

Private Hire Licensed Operator Business Meeting - January 27th 2016 City Hall

1. Introductions

Cllr Val Slater introduced herself and welcomed Operators.

Operators who attended were:

Central Private Hire
Apple Cars PHBO
CWC Private Hire
New Eldwick, Bingley & Harden PHBO
LEAP PH
Euro Cars PH
Local Cars Base 3
Local Cars Base 2
Baildon
Great Horton & Royal Everywhere PH
Naseem Travel
Colins Private Hire
Low Private Hire
Keighley 608608 Private Hire
Wrose Village & Roadwise PH
Oxford P.H.
Express & Junction
AA Carz
A1 Wibsey
Moorhead, Saltaire & Eagle PH
Girlington All Over PH
Speedline
Best Way & Canal Road
Chanaal Travel Service
Shipley Central Ltd PH
Dial A Ride & FTB Ph
CJ'S/Treble Sixty Cars/JJ'S Private Hire
D.C.W. Denholme, Cullingworth &
Wilsden
UBER Private Hire
Eccleshill Premier Cars PH
Arrows, Galaxy & streamline ph
Jenny's & M & R PH
Airport Direct PH
Graham A Pullan
Marks Private Hire
Lyons Mane Airport Travel

Michaels Private Hire
Kirkwall Travel
Auto Cars
Pauls
Ben Rhydding PH
Daviss Travel
J&M
Cue Cars
Ilkley
Powercarz

There had been confusion over the start time of the meeting. Officers explained that Operators had been asked to attend at 10:00 for a 10:30 start as it takes a long time to register attendees and that City Hall was on Amber Security alert.

Note: Over 75% of attendees at the meeting arrived after 10:00 despite the invite to arrive at 10:00. In future all meetings will be scheduled to start at 10.30 but Operators should arrive from 10:00 to sign-in.

Cllr Slater explained it is a difficult time for Private Hire firms, especially given the two deaths over Christmas and the recent serious injury. A minute's silence in memory was observed.

An introduction was then given by Officers where it was explained that the purpose of the meeting is to gain views from business owners which may help develop and improve their business in line with ensuring the safety of the travelling public.

2. Attendance

Officers invited Operators to comment on their attendance at meetings in accordance with the required Condition. It was suggested that it may be helpful for small businesses to attend one meeting per year rather than a minimum of three.

Lyons Travel felt the meetings were a great idea as it gives the chance to communicate and he felt it was difficult to get hold of the Service by phone. He raised concern around warning letters received in relation to the October CSE seminars.

Action: Officers to investigate and respond

Officers encouraged the trade to email in to taxi.testing@bradford.gov.uk (central inbox) as there are some 3,500 + licensed trade members and therefore using the phone is not the best way to contact the service. The central inbox is monitored by the entire licensing team and a response will come from an appropriate person when queries come in. Individual staff members should not be emailed directly due to possible sickness / leave in which case no replies would be made.

Cllr Slater added that in the future meetings the agenda will be shaped around the trade suggestions.

After note:

After due consideration, it has been decided that an Operator with 5 vehicles / drivers or less need only attend one out of four meetings per year - providing the Operator is compliant with the requirements to visit the website on a monthly basis and keeps up to date with changes and information. Operators with 5 vehicles/drivers or less are still welcome to attend all meetings should they wish.

3. Agenda Point Submissions

One agenda point had been submitted by Michael's PH which had been raised and answered prior to the meeting. The question related to the vehicle specification not allowing tip-forward seats which block access/egress in licenced vehicles. Officers explained that the purpose was to allow customers in Bradford clear access/egress and travel in comfort and safety.

A further question was raised stating that vehicles with tip-forward seats should be licenced to allow Bradford Operators to compete with Operators from surrounding areas who allow such vehicles. Officers clarified that there are 8 seat minibus vehicles on the market which meet the required specification without the need for tip-forward seats.

Operators were reminded of the need for vehicles to accommodate both able bodied passengers and passengers with limited mobility etc. Officers also reminded Operators that Open Days were held by the Council Workshop which gave advice (free) on such matters before buying vehicles. The vehicle specification is on the website www.bradford.gov.uk/taxiandprivatehire

Graham Pullan (Company) raised concern about out of area vehicles that are 8 seat vehicles operating in Bradford but which Bradford wouldn't licence under their specification. Cllr Slater and Officers confirmed that many Councils have different specification but Bradford's took into account a commitment to help passengers with limited mobility.

Discussions then moved to "Rossendale" (HC vehicles/drivers licenced outside of BMDC but operating within BMDC as PH). Cllr Slater/Officers confirmed that whilst this is legal BMDC wishes to ensure that BMDC customers have a safe and comfortable journey and that this can be monitored and managed by BMDC Enforcement Officers. They also confirmed their understanding that Rossendale have recently introduced an Intended Use policy which will mean they will not licence people who are not working in the Rossendale district.

Speedline made reference to the fact that fees have gone up. Officers asked for examples. No examples of fees increasing were put forward.

Another Operator (apologies for missing his company name) stated that re-test fees had increased. Officers explained that this was inaccurate. They explained the previous scheme had a sliding scale of charges starting at £5 for even a very minor failure such as a bulb, which increased in stages up to £20. The new scheme has benefitted hundreds of drivers as they no longer pay a £5 re-test charge for minor failures – which was in recognition that sometimes people who had prepared their vehicle well but had one or two minor issues on the day were being penalised by having to pay £5. At the other end of the scale, drivers who submitted vehicles with

serious faults would be charged £100 for re-test as they should not be presenting vehicles in unsafe/dangerous condition.

The Operator of A1 Wibsey raised concern over the MOT's that were included in the fee and had subsequently been taken away. Officers explained that this was an historical issue (more than 6 years old) and no officer present had been here at the time of the decision. Officers confirmed that licence fees had been increased following years of underpayment – i.e. fees received did not match expenditure. The increase in fees was therefore required and the introduction of a “free” MOT was requested / included. Once introduced it caused significant problems for the trades as any vehicle which failed MOT had to be taken off of the road and the driver therefore couldn't work. Following representations from the trade, a further review was undertaken and it was agreed to remove the MOT and amend the safety inspection criteria to allow vehicles which were in-licence to continue to work providing that any defect was not safety related. This had been agreed by the trade along with the removal of the “free” Mot test.

Actions: Officers to investigate cost of tests

Cllr Slater added that the actual fee for licensing has not gone up in recent years, it has reduced.

After Notes:

- In June 2012, there was a significant reduction in fess for vehicles over 6 years of age which were tested every 6 months, the cost was £175 equating to £350 per year. This was reduced to £250 per year.
- In August 2013 the requirement to pay a deposit on vehicle plates was removed.
- In 2015 the fee was further reduced for cars up to 6 years old from £175 to £165 per year.

4. Operator Grading System

Cllr Slater explained that this would be like a ‘scores on the doors’ rating like restaurants have. The idea of a rating is based on what the public should expect from a firm / service. Officers invited Operators to comment on what should be included. Responses included:

L.O.W suggested vehicles should be roadworthy, safe and clean; a driver should be able to communicate well, be clean and presentable; communication should be good with the phone and radio operators; they should be polite and keep the customers informed at all times.

Colin's said he would like to see a driver history, a rating against a driver, not just a rating against an operator. He was concerned that since he first raised the issue a couple of years ago there appears to have been no movement towards it. Officers replied by confirming that his suggestion was still very much live and once they had an IT system which could provide such information they would seek to implement. Officers also pointed out that there are likely to be data protection concerns which need to be addressed when it comes to holding and sharing data across the

Operators and neighbouring West Yorkshire Authorities. Officers agree that a driver history record would be a positive move.

Action: Officers to advance the driver history request when feasible.

The majority of Operators present agreed that a driver history would be beneficial to the trade as a whole.

A1 said that a number could be put on the driver's badge to show the number of times a driver has moved bases.

Uber explained that all of their drivers and jobs can be rated through their APP survey. This helps them identify who their better drivers are and also shows them who their poor drivers are.

A proposal was made and supported by the overwhelming majority of Operators for drivers to be restricted to work for one base only.

Action: Officers to consider the proposal and report back.

5. CCTV

Officers explained that this is a project currently being conducted. They are exploring the legalities and options to fit licenced vehicles with CCTV. Officers will report progress at the next meeting.

Some Operators believed it could be very useful for recording everything that took place in a vehicle. Officers advised them that constant monitoring may not be legal.

6. Licensing Update

The Service receives very high volumes of telephone calls. The Service asks customers to use the taxi.testing@bradford.gov.uk email and await a reply – which is far more efficient than queuing on the phone as an officer will phone them back when free.

Officers confirmed that the Service has up to 40 time slots per day that it can use for appointments. If customers email in and wait for an officer to phone back such time slots can be more effectively used and save customers waiting time. The appointment can be used for a variety of matters, including badges, booking plates, Operator renewals, DBS etc.

The trade requested that more people go on the phones. Officers explained that electronic communication is progress and that the only way to get more people on the phone is to employ extra staff and increase fees. Moving to an IT solution will improve efficiency and keep costs down.

Officers apologised for continued delays in getting an online booking system in place on the website but they continue to work with the Council on this matter. Cllr Slater explained that the Council has a long process to follow when purchasing IT systems etc. and this is outside the control of Licencing Officers.

7. Enforcement Update

Officers explained that despite an extensive education programme over the last 3 years around 40% of vehicles are still failing tests. At the next meeting there will be a breakdown of the failure rates by Operator.

The Service is receiving fewer complaints and these are mainly low level complaints which are being dealt with efficiently by Operators. Officers thanked Operators for their work in this area.

8. Training update

As per the conditions of August 2013, all drivers must attend taxi modular training before 1st September 2016. Any driver who has not attended training by this date will not be allowed to continue driving and therefore will not be available for Operators to use. The responsibility to ensure drivers are trained before using them on a booking will be that of the Operator.

Action Required: All Operators are required to ensure their drivers have been trained. If required, they are to contact the FTS training department to book their drivers on training. At the time of booking Operator are required to make payment.

9. Communications Update

There wasn't time to run through this item during the meeting. The key points, however, are:

The service holds an active email for all licensed operators and we will be communicating from the service central inbox when we email out to all Operators.

Operators are required to send replies and emails to taxi.testing@bradford.gov.uk – not to individually named Officers.

All Operators are required (Condition) to visit the Service website and update themselves on the “What’s New” page every month.

10. Conditions

Officers reminded Operators that 11 Conditions passed in November 2015 came into force on 01/01/2016.

The latest 5 new proposed Conditions were explained (listed on a separate attachment to this email). 4 of the 5 proposed changes received no comment from Trade Associations.

One Condition commented on was that requiring a separate phone line for the booking of out of area vehicles. A1 asked how it works if the job is booked on an app not through a phone line.

Action: Officers to investigate recording out of area jobs booked through Apps.

Action: All Operators who use an APP for bookings are to notify HCPH service by email.

Officers' confirmed that anyone who has a phone line to take bookings and has out of area vehicles will require a second phone line.

Action: Officers to send proposed conditions changes out with a summary of the meeting

A question was asked regarding how much profit the Council was making out of licencing fees and could they see a profit and loss account. Officers explained that the service does not make any profit – the licencing service is a break-even ring fenced budget.

Action: Officers to provide a statement of accounts at the next meeting.

JM Private Hire stated that various fees, as low as £1, are being used by companies in Bradford. It was asked if Bradford could do as Sheffield have done and set a minimum limit. Officers explained that the Council is not legally empowered to control fares.

Action: Officers to contact Sheffield Council. This has been done and their reply is:

“We in Sheffield do not have a mandate to control what private hire firms can charge; this would against information contained in the LGMPA 76 where we as Local Authorities cannot control such fees. We have a wide variety of different types of operators in Sheffield, including Uber who charge different prices dependent upon demand so controlling fees would be impossible.”

CLlr Slater closed the meeting by thanking operators for their input.

11. Date of next meetings

The next meeting is on Wednesday 27th April 2016 at City Hall.

Polite Reminder: This was the first Operator business meeting and therefore not all parties were familiar with the custom of waiting to be invited to speak by the Chair of the meeting. As such, the meeting became confused and at times quite noisy. In future meetings please wait to speak until invited by the Chair. Once invited to speak the person should state who they are and the company they are representing.