

**MINUTES OF PRIVATE HIRE FORUM
HELD ON 17 september 2010 AT ST GEORGE HOUSE**

ITEM		ACTION
	<p><u>In Attendance</u></p> <p><u>Leeds City Council:</u> John Mulcahy – Head of Licensing & Registration Martino Deplacido – Operations Manager Martyn Johnson – Licensing Manager Kate Coldwell – Service Development Officer Joanna Mingham – Service Development Officer Alison Calvert – Temporary Management Support Officer (Secretary)</p> <p><u>Private Hire Operators</u></p>	
1.0	<p><u>Welcome and Introductions</u></p> <p>John Mulcahy introduced himself and thanked everyone for attending.</p>	
2.0	<p>JM advised that before the meeting was to start that he had a statement to read in relation to rumours circulating the trade.</p> <p>The Statement read as follows:</p>	
3.0	<p>Due to a prior commitment outside of Leeds, the Assistant Chief Executive (Corporate Governance) cannot be here. However she has asked if I would relay the following to you.</p> <p>"I will be responding to the letter from Mr Landau making it perfectly clear that who the Council employs and in what role is entirely a matter for the Council. Such decisions are not subject to the approval of the trade and therefore any "threats" in relation to such matters show a fundamental misunderstanding of the respective roles of the Council and the trade, are pointless and will be ignored.</p> <p>As with any other service, if any service user has a concern regarding the conduct of an employee, then such concerns should be made formally, be put in writing with the appropriate evidence, in order that the concerns can be investigated and, where appropriate,</p>	

action taken. However rumour, gossip and insinuations will not be considered.

As previously stated, I will not be commenting on the current position with Des as that is entirely a matter between the Council and Des and is clearly not a matter for the trade. John, as Head of Licensing is covering the Section Head role with assistance from Tino and Martyn, therefore if you have any concerns regarding the service, then they need to be raised with John."

JM asked AC to e-mail this statement to everyone who was in attendance.

Mr Pennock reminded Mr Mulcahy about a document that was handed over at the last Forum and advised that he had not received a response from Nicolè Jackson. JM agreed to remind Nicola Jackson about this. Mr pennock expressed concerns about raising the licence fee at a time when Des Broster the section Head was off work.

JM

Minutes of the last meeting

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

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

4.0

WAV review – The Leeds Access Committee had requested a meeting with the Trade. JM advised that the section was in the early stages of this work and that a meeting may be considered at a later date once some work had been undertaken.

Discussion took place on types of vehicles in particular the VITO. MD advised that this vehicle had not been to the Section to be looked at for approval. Discussions then went on to the Doblo and the high standards in Leeds as compared to other Authorities. MD advised that every vehicle is compared to the Council's vehicle conditions and any vehicle converter could bring a vehicle to Leeds to see if it meets the criteria in Leeds.

MJ advised the meeting that vehicle in Leeds were expected to reach a standard and that people with disabilities should not expect a lower standard.

JM advised that it was up to each Authority to set it's own standards which is why they varied across the Authorities. JM advised the meeting following the Panel meeting the section had been requested to look at the WAV fleet.

An anonymous letter was handed to JM from the Trade who advised that several Operators had received a copy. JM advised that this was the first time he had seen this but that this would be referred to Nicola Jackson. JM advised that the hearing had been

concluded, a decision made and that the outcome was not know.

(Post meeting note : date hearing concluded to be inserted)

Discussion on the proposed Hackney Carriage rank near the airport took place and it was agreed that the minutes of the previous meeting should be changed to refer to White House Lane, Yeadon. JM advised the meeting that this rank was one of a number of schemes to improve the highways, junctions etc and a Panel of Officers would look at each proposal and prioritise them.

MD

Staffing issues

5.

MD advised that a member of the Enforcement Team had left the Section. The team now consisted of 3 Enforcement Officers and 2 Principal Enforcement Officers. The Section was now reviewing the Job Descriptions of the current Enforcement Team and was putting together a Job Description for new Enforcement Officers to cover a different shift pattern which would include other nights of the week. MD advised that existing Enforcement Officers could change to the new shift pattern and that a consultation process was underway. The new hours would range from 8.00 am to 6.00 am to meet the changes in demand. The section had 5 vacancies. MD explained to the Trade the recruitment process i.e Re-deployees, internal & then external adverts.

Discussion took place on how Officers could be used and MD advised that the Enforcement Team could not target companies but targeted 'hot spots' within the city centre for operations. The CCTV vehicle was a help with the Operations which took place.

MD advised the meeting of the procedure if a driver did not have a cover note or did not have a badge. MD advised that in the interests of public safety then the Enforcement Team would remove the stickers from a vehicle as the driver cannot be identified.

Discussion then took place on the view of the Road and the positioning of sat nav's and data heads. MD advised the Trade that the view of the road is Regulated and drivers needed to comply with the relevant regulations.

The Trade advised that several drivers had had problems with the stickers and had failed MOT's because of the height of them. MD advised that he would look into this.

MJ

MD advised the meeting that the Principal Vehicle Examiner's post which Phil Hatch had been acting up had been advertised internally within the Council and that shortlisting for this post was due to commence next week.

MJ/KC

MJ

Licensing Update

MJ advised that the Enforcement Team would be handing out a partially completed form as an example of how the form should be completed to all Operators for their drivers.

Ticket machine – MJ advised that he had not progressed this item yet but thought that the new reception area was working well and was helping to reduce the length of the queue.

MJ advised the meeting that the licensing office was proposing to open through until 5.30 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays from August until September as a trial. MJ advised that the staff had volunteered to do this and that it would be a limited service.

MJ advised the meeting that in the past the licensing office had stayed open for new driver appointments, but quite often the driver had not turned up and was therefore not cost effective.

MJ advised that flyers would go out and an e-mail sent to Operators to advise them of the extended opening times.

Discussions took place on the number of counters that were open and the Trade were not happy that all counters were not open all the time. MJ advised that this was not always possible due to new driver appointments, annual leave and sickness. The Trade advised that they thought there should be extra staff. MJ advised that this may increase the licence fee on top of what had already been discussed at the previous meeting. MJ advised that he would review the situation.

MJ agreed that application forms could be put on our web pages for drivers and Operators to download. MJ agreed to speak to Kate Coldwell about this.

The Trade requested a supply of new application packs. MJ agreed to supply Operators with a number of packs.

6.0 &
8.0

Post meeting note: the latest application forms, Group 2 medicals etc needed for a new application are included on our web-page – www.leeds.gov.uk/taxis.

MJ advised that each new application is assessed on its own merits.

The Trade asked why all renewals expired on the same day and why a specific day for expiry of a licence could not be given. MJ advised that this was not possible due to the current licensing system and that on each renewal date the driver was given a suggested date for attending. The suggested date staggered the people who needed to attend the office. MJ advised that drivers knew that they had to renew before the end of the month and so drivers tended to leave it until the last week of the month generally.

JM advised the meeting that the contract with the Provider of the new licensing system had been terminated. The Section had not accepted the software and so the contract was terminated. JM advised that the Section was looking to procure a different system. JM advised that the Section was looking at a new system which was already in use by the Council and had a Licensing section. JM

advised that the section had looked at this system and were looking into whether this new system could meet the specification drawn up from the previous tender exercise.

The Trade asked about the cost of terminating the contract and JM advised that it was minimal, less than £5,000, but the section had spend a lot of time and effort in testing the system to make sure that it would meet the Sections requirements.

MD

JM advised that the cost of the proposed new system were not known yet but were expected to be considerably cheaper than the previous system.

Operations

MD gave the Trade figures from the Multi-agency operations with Police and Parking Services.

MD advised that not all approached were successful. In a recent weekend of 30 approached only 1 was suspended for plying for hire.

In a joint operation with the Police, Parking Services and the Enforcement Team:

124 inspections carried out
50 identified faults
28 Suspended
22 issued with advisory notices.

7.0

MD advised that the Enforcement Team do not have the Authority to deal with congestion issues around the city centre which is why the Enforcement Team were carrying out joint operations so that a range of offences could be dealt with.

MD advised that from 28 April 2010: 565 roadside compliance checks had been carried out. 20% had pass with advice and 20% had serious defects.

9.0

Construction and Use offences – MD advised the Trade that 22 files had been prepared for illegal tyres and that Magistrates were coming down very hard on this type of offence.

The Trade asked for further information. MD agreed to speak to legal to see what information can be released.

MD advised that he had obtained legal advice about using CCTV footage only to identify drivers plying for hire. The footage could be used to identify driver in a location, if a driver did not have a reason for being in the area then they would be pursued for plying for hire – only after an investigation had taken place to establish that the driver had not reason to be in that location.

Operator base checks – MD advised that these should only take place once every 12 months unless there was an areas of non

compliance which needed to be improved. MD advised that there appeared to be a problem in spacing out Operator base visits as different officers were dealing with them each time.

MD advised the Trade that he was in the planning stages of doing multi-agency Operator base visits. This has been raised a previous forum.

Vehicle Inspections - Update

MD advised the Trade that since February 2010 each vehicle which had been transferred had to be inspected. Out of 173 vehicle that had been checked – 66 passed, 69 failed and 26 were VOR'd.

MD also went on to advise the meeting that since the introduction of the 7 year age criteria there had been no noticeable change in the number of vehicle which had failed their inspection.

JM

Licence Fee Proposal

MD advised that at the last meeting the fee proposal had been discussed and feedback requested.

Discussions took place and the Trade requested sight of the budget statement for the section. JM advised that he did not have it with him but that he would enquire if the statement for the period ending March 2010 had been audited. MJ advised the meeting that the previous years accounts were on the Council's web-site.

JM

JM advised the Trade that there was a drop in income due to a reduction in renewals. JM advised that to maintain staffing levels the fees would need to be increased as the section was in deficit. Jma dvised that he also proposed that year on the the fees increased in line with RPI.

The Trade asked what the Sections income was and JM advised it was £1.4 million.

Discussion took place on how the extension to the building at 225 York Road was funded and JM advised that the final cost of the build was around £700,00 and that part of this funding was taken from the surplus and part of the funds were sourced internally form within the Council at a very good interest rate.

10.0

The Sections surplus was being eroded because the Section was operating at a loss due to a reduction in the number of renewals.

The Trade asked about the cost of stickers and whether that could be out sourced at a cheaper cost to drivers. JM advised that the Councils Policy was if there was an internal department that could do the work then they would do the work. JM agreed to clarify Procurements Standing Orders and Thresholds.

The Trade commented that the Operators licence fee had not

changed. MJ advised that he would like to see banding based of the number of vehicle an Operator has on his OPVS. MJ advised that the proposal represented small increases across the licensing regime.

JM advised that the process for fee increases would be for them to be advertised in the local press for 21 days to receive any representations. This would then be referred to Stuart Turnock for a decision on the fee increase.

JM confirmed that he would speak to Finance to see to what information on the budget could be released and if accounts had been audited could they be released.

11.0

Discussion on the surplus took place and JM advised that the ramps in the garage were to be changed at a cost of approximately £40,000. JM advised that part of the surplus had been set aside to do this. The Trade asked why the ramps need replacing. MD advised that there were passed their life span. Discussions took place on their re-sale value and it was agreed that they would be sold.

MJ

JM advised that the Section was running at a loss so the fee increase would need to be agreed quickly.

Trade Q & A Session in Civic Hall

JM advised that there had been a few requests for members of the Trade to speak to individuals in other areas within the Council. JM advised that he was proposing to set up a Q & A session for the Trade in the Banqueting suite of the Civic Hall. The Trade thought that this was a good idea but suggested separate sessions for Operators, Private Hire drivers and Hackney Carriage Proprietors and Associations.

12.0

JM advised that he was putting together a Panel of Officers from the Police, Highways, Parking Services & Planning to attend and answer questions. Vehicle manufacturers and converters may also be invited to attend to put together a stall so that vehicles could be viewed.

The Trade thought that it was important for Julie Hatton from Education Transport to attend.

October Half term was suggested as a good time for an Operator's Q & A session.

JM advised that the format would include a short presentation from individuals which would be followed by a Q & A session.

ISA/CRB Vetting of Licence Holders

MJ advised that the ISA registration was now on hold and that the Coalition Government was reviewing the situation. MJ advised that the proposed fee increase due to the ISA element of the CRM

disclosure would not now go ahead. MJ advised that he would keep the Trade informed of any change in the requirement to do the ISA registration.

MJ advised that extra staff would need to be employed to do the ISA/CRB check if it was decided that this check needed to be carried out. This would be a Policy decision which would need to go to consultation and then to Panel.

Discussions took place on the cost of the CRB and the % rise proposed in the CRB.

JM advised that that the proposed fee increase would generate enough to cover the £179,000 shortfall.

JM advised that if the price increase was not agreed then Services would have to be cut.

Any Other Business

JM advised the Trade that the 2 licensing committees i.e Entertainment Licensing & the Licensing & Regulatory Panel were merging into one Licensing Committee from July 2010.