
CONSULTATION WITH TAXI TRADE

1 SUMMARY

1.1 Members to consider the outcome of a consultation exercise with the Taxi Trade on three issues deferred from the Sub-Committee Meeting of 7 March 2001. These items related to:-

- Grant Aid to proprietors of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis.
- The licensing of stretched limousines and Specialist Vehicles for Private Hire.
- A variation of the Council's Driver Licensing Conditions.

1.2 A meeting of the Taxi Licensing Working Group was held on 4 June 2001 when five representatives of the Taxi Trade were present.

2 GRANT AID TO PROPRIETORS OF WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE TAXIS

2.1 In 1998 this Sub-Committee agreed, in principle, to earmark £5,000 to enhance the Taxi Voucher Scheme and to encourage the acquisition of a number of wheelchair accessible taxis to serve the whole of the District subject to the Head of Service devising a simple, equitable scheme for fund distribution.

2.2 Detailed consideration of the scheme was undertaken at the very next Sub-Committee Meeting on 5 November 1998. The minute of that meeting (95/98) is reproduced below:-

"The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue Services, proposing a means of administering a Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Grant Pool. The aim would be to provide upwards of four or five vehicles to service the District, funding for which was assured for the next 3 years.

Members were impressed by the commitment to the scheme, both financial and otherwise, shown by local taxi firms. It was suggested that a statement expressing Members' gratitude be placed in the next issue of "The Knowledge". Members were advised that a photo call with the Press had already taken place and that arrangements were in hand for a Press Release to be carried by trade journals. Officers to consider further ways of promoting the scheme which, where possible, involve the taxi trade.

Resolved

That the Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Grant Pool be administered on the lines set out in the report”.

- 2.3 Much of the communication with the Trade was by word of mouth but the taxi trade newsletter did carry an article encouraging the acquisition of Wheelchair accessible taxis. The intention of the scheme was always to act as pump-priming funding for a three year period only.
- 2.4 Taxi Trade representatives expressed concern at the Working Party meeting stating that they expected the Grant to continue until 2012 when, under the Disability Discrimination Act 1985 all taxis are to be wheelchair accessible. They asked that the Grant be resumed. The head of service and his staff have contacted two of those in receipt of the Grant who confirmed that they understood the grant to be available for three years only although, naturally, they would like to see the grant continue.
- 2.5 No budget provision has been made in 2001/02 nor is grant assistance included in the Budget Strategy. No reference is made in the Corporate Plan.
- 2.6 Members should now consider whether there is a need to continue with grant aid. Nine vehicles have been provided as a result of the initiative, which is about twice as many as originally envisaged.

3 LICENSING OF STRETCHED LIMOUSINES

- 3.1 A comprehensive report by the Head of Service had been deferred from the meeting of 3 January 2001 when safety issues relating to two and three point seat belt anchorage had been discussed. This report is reproduced as an Appendix.
- 3.2 The Working Party noted that Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council had developed a licensing model as part of their Best Value review process. It was proposed that the model be adopted for Stretched Limousines and Vehicles of Historic Interest, as part of sharing best practice, with the following amendments:-
 - (a) mechanical inspections be carried out annually for all vehicles up to six years old, six-monthly for all vehicles over six and up to ten years old, and four-monthly for all vehicles over ten years old
 - (b) the six year rule on the admission of a vehicle for its first licence shall not apply

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- (c) drivers of such vehicles should not be subject to a knowledge test due to the nature of the work.

- 3.3 The Head of Service is content that the adoption of the Sefton model, with amendments, would serve Rochford.

4 LICENSING CONDITIONS

- 4.1 The taxi trade sought relaxation of the Hackney Carriage pre-licensing standards as they relate to the number of plates an individual or company might hold.

- 4.2 At the Working Party meeting there were opposing views from the perspective of the three companies represented and the driver representing those who were independent proprietors who favoured the existing limits on plate holding.

- 4.3 After some debate the Working Party agreed that:-

- an initial plate may be applied for by an individual or a company after 3 years continuous involvement in the Rochford taxi trade, the immediate past year having been on the basis of the applicant's principal employment.
- unlimited plates may be applied for after an additional two years following grant of the first plate.
- the "wheelchair accessible" requirement be removed from all categories of applicant.

- 4.4 The Head of Service reminds Members that, unlike other licensing authorities, Rochford does not have an upper threshold limit on the number of plates operating within the District; it relies on market demand to establish an equilibrium.

- 4.5 At the time when Rochford recovered taxi licensing from Southend-on-Sea Borough Council there were 115 plates in existence. Under the existing licensing regime this rose to around 140 plates after a relatively short while and has fluctuated between 140-150 plates since that time. It might, therefore, be assumed that the optimum number of taxis in the District has been reached.

5 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 It is proposed that the Sub-Committee **RECOMMENDS**

- (1) That Members consider whether to reintroduce the Grant Aid to Wheelchair Accessible Taxi proprietors.

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- (2) That the model licensing regime operated by Sefton MBC be adopted by this Council subject to the inspection regime, age criteria and driver requirements outlined above.
 - (3) That Members consider the relaxation of plate holdings and need for wheelchair accessible vehicles as requested by the trade.

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