

Taxi Driver Forum 6 January 2025

10.30am to 12pm

Notes

Item and discussion	Driver feedback								
Introductions									
<p>Christian Moore (CM) opened the forum and set out the agenda for the session.</p>	<p>In attendance from West Suffolk Council:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Cllr Roger Dicker</td> <td>Chair Regulatory Committee</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Mike Pursehouse</td> <td>Director (Housing, Communities and Regulatory)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Christian Moore</td> <td>Food, Safety and Licensing Manager</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Tim Cleary</td> <td>Senior Licensing Policy Officer</td> </tr> </table>	Cllr Roger Dicker	Chair Regulatory Committee	Mike Pursehouse	Director (Housing, Communities and Regulatory)	Christian Moore	Food, Safety and Licensing Manager	Tim Cleary	Senior Licensing Policy Officer
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West Suffolk approved garages									
<p>CM provided an update on the recent changes to the approved testing centres.</p>	<p>Drivers were encouraged to contact the licensing department asap if encountering problems getting taxi inspection appointment.</p> <p>Concerns were raised as to why testing centres were taken off the approved list. Christian Moore (CM) explained that during the summer of 2024 the council went through a tender process and two were successful. Others did not submit their application correctly or within the required timeframe.</p> <p>Licensing said that where people demonstrated they had experienced difficulty in getting a vehicle booked in for testing the council had not penalised drivers. As of 6 January, there are now five approved testing centres resolving the issue.</p> <p>The question was asked about the difference between MOT tests and taxi inspections. This will be detailed and made available on the news page of the website.</p> <p>Concern over the 28-day processing time for applications was brought up.</p> <p>CM said that 28 days is to ensure there is ample time to handle all applications efficiently. There are more checks and statutory requirements than there was previously. CM noted however that while the official timeframe is 28 days, applications are regularly processed in less time.</p>								

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	<p>CM said that roundtable forum discussions would be scheduled to discuss future changes to policies.</p>
<p>Vehicle age requirements</p>	
<p>CM provided an update on the changes to vehicle age requirements which are due to come into effect from 1 April 2025</p>	<p>CM would check reasoning behind the decision on car age and a review of the requirement would take place.</p> <p>The point was made that vehicles should not need to be changed if they still pass the taxi inspection. An example was given that many older cars are well looked after and that passengers are concerned about safety, not age.</p> <p>Other concerns were raised that some new or newer cars have emissions producing more pollution.</p> <p>CM said this was a cabinet decision made in 2022 after other authorities were looked at to see how they were reducing emissions to provide a greener fleet, but drivers felt they were being pushed towards changes without being consulted, and that West Suffolk is a rural area and should be considered as such rather than a county-wide approach or by following TfL.</p> <p>The question was asked on where there would be a period of grace.</p> <p>Cllr Kelly has since said that he will be asking his Cabinet colleagues to amend the current policy to take out the age requirement when it meets on 11 March and that an update would be sent as soon as the decision has been made.</p>
<p>Best practice guidance</p>	
<p>CM explained that updates had been made to the 2010 Best Practice Document</p>	<p>The comment was made that while we should consider the Best Practice Guidance, we should not necessarily implement.</p> <p>Another said that drivers felt decisions had already been made without engagement and that WSC needs to have more face-to-face contact with drivers which is something the council is looking to achieve by encouraging greater attendance and participation in the forum</p> <p>One note was made that it is difficult for drivers to get insurance for electric vehicles.</p> <p>Tim Cleary (TC) suggested consideration should be made to incentivise electric vehicles and that we are reviewing an emissions-based standard.</p>

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	<p>A discussion took place on whether the school contracts would eventually be run solely by Vertas as it was felt they were taking majority of the work. A representative from Suffolk County Council confirmed that there were currently 160 operators doing school contracts across Suffolk and that they were always looking for a competitive marketplace of reliable safe operators, not for Vertas to run the contracts solely.</p> <p>CM said the council wants to build relations with the and MP said we wanted to improve communications.</p>
Taxi and private hire vehicle policy	
<p>CM provided an update on the forthcoming review of the Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Policy and said the document would be split into smaller sections for review by the trade at future engagement sessions.</p>	<p>CM said that regular driver engagement would be scheduled to discuss changes to policy.</p> <p>Drivers said they wanted to be involved in the process, not just be informed once decisions have already been made.</p> <p>They also suggested joining a cabinet session so that they could comment on decisions being made.</p> <p>Cllr Dicker encouraged drivers to discuss issues with their local councillors as they can then escalate them to cabinet members. This is a relatively new administration, and they are keen to listen.</p> <p>Drivers were keen for the medical process to be looked at as high priority. It was discussed that medicals for over 65 years of age are annual, but the current state retirement age is now 67 so the two are not aligned. Some GPs have said they don't agree with annual medicals, and it is a huge expense for drivers. TC – for taxi drivers we should be using the current D4 medical requirement for lorry drivers</p> <p>CM said we are aware that some GPs are reticent to carry out medicals especially during winter/flu season, which is why our policy requirement was changed for the medical to be carried out by a registered doctor not just a registered GP, but we are trying to meet majority of recommendations in BPG. However, CM said we could potentially survey GPs within the local area.</p> <p>The other question raised on medicals related to drivers who were not born in the UK – GPs are not checking their full medical history because they do not have access to it.</p> <p>TC said this will be included as part of the next policy review.</p>

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Fees and charges	
CM explained that licensing fees are reviewed every three years.	CM said that calculations will be made at the end of 2025 to be implemented by April 2026.
Digital applications	
CM gave an update on digital applications	<p>CM provided reassurance that the application process will be reviewed throughout 2025 with the intention to introduce online taxi-related applications.</p> <p>Drivers welcomed this change as they found the current process difficult and stressful. It was noted that some of the forms were not editable/printable from the website.</p> <p>Karen Verrechia (Licensing Team Leader) asked drivers to inform the licensing department of any forms that were causing problems on the website.</p>
Unmet demand survey	
CM shared the results of the Unmet Demand Survey	
Questions and feedback	
1. Clarification was sought as to whether the testing centres email taxi inspection documents to the department.	CM confirmed that drivers are still required to email inspection documents through to the team.
2. It was stated that the West Suffolk Operational Hub (WSOH) remove plates from a vehicle if it fails inspection. This doesn't happen at other testing centres.	We will look into this with WSOH and other testing centres.
CM asked attendees how they feel future sessions should be conducted.	<p>Some were happy to keep a similar format, others said it should be less formal, and that WSC should not make excuses, but listen to what the trade had to say so that they feel something is actually being done as currently the general consensus is that the council have made decisions and won't change anything.</p> <p>We will send a link to a survey to find out preferences.</p>

A copy of the presentation is available on the West Suffolk Council website: [Taxi driver news](#)