

**Drivers Forum Minutes**  
**28 July 2020**  
**Microsoft Teams Meeting**

**Introductions – West Suffolk Council**

Fiona Quinn, Environmental Health Service Manager  
Natasha Wade-Guest, Licensing Team Leader  
Brenda Wright, Licensing Officer  
Steve Moore, Licensing Officer (Temporary)  
Kerry Pryer, Licensing Technical Support  
Jakob Wimpenny, Licensing Support Apprentice  
Kim Barnes-Clark, Administration Support

**Representatives of Drivers Forum**

Daniel Adkins  
Loretta White  
Alex Williams  
Laura Williams

**Items**

Fiona Quinn opened the meeting and introduced herself to the forum. The rest of the team then introduced themselves, along with the representatives of the driver's forum.

**Election of Chair**

Fiona asked those present to elect a chairperson for the meeting. Daniel Adkins who had previously acted as chairman of the forum suggested a rota where each representative had an opportunity to chair a meeting if they so wished. This was supported by the other drivers present with emphasis being put on conducting the meetings in an orderly manner and everybody having an opportunity to put their views forward.

Fiona was asked to chair this 'virtual' meeting as this was the first time of using Microsoft Teams for the drivers.

**Terms of Reference**

To be formulated and agreed by next meeting.

To get the most benefit from the forum all agreed that a good mix of drivers, operators, police and councillors, together with Council officers would be useful and that a police representative, and the Chair of Licensing and Regulatory Committee would be invited to future meetings.

## **Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Conditions Policy Handbook**

The Handbook was due to be presented to Cabinet Planning meeting of the Council on 21 July 2020 however, due to the Department for Transport issuing their updated guidance on taxi and private hire vehicle licensing on that day it was considered prudent to withdraw the policy from that meeting. It will now be presented to that committee on 8 September 2020 allowing time to make any necessary changes in line with the guidance.

Reduction in engine size was raised as this has already been approved in the handbook it was felt that no further discussion was needed on the matter.

Fiona pointed out that if drivers were uncertain whether a vehicle they were proposing to purchase fulfilled the necessary criteria set out in the handbook, the best way forward would be to put their proposals in writing to the licensing team for consideration on a case-by-case basis. It may be that a decision would be reached after discussion with councillors.

Laura Williams stated that she had attended the West Suffolk Cabinet Planning meeting and raised the matter of vehicle age in connection with hybrid, LPG, and electric vehicles. As these vehicles were substantially more expensive than diesel or petrol vehicles and are much more environmentally friendly she had suggested that vehicle age should not be a consideration. Again, Fiona suggested putting proposals to the licensing team on a case by case basis for consideration by West Suffolk Council members. Going forward; it may be appropriate to publish a decision on this matter.

Loretta White mentioned financial hardship because of COVID-19 and her concern that changes to the handbook should not be implemented if they are going to add to the burden for drivers.

A comment was made about 'maximum age of vehicle' coming into effect on 1 January 2025 must not be brought forward.

Fiona stated that the forum was a useful tool to make drivers aware of what is going on and vice-versa. It is a platform to share Cabinet decisions and other news.

Dan Adkins mentioned that grants for electric, hybrid and LPG vehicles are available, based on various criteria not just age.

It was again mentioned that there could be an exemption in the policy regarding vehicle age for these types of vehicles being used for private hire work.

Fiona said consideration will be given to how our policy links up with future aspirations regarding carbon footprint.

Mention was made of LPG conversions to current vehicles and that this would reduce boot space.

Any conversions would have to be approved by West Suffolk Council. Laura Williams stated that it would be very expensive if the conversion was done and then West Suffolk Council did not approve this.

Fiona said best to submit proposals first.

Laura suggested that West Suffolk Council compiles a list of suitable vehicles for conversion.

Fiona noted all comments and confirmed that after further consideration drivers would be updated.

## Issues arising because of COVID-19

Steve Moore went through the medical process covering issues some drivers had encountered when trying to get a medical. He stated that drivers could self-certificate but would be expected to obtain an appointment for their medical either through their usual practice or another practice as long as they had given their permission for the registered GP who carried out the medical to access their medical records.

Eyesight test could be carried out either by the doctor or an optician.

Dan Adkins asked if it would be ok to get medical early in the current climate and Steve confirmed that this would be a very good idea.

Loretta White said that she felt that West Suffolk Council had not given drivers enough guidance regarding the pandemic and said that she felt abandoned.

Dan Adkins suggested the possibility of a stronger relationship between Operators and the Licensing team, having to produce identical documentation to both seemed a duplication of effort. The operator could be used as middleman and therefore avoid duplication of tasks.

The matter of masks and hand sanitiser use in operational vehicles was discussed. Laura Williams stated that Pride Cars Limited follow Transport for London guidance and insist on wearing of masks. Steve Moore responded that it is not for us to take our guidance from Transport for London but from central government.

Fiona asked for feedback on our electronic applications process and requested that everything is emailed to the licensing inbox and not individual officers.

Dan Adkins commented that some applications were dealt with very quickly and others not.

Brenda Wright advised that the Licensing Team have updated their procedure to deal with applications on a complete application received date, rather than a vehicle plate expiry date basis. If drivers get their completed and valid application sent to the Licensing inbox in good time prior to expiry (ideally at least 1 month before) there should not be a problem with the licence being issued prior to the expiry date. She also advised that officers are working on a procedure to allow new driver applications to be processed and the website would be updated with this guidance shortly.

Laura Williams commented that it was sometimes difficult to get documents uploaded and sent to the Licensing department and asked if a customer access strategy had been considered. She commented that Suffolk County Council had a good system which operators used when tendering for school transport contracts. Natasha Wade-Guest confirmed that we were actively exploring this and are very keen for this to happen although there is some way to go.

Natasha also informed the drivers that we are now printing plates in West Suffolk House and appointments are being made for drivers to collect these and return their expired ones. As the West Suffolk Council offices are currently closed drivers would need to pick them up from the Bury St Edmunds Depot, but each driver will be contacted to confirm these arrangements.

It is our hope that we will soon be up to date on issuing plates and or driver badges.

Steve Moore added that it is the way that some of the applications are submitted which is making it time consuming for downloading purposes and processing. PDF's are the best format.

Laura Williams suggested changing renewal forms to be quicker and shorter for applicant as the Licensing team already have vehicle information on file.

Natasha pointed out that, going forward, once we are customer facing, it would not be necessary to complete all the information again.

Natasha then asked what drivers thought of the new garages which had been added as testing stations since the COVID-19 outbreak.

Generally, the drivers seemed happy with the service received.

Steve Moore mentioned that we are now requiring garages to send to the Licensing department a copy of the check sheets used for the testing of vehicles.

Laura Williams had a query regarding parcel shelves and headrests in relation to tests.

## **Conclusion of meeting**

Fiona thanked those present for attending and the positive input. The meeting concluded at 6pm.

## **Date of next meeting**

To be arranged.