

Taxi Drivers' Forum minutes 17 February 2020 West Suffolk House, Bury St Edmunds

Introductions

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)
Jakob Wimpenny, Licensing Support Apprentice
Cllr Clive Springett (Chair) Licensing and Regulatory Committee
Cllr Rachel Hood (Vice-Chair) Licensing and Regulatory Committee
Representative from Police Licensing

Items

Fiona Quinn chaired the meeting and introduced herself to the forum. The rest of the team then introduced themselves. The councillors attended to observe and the representative from the police came along to talk about safeguarding and county lines.

Terms of reference

Fiona went through the terms of reference of the forum, namely, to raise issues and discuss matters between the trade and council officers. It is an arena to share information, discuss policy changes and changes to national legislation. Dedicated meetings can be arranged to discuss specific matters which affect one sector only.

The forum is for all West Suffolk drivers, however representatives need to be nominated, along with a chairman and vice chairman. Membership to consist of licensing and other council officers, the hackney trade, private hire trade and drivers (private hire or hackney carriage) nominated by particular communities. Membership and frequency of the forum to be agreed.

Nominations to the forum to be emailed to licensing@westsuffolk.gov.uk along with specific areas of interest of the nominee. It is important that drivers keep licensing informed of any changes to addresses or emails to enable contact to be maintained.

Comments were made at the forum that whilst some drivers had received numerous duplicated emails, others had not been contacted at all.

Hackney carriage demand survey

Fiona detailed the aim of the survey, namely to identify any significant unmet demand (or otherwise), provide evidence of current position regarding unmet demand and its significance at this point in time; and to provide a database of information for policy review related to decision regarding retaining two zones or merging them. Detailed slides were shown as to who was consulted and the feedback received. The evaluation

did not show any significant unmet demand other than in the private station rank in Zone B.

A Haverhill driver said that, in his opinion, the Haverhill rank was illegal. When it was first sited at its current location it was as a temporary measure only.

Concern was raised that there was no rank in Brandon, although three Brandon drivers had hackney carriages.

Taxi policy handbook consultation

Fiona went through the aims and background. She explained that we must have a policy to regulate the licensed vehicle trade. The policy incorporates statutory elements and sets out our locally adopted conditions for regulating hackney carriage vehicles, private hire vehicles, operator and driver licensing. The policy needs to incorporate conditions that protect the integrity of the trade; ensure the safety of passengers, ensure that both vehicle and driver are fit to be on the road and ensure that operators are fit to hold a licence.

A slide was shown indicating the policy areas under consideration and drivers were invited to attend one of two drop-in sessions. The first session is to be held on 24 February at the council's offices at West Suffolk House from 9am to 1.30pm and the second on 26 February at the council's offices at College Heath Road, Mildenhall between midday and 5pm. Fiona and a licensing officer will be present at the sessions to discuss the proposals in fuller detail.

The ultimate aim of the policy is that it is fit for the future.

General comments regarding policy

Opposition to electric or hybrid vehicles being exempt from 10-year age cap.

Comment made about vehicle age versus emissions.

Private hire vehicle livery.

Driver commented that work needs to be done around educating the public on differences between private hire and hackney carriages through advertisement or flyers.

Are Section 75 vehicles outside policy?

Why are the council's own vehicles (that is refuse freighters) over 10 years old?

Drivers will be able to talk through issues at the designated drop-in sessions.

Introduction from Chair of Licensing and Regulatory Committee

Councillor Clive Springett introduced himself and explained his role to the forum. He explained that, as an elected member, he attends meetings where decisions are made by members following full consideration of matters before them.

He explained that members of the forum could not directly present their views to Committee but he as an elected member could represent the forum's views.

Fees and other matters arising

A driver, supported by several others, brought up the matter of fees and thought they were unnecessarily high.

Complaint that the medical form used is a DVLA form and some GPs are not happy to sign covering page indicating that a driver is fit. In the case of HGV drivers this medical is sent direct to the DVLA who makes decision as to fitness or otherwise. It was also pointed out that the sight test must be done by an optician.

Complaint regarding time taken to process applications, in particular change of address was mentioned.

Comment made regarding possibility of doing online applications and driver training to do this process.

Comment made that West Suffolk website is not at all customer friendly and required forms cannot be found – why cannot drivers pick up forms or receive them as part of reminder?

Comment with reference to inconsistency in time taken for DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) applications to be dealt with and received by customer – takes between a few days and several months.

Comment made regarding lack of street lighting in towns at night.

Comment that drivers were required to undertake rigorous training and that passenger assistants who are appointed by the county council are not required to do any.

Dissatisfaction that the two-day college course only held twice per month and that Ipswich drivers are taking up the places leaving West Suffolk drivers waiting far too long to achieve the qualification.

Drivers advised that these matters will be looked at.

In response to a query from a driver, it should be noted that although there is no dedicated enforcement officer, all licensing officers carry out enforcement as part of their role.

Submission of applications

Jakob, licensing's apprentice spoke to the drivers about the importance of submitting fully completed applications to the Department. Applications will only be accepted if they are submitted on up-to-date forms which have been fully completed, signed and dated.

All applications for renewals should be submitted a minimum of 14 days prior to expiry to allow time for them to be processed before expiry.

In the case of new applications an appointment will need to be made with an officer. All new drivers need to be interviewed. For new vehicles an appointment will need to be made after compliance test is undertaken so that the plates can be issued at that appointment. To book appointments call Customer Services on 01284 758050.

West Suffolk depot

Drivers are not happy that their vehicles are taken away from them during test and they cannot see what is going on.

Suffolk Police – Safeguarding and County Lines

Romeena from the Safer Neighbourhood Team came along to talk to drivers about County Lines and safeguarding. She had literature with her for drivers to take with them. She pointed out that feedback can be submitted online, anonymously if desired.

Drivers commented that police do not respond when they report incidents and do not attend when necessary.

Date and time of next meeting: