

# **Operator Business Meeting**

**15<sup>th</sup> November 2017 – 10am registration, 10.30am start**

## **Meeting Summary**

### **1) Introductions / Welcome**

Cllr Ferriby welcomed all and provided a brief introduction before handing over to Officers.

### **2) Outstanding Actions**

3 x Actions from the previous meeting 9<sup>th</sup> August:

#### **Officers:**

Circulate information regarding 'Air Quality / Clean Air Zones' and a summary of conditions changes from July 2017 Regulatory and Appeals Mtg. Both documents issued via email with minutes of the Operator meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> August and placed on Service website

#### **Operators:**

Email Licensing Manager to express interest in trialling online payments. Nothing received from any Operator since August meeting.

### **3) Police Update**

Since last year there have been fewer missile attacks on Hackney Carriage or Private Hire vehicles. Police have been working in neighbourhood areas across district, especially in high risk places such as Homewood where incidents have been reported in past.

Key points:

- From 01/11/2016 until 31/10/2017 there were 145 incidents compared to 179 in the previous 12 months. A reduction of c19%
- Police take all reports seriously and will work with trades to reduce numbers further.
- Gaining convictions is difficult as offenders are often carrying out attacks in the dark, hidden from view. 10 people were arrested in past 12 months, half of who were 15 or under and the remainder 25+ in age.
- There are no specific peak times throughout the year, other than around October and November (Halloween and Bonfire times) which is "normal" and during which police vehicles, ambulances, fire engines etc. are also targeted.
- Anyone with information regarding names of offenders please approach Neighbourhood Police Teams (NPT).
- Operators are advised to think about routes that they send their drivers on as they have a duty of care to their drivers. If there is trouble in certain areas an Operator should consider avoiding them.
- If a name is provided to the Police and a police officer says they can't do anything then a member of public may ask to speak to a more senior police officer (i.e. a sergeant or someone back at the police station for more details and explanation).

- There is also an appeal system by using [www.westyorkshire.police.uk/report-it/victims-right-review](http://www.westyorkshire.police.uk/report-it/victims-right-review)
- Operators asked for prosecution rates for the 145 but they could not be provided in detail at this time. They were reminded that offenders can be cautioned or convicted or have orders put on them for offences dependent on severity. Police look at all cases on merit.

#### 4) **Health and Well Being**

Officers spoke about this arising from the Peer Review report. Drivers are in sedentary jobs therefore the Service has asked Public Health if they could provide health and wellbeing advice. This is in hand and will be published via the website shortly. For drivers who are disabled then a lift to the Licensing Service office is available.

***Action: Officers to circulate information via website***

#### 5) **Vehicle Safety Inspection Results**

Officers provided the results for October. It was agreed that information will be attached to the minutes of the meeting. Discussion took place and the key points were:

- Overall Pass rate is 71% for annual inspections.
- Overall Pass rate is 60% for random vehicle inspections.
- A high number of faults are around signage and bulbs. These can be quickly rectified by effective daily vehicle checks.
- The Officer responsible for publishing this data is new, in post c3 months. He is working with colleagues across a number of departments to develop the database and reporting in further detail. The Service envisages these reports will be available for general circulation by end Jan.
- The Service will be monitoring reports over next 2 / 3 months to ensure any minor anomalies are resolved.
- It was agreed by Operators and Officers that improved reporting will help to identify persistent offenders.
- Any drivers with a concern regarding a vehicle failure should raise it with the Vehicle Inspector at the time.
- Subject to development progress, it is anticipated that a full breakdown by Operator will be available at the next meeting.

An Operator made the point of asking if visors and decals matched at time of test failure and made the suggestion to have a generic Visor from the Council. The merits of this will be looked at.

***Action: Officers to consider merits of standardised window visor and feedback at the next operator meeting in 2018.***

***Action: Officers to supply the breakdown of vehicle failures by retest fees with the minutes of the meeting.***

Officers covered the need for all licenced personnel to have accurate email addresses. A working and monitored email address is something which is a condition for Operators and HC Proprietors.

The service will be emailing out to validate these shortly. Subject to the aforementioned and gaining email addresses for all drivers, the Service will look at sending renewal reminder emails/letters to assist the trade to be more organised when renewing licences.

***Actions: Officers to begin process of sending Operators renewal reminder emails before January 2018.***

## **6) Queue Management information**

New system working well over 6 week period pre the Council-wide fault which occurred and took the system off line for a week

The service apologised on behalf of the Council and explained the issue was outside of Service control. The fault has now been fixed.

Data shows an average of c120 customer visits per day to the Service. Many of these were 'drop in' visits which make it impossible to meet/manage customer expectation as demand levels are unknown in advance.

The service has written to 5000+ licensed members to advertise and look at new ways of working to increase appointments and enable the management of customer expectations (see below).

## **7) New ways of working**

Key points discussed:

- A 'Drop and Collect' / 'Click and Collect' service was sent along with a letter to trade week commencing 30<sup>th</sup> October and is also on the service website under 'contact service page and referenced under 'latest news'. The process had previously been advertised in October.
- The trade can renew 1 month ahead of licence expiry without losing any licensing time or money.
- Making appointments reduces/removes waiting time.
- Transactions like Plate Renewals can be completed in the back office and drivers can then attend to collect items once ready rather than wait.
- The above would reduce the number of visits to Shearbridge.
- Emails are being answered in line with the reply message, 5 to 10 days. Many are answered much quicker.
- Drivers need to check their licence expiry dates and Operators can help them to become more organised (i.e. Operators are unable to use drivers if they are not licenced). All licenced personnel should start renewal applications via email at least 3 – 4 weeks ahead of expiry to ensure any glitches can be resolved before the licence expires. This would also reduce/remove the need to queue.
- Operators raised concern that online bookings has not materialised after several years of conversation around this subject. Officers explained that they had written to licenced personnel to explain this. In brief, the Service has had three different IT systems in 4 years and of which two could ultimately not meet the functionality required. These were not identifiable in advance and were outside of Service control. There is no standard IT licensing system, each is bought as a database and then developed to provide the functionality required. The current system is progressing well and should be developed to a large extent by early 2018 and the Council's ICT department are working closely with the Service to this end.

- When systems go down relating to Queue management the service uses raffle tickets to manage the queue as a contingency plan.
- Concerns over unanswered phone calls were raised. This is historic and answered in more detail in section 9.
- Officers confirmed that when they call a customer they make several calls to book them in and take payments. Voice messages are left by officers where there is a facility to do so.
- Online payments – officers encouraged the trade to trial this aspect. Some operators are currently trialling online payments with regards the training department. It is working.
- Concerns were raised by Operators over negative staff comments at Shearbridge and concerns were raised that appear to be no 8.30am appointments available due to staff not being ready.

**Action: Officers to look into concerns around appointments and opening**

**Action: Officers to look into allegations of poor staff attitude to improve levels of service**

## 8) Peer Review

Officers asked whether Operators would prefer to discuss the Review now or later as it had only just been received and circulated. The consensus from Operators was that they would like time to go through the Review and asked for it to be placed on the Agenda at the next meeting, Jan / Feb 18.

Officers clarified that the Peer Review was requested by Elected Members. It was carried out by an independent subject specialist. The general principle of the Review was that the areas covered should be benchmarked against best practice and Leeds Council. The Department of Transport (DoT) Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licencing Best Practice Guidance has been used for benchmarking purposes, which is recognised at best practice throughout the licencing community. The Officer clarified that the Council does not own and could not influence the Review and as such it can't be changed, whether or not anyone agrees or disagrees with it.

**Action: Officers to set a date to discuss the Review. After-note: So as not to use up time on the next Operator Meeting a separate date will be identified.**

## 9) Agenda points raised

Officers did not publish the names of Operators who raised agenda points as prior authority had not been requested. The process for submitting agenda points will be changed to address this in future.

An Operator submitted the following 2 points:

1. Vehicle statistics for October

**Answer:** This was answered in agenda point 5.

2. Would like to know what initiatives the service has had to reduce waiting times other than 'Drop/collect & Click/collet' - proposing more counters.

**Answer:** This was answered primarily under agenda point 7. More counters can't be created (the building has physical limitations). The canteen area at Shearbridge is shared

with the public and other officers of other service departments. Staffing more counters is not possible and if it was then it would require further recruitment and costs which would increase fees and would not improve efficiency.

An Operator submitted the following 2 points:

1. Wants more appointments, better time keeping of them and opening of more counters to deal with drop in visits.

**Answer:** This was answered primarily under agenda point 7. More counters can't be created (the building has physical limitations). The canteen area at Shearbridge is shared with the public and other officers of other service departments. Staffing more counters is not possible and if it was then it would require further recruitment and costs which would increase fees and would not improve efficiency.

2. Remove all decals and visors for licensed vehicles for safety of the public due to attacks on licensed vehicles

**Answer:** The primary goal of Bradford Council's Licensing Service is the protection of the public from dangers affecting their safety. Permanent Decals play an important role in stamping out rogue drivers impersonating licensed vehicles. Permanent Decals give confidence to the travelling public that the vehicle being dispatched will be identifiable. If a car was dispatched without Decals the customer would not as reliably know if the vehicle was sent by the Operator or licensed by Bradford Council. In addition to this it is important from an enforcement side that a vehicle is easily identifiable.

An Operator submitted the following 5 points:

1. Parking – Wants to know what reason there is for limited spaces for the trade when there are thousands of visitors to the depot

**Answer:** There can be no mixed parking of vocational and non-vocational vehicles. There are 8 spaces available for visitors. There is not enough parking for staff and 100's of staff park on the main roads around the site. The requirement is for any visitor to park off-site if the allocated visitor parking is full. This information has been circulated previously and is on the website. All visitors are asked to arrive early, in case of parking problems, to avoid being late for pre-booked appointments.

2. The phones not being answered

**Answer:** This is a well-known, long standing issue for many years and has been answered many times. In brief, it makes no sense to recruit large numbers of staff to answer thousands of phone calls when the information sought by the caller is published on the website etc. Such a move would increase fees. The service is looking forwards and working on an email and appointment system for the future, financing a system which has never worked in the past is not beneficial to the trades.

3. How come tests are carried out after the counters shut

**Answer:** It has never been a requirement to collect plates after a test. As covered above, the "drop and collect" or "click and collect" processes mean that a plate appointment will be given when booking the vehicle in for test and thus remove the need to queue etc.

4. Vehicle tests – taking 15 minutes when inspectors are not MOT trained

**Answer:** All Vehicle Inspectors are fully qualified mechanical engineers and MOT Examiners. Annual Vehicle Safety Inspections take between 30 – 40 minutes generally, based on age / condition of vehicle. Sometimes more than 1 examiner is available to work on a vehicle test which means a test can be conducted quicker than the normal. Any re-

tests that is booked often requires only a short inspection to establish specific repairs have been carried out.

5. Fining drivers and holding operator responsible for minor faults on vehicles; when operators carry out a basic check

**Answer:** This has been answered many times over many years. It has been covered in depth in both Operator Business Meetings by Officers and also by the Police. Detailed information on this matter has been circulated previously and is on the website. Operators are responsible for ensuring suitable maintenance checks and evidence of such is in place.

## **10) Engagement on next round of conditions proposals**

The next round of engagement on new conditions will be available shortly. The Service will use snap survey (on-line) and drop in sessions. More information will follow shortly.

## **11) Dates for 2018**

14<sup>th</sup> February

16<sup>th</sup> May

8<sup>th</sup> August

14<sup>th</sup> November

## **12) AOB**

On Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> December at Valley Parade there will be a human trafficking and modern slavery awareness workshop. This event will be at 1.00pm until 4.00pm. A poster for the event will be on the website and the link is below:

<https://www.bradford.gov.uk/transport-and-travel/hackney-carriages-and-private-hire/latest-news-and-updates>

Please feel free to attend the session to raise your awareness of this issue.

**The meeting was then closed officially by Cllr Ferriby at approximately 12.10pm and attendees were thanked for their attendance and participation.**

## **Licensing Manager's After-Note**

After a review of the agenda points submitted by Operators and also the discussion points which took place during this and previous meetings, the following points are brought to the attention of all Licenced Operators.

Licensed Operators, Elected Members and Officers are extremely busy therefore it is vital that the use of their time is geared to balancing the overriding priority of the Licensing Service, which is to protect the travelling public, whilst at the same time supporting Operators to help them develop and meet future business needs.

Almost all of the agenda points submitted have been asked and answered on many previous occasions, quite often by the same people/companies. Almost all of the debates which are taking place and have taken place previously are focussed on the past rather than the future and thereby they are not contributing to developing the service area. In recognition of this officers will not in future table agenda points that have been asked and answered and published on the website previously. Please be assured that the only reason for doing this is to increase the time for and encourage forward thinking operators to table points which can both assist them in developing their business whilst protecting the public.

Please remember, licencing policy is set and rigorously monitored by Elected Members. The Licensing Service is a regulatory service and it recognises that no matter what is done there will be a percentage of the trade which disagrees. Indeed the Peer Review comments:

“Some small parts of the trade do appear to thrive on conflict and it can seem that whatever an authority does, parts of the trade will never be satisfied. It’s important to remember that a licensing authority is in place to protect the travelling public and regulate the HC and PH trade so it is the safest environment possible. Authorities need to accept that the trade may not be satisfied with a policy it has recently introduced, but as long as the authority is satisfied the policy is in the best interests of safety of the travelling public then it has made the right decision. A licensing authority needs to engage properly with the trade in a meaningful and productive manner, but it is not there to service the business needs of the trade, and clearly the restrictions some of the trade feel licensing authorities are placing upon them have not restricted the business opportunities of Uber or other high profile national operators”.

Please be assured that the Licensing Service will always welcome comment and questions but as a Regulatory Authority it cannot spend the majority of its time listening to points which have been asked and answered repeatedly. The Service looks forward to ideas and proposals which will help Operators develop their business whilst protecting the public.