

Drivers Forum Minutes 29 October 2020

Microsoft Teams Meeting

Introductions – West Suffolk Council

Fiona Quinn, Environmental Health Service Manager
Natasha Wade-Guest, Licensing Team Leader
Gary Moran, Licensing Officer
Brenda Wright, Licensing Officer
Steve Moore, Licensing Officer (Temporary)
Kerry Pryer, Licensing Technical Support
Haleigh Peters, Licensing Technical Support

Representatives of Drivers Forum

Daniel Adkins
Alex Williams
Laura Williams
Peter Spiking
Emil McKenzie

Others present

Councillor Clive Springett
Councillor Rachel Hood
Clare Prosser
Angela Puiy

Apologies

Steve Bye (due to IT issues)

Items

Fiona Quinn opened the meeting, introduced herself to the forum and welcomed those present. The rest of the meeting attendees 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 as it had been agreed at the meeting held in July that the forum members would chair the meeting on a rota basis. Daniel Adkins stated that as this meeting was a 'virtual meeting' and forum members were not used to this type of environment, he requested Fiona chair the meeting.

Fiona agreed and explained housekeeping process for requesting permission to speak on an issue or adding comments on the Teams "chat" icon.

County lines – Claire Prosser

Claire was invited to the meeting to discuss county lines and ways in which drivers, the police and councils could work in partnership to recognise and report on criminal exploitation. She showed a presentation which will be circulated to forum members detailing statistics of missing people, child criminal exploitation, modern day slavery and lots of different factors to look out for in identifying these issues.

She explained that she was working as part of a three year county-wide programme. Section six of the presentation gave details of how all agencies and individuals can work together. She encouraged forum members to let her know ways in which they could be helped. Urgent and immediate concerns should be reported to the police. Crimestoppers are always manned and can help and intelligence can also be submitted online.

Claire asked if there were any questions. Laura Williams suggested that private hire operator log sheets could be used to identify repeat journeys which could involve a vulnerable person.

Claire responded that would be really helpful and that West Suffolk had more issues with county lines than East Suffolk.

Dan Adkins enquired as to whether training was being given to drivers on this important subject. Fiona responded that the Council is introducing refresher training on safeguarding to update drivers. Dan stated that this would be welcome, providing it was not too expensive and time consuming. He stated that it must be managed well.

Fiona stated that the details are being worked through at the moment but it is hoped there will be no additional charge to drivers.

Claire stated that she was hoping to be able to provide resources to drivers to help them recognise potential issues and that forums are very important to keep drivers updated. Fiona requested that Claire forward her presentation slides which could then be shared with drivers.

Police – Angela Puiy

Angela Puiy who attended the meeting on behalf of the police suggested that operators could email log sheets to them to raise awareness of potential concerns. Laura Williams stated that other police forces have access to their log sheets.

Angela urged drivers to approach the police for updates and feedback. She said that the police were there to signpost and answer enquiries.

She quoted statistics of missing persons and said that if drivers had any suspicions regarding passengers they were transporting to report the matter. Sometimes it's just a gut feeling. Use 999 in an emergency, 101 if not an emergency or use online reporting. Additionally, Crimestoppers is easy to use and always manned.

Terms of Reference

Fiona went through the draft terms of reference document. The current membership of the forum does not reflect a fair overall representation of the whole of the West Suffolk area drivers and operators. Currently most of the members of the forum are from the Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill areas and Newmarket, Mildenhall and Brandon are not represented.

Fiona asked those present for suggestions on how to extend the membership to include representation from all areas. Dan Adkins mentioned that the drivers have a Facebook site on which they can canvas for representatives from the required areas.

Dan Adkins and Alex Williams agreed to pursue this matter.

Fiona to circulate draft terms of reference with suggestions.

Comments made by drivers at Forum and drop-in sessions – February 2020

Following the Drivers forum and drop-in sessions in February, a list of drivers' questions and comments had been compiled. Licensing officers had added their responses and Brenda Wright went through the document at forum.

Changes to the hackney carriage and private hire conditions policy handbook

Fiona spoke about the new policy which had been adopted by Cabinet in September. She explained that the policy had been due to go before Committee in July but this had been withdrawn from that Committee as the Department for Transport (DfT) published its safeguarding guidance on that day which needed to be incorporated within the policy document.

The new policy incorporated much of the DfT statutory guidance regarding Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and safeguarding training for drivers. Drivers will be required to be DBS checked six monthly. It was also explained that vehicle proprietors and operators will also need to be DBS checked.

Laura Williams asked whether the DfT had got statistics showing necessity. Natasha Wade-Guest explained that the checks formed part of the required "fit and proper" test for drivers, proprietors and operators.

Dan Adkins asked what the drivers would be required to do. Natasha explained that the application forms are being updated to require drivers to give their consent for the Council to carry out the checks. When asked how the system will be rolled out to current drivers, Steve Moore said that it will be a rolling programme requiring all drivers to sign up to the DBS Update Service and sign a consent form giving permission for the Council to make the necessary checks. He hoped drivers would find this a smooth process.

Issues raised by Dan Adkins

Dan Adkins was listed on the agenda as wanting to speak on the subject of medicals and renewal procedures but now wanted to use the opportunity to put forward issues raised in a complaint which he had raised about the licensing service. Dan was advised that he would get a formal response to the issues he had raised.

Fiona stated that we are working on improvements to the way we work, closure of the offices was out of our control and the only option was to require electronic applications. The forum is an opportunity to work on improvements and solutions.

Licensing team had put in packages to assist drivers, for example self-certifications for DBS and medicals and temporary paper plates for vehicles.

A member of the trade stated that bus and lorry drivers are allowed by DVLA to self-certificate for 12 months. If doctors are refusing to carry out medicals what are drivers supposed to do. It appears that there are different standards in different surgeries.

Steve pointed out that when the offices were closed the Licensing team had to work out solutions for the interim time and paper plates and self-certifications were implemented.

Dan Adkins stated that he thought some sort of incentive to drivers should be implemented, eg money off and stated that other authorities were doing this. He wanted another meeting pre-Christmas to resolve issues.

Taxi Rank Space – Alex Williams

Alex Williams spoke on this matter, stated that rank space was inadequate and that in Haverhill the ranks were illegal.

Steve responded by pointing out that this is not an issue addressed by licensing it was for the trade to present a business case for consideration.

Emil McKenzie put forward his idea to extend the existing Bury rank. Fiona said for the trade to get together and put forward their proposals.

Alex Williams said that they would do this. He said that the Brook Service Road in Haverhill has no exit and the other rank in Haverhill is unsafe and needs looking at.

Dan Adkins stated that they would need to know the process for this. Fiona stated that she will advise on process. She stated that we are looking at ranks to make sure signage and other examples is correct.

Alex Williams stated that the rank in St Andrews Street South is always illegally occupied by private hire vehicles. Fiona advised that licensing will monitor.

Covid 19

Drivers commented that the statement on the Council's website regarding wearing of masks was really helpful.

AOB

Fiona mentioned an out of hours issue regarding hackney driver who had tested positive. She requested that hackney drivers maintained a voluntary log of passengers and journey details to assist the contact tracing team.

Alex Williams asked whether drivers could reject passengers for not wearing a face covering. Steve stated that if a driver had a good reason to do so they could. All matters needed to be risk assessed.

Conclusion of meeting

Fiona concluded the meeting by thanking all for their participation. She stated that she would be addressing the matters raised in Dan's complaint and would get back to him. She looked forward to hearing from Alex Williams further on proposals to alleviate taxi rank congestion and also any suggestions from the trade on terms of reference.

The meeting concluded at 6pm