussions took place about the Hackney Carriage rank on White House Lane, Yeadon and JM advised the meeting that this was an issue for Keith Darch at Highways.

Discussions also took place on the siting of Hackney Carriage ranks all around the city and the there was double yellow line around the city making it difficult for the Private Hire Trade. MD advised the meeting that Private Hire drivers were allowed to stop for short period of time to drop off and pick up. MD advised that there had been an issue with congestion in the city centre. The Trade asked for leniency by Parking Services before they issue a ticket. MD advised that he had spoken to Mark Jefford who was head of Parking Services to clarify that there was some time allowed for the Trade to drop off and pick up customers before drivers are issued with a ticket. JM advised that if drivers do have any problem with a

ticket that had been issued then they were to write to Mark Jefford.

Contact details for Mark Jefford :

Mark Jefford, Parking Manager, Knowesthorpe Gate, Cross Green, Leeds LS9 ONP
Mark.Jefford@leeds.gov.uk

Discussions also took place on plying for hire and hot spots within the city. MD asked Operators if they could ask customers to walk a small distance from these hot spot which would help make it clear for drivers to identify their customers. The Trade advised that it would be difficult to ask customers to do this and that customers wanted picking up from outside where ever they were, they would be reluctant to walk to get into a car which would make it easier for drivers who were plying for hire.

Discussion also took place on whether the Enforcement Team could concentrate on problem Companies. MD advised that it was not just a particular company but drivers from all companies were plying for hire and that it would be unfair to discriminate in such a way.

MD gave the meeting an update on the joint plying for hire operations with the Police. He advised that the Section has a good working relationship with the Police and that more joint Operation would be carried out throughout the year. MD advised that drivers were given the opportunity to say 'no' and that many drivers do.

The Trade asked if a fixed penalty could be used as a deterrent to drivers, JM advised that due to current legislation that this was not possible.

MJ advised the meeting that he would like to see the Operator conditions increase the obligations placed on an Operator. JM advised that any change in conditions would be discussed at forums, meetings, articles would be in the section's newsletter and a consultation process would be followed.

Discussions then took place on the annual Operator visits that the Enforcement team carry out. Some Operators advised that they had had two visits within 4 months. MD advised that visits should be annual but that the Enforcement Team may visit to follow up on improvement notices etc, which would mean that Operators were getting multiple visits in one year. JM & MD agreed to look into this so that Operators would not be getting more visits than necessary.

Discussions also took place on multi agency operations with Benefits agency, IR, Immigration etc. MD advised that these had taken place in the past. MD agreed to look into establishing this sort of operation at Operators offices.

JM & MD

JM agreed to look into putting together a multi-agency Operation and would report back at the next meeting.

MD

The Trade mentioned that there were a lot of Premier and Time-

MD

Line cars plying for hire/touting in Wetherby on a weekend. MD agreed to look into this.

Operators also mentioned the length of time it takes for Roadside checks to be carried out. MD advised that compliance checks should take 10-20 minutes depending on the problems with vehicles. Operators were concerned that some check were taking drivers of the road for 3 hours. MD advised that this should not be the case. The Trade asked if Hackney Carriage driver were also stopped for compliance/roadside checks. MD agreed to confirm the numbers at the next meeting. JM & MD confirmed and agreed that any Operations carried out included both the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Trades.

MD

Discussions took place on ANPR vehicle. The trade asked if the vehicle could be used for plying for hire operations. MD explained that at the moment plying for hire operations were quite labour intensive due to the evidence required to prosecute drivers. MD explained that the Section has a policy to prosecute drivers suspected of plying for hire. MD advised that legal advice would be required on whether we can prosecute on recorded image evidence only. MD advised that the Section would then need to take a test case through the Courts. JM explained that the Section had an excellent record on prosecutions for plying for hire and would not want this spoilt.

MD

8.0

Vehicle Inspections - update

MD advised that there had been a decline in the number of new vehicles licenced over recent months. MD advised that new vehicle were now been given an inspection appointment of 8.00am or 9.00 am and that counter staff had been advised to give new vehicles this slot. Currently a number of 8.00 am slots are not been taken and this impacts on other appointments and means that staff are stood around.

Discussions took place as to why the number of vehicle licences has declined and it is though by the Trade that this is due to the economic climate.

MD also advised that staff are spending a lot of time inspecting vehicles which had been transferred and now all vehicles which have been transferred are now inspected.

MD also advised that the vehicles that are now been called in for inspection are the oldest vehicles. The Section has been profiling vehicles and calling in vehicles that are in the relevant age range.

10.0

Review of Taxi & Private Hire Licensing budget

MJ handed around a document showing the current and proposed fees.

JM advised that at the present time he is completing an end of year budget and completing a comprehensive review of the current

budget for the Section. He advised that a considerable number of licences have not been renewed which has reduced the income to the Section. The Sections expenses have increase over a number of years and the licence fee has not been increased since 2005. JM advised that the Section is facing a shortfall based on the current number of licences and the proposed budget.

The current economic climate, age criteria and Group 2 medicals have all helped to reduce the number of licences.

MJ & JM advised that the proposed increases represented a 2% increase and was to cover the £190,000 shortfall. The Section was also looking to have a year on year increase in line with the RIP. JM advised that they increase was across the board. JM advised that he recognised that Operators will want to take this information away with them to discuss with their drivers.

The Trade expressed their concern that this was a further cost to them when fuel costs were at the highest they have ever been, the poor economic climate, age criteria and Group 2 medicals have all impacted on the cost to licence payers. The Trade also advised that the new ISA/CRB is another cost that is going to be borne by the licence holder.

JM advised that the service provided by the Section is paid for by licence fees and that the income raised is ring fenced. Discussions then took place on the cost of the extension to the building with JM advising that the cost of the extension and the ANPR vehicle had been taken out of the 'surplus'. Discussions then took place on the changes to the original plan when the garage had MOT status. JM gave the Trade an update on the reasoning behind this.

JM advised that the only way to reduce expenditure greatly would be to reduce staffing levels and in view of the comments made today that he would not be looking to do this.

JM gave the Trade an update on the consultation process and asked that any comments the Trade had on the proposed changes to the fee structure be fed back to him. He advised that there was a 21 day consultation period with the Trade once adverts had gone into newspapers. The proposed fee increase is was a delegated decision that would be taken by Stuart Turnock.

The Trade also asked if the proposed fee increase was to 'pay off' Des Broster or to pay for a 'golden handshake'. Comments were made that DPB had been suspended on full pay while an investigation was carried out and that this was wasted money.

JM advised that the fee increase was to cover the shortfall in revenue as previously explained to the meeting. The Trade asked if the Sections accounts were available to the Public. JM advised that the Sections accounts were in the Public domain and were available on request. He advised that he would bring copies of the accounts to the next meeting.

Operators

JM

10.0**Any Other Business**

JM asked the meeting if it would be useful and more reassuring if he could get Keith Darch from Highways and Mark Jefford from Parking Services to attend a meeting so that they could answer any questions the Trade had. The Trade thought that this was a good idea and JM agreed to organise a meeting.

JM

The Trade also requested some feedback on issues raised following Operator visits. MD agreed to get some feedback.

MD