

Minutes of the meeting of the **Taxi Licensing Sub-Committee** held on **17 July 2002** when there were present:-

Cllr Mrs R Brown
Cllr T R Livings
Cllr C R Morgan
Cllr P F A Webster

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr J E Grey

OFFICERS ATTENDING

R Crofts	Corporate Director (Finance & External Services)
A J Bugeja	Head of Legal Services
P Skelton	Transportation & Revenue Administration Manager
J Bostock	Principal Committee Administrator

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

Resolved

That Councillor P F A Webster be appointed Chairman of the Taxi Licensing Sub-Committee.

2 TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management setting out proposed terms of reference for the Sub-Committee.

Resolved

That the Sub-Committee's terms of reference be to consider and report on:-

- i) Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Driver Licence Conditions
- ii) Pre-licensing Standards for Hackney Carriage, Private Hire, Special Event and Contract Vehicles
- iii) Conditions of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licences
- iv) Fares
- v) Charges fixed by the Council for services delivered
- vi) Driver tests and knowledge tests
- vii) Limitations on plate holding
- viii) Rank sizes and locations
- ix) Resources within the Transportation Section
- x) Future arrangements with respect to consultation with the trade

3 HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE LICENSING

The Sub-Committee considered the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on determining the process and timetable for a review of the Hackney Carriage and Private Vehicle Licensing function.

During debate, the Sub-Committee endorsed the view of the Chairman that final recommendations should be submitted to the meeting of the Environmental Services Committee scheduled for 5 September 2002.

The Sub-Committee first considered proposals that:-

- all drivers and operators be advised that the Council will consider any written material they wish to submit in relation to the review, subject to the Council being in receipt of all such material by 31 July.
- the costs associated with the licensing function must be matched by income, i.e. the Council cannot subsidise the service.
- particular cognisance should be taken of the licensing conditions currently used by Maldon and Uttlesford District Councils, which can be seen as concise and effective.
- knowledge tests undertaken by drivers should cover the whole of the District.
- that there should be no limit on the number of cars registered provided that registered cars meet all the Council's conditions.
- there should be no limit placed on the number of drivers that can be registered provided they meet the Council's licensing requirement instructions.
- the future fares structure should be based solely on the headline retail price index rate rounded up to the nearest whole number plus an additional 1%.
- Vehicles may only be registered to persons holding the Hackney Carriage Drivers Licence.

A Member referred to the value of ensuring that the Council's conditions are in plain English. The Sub-Committee agreed that it would facilitate consideration if Officers could produce a draft set of conditions in plain English which take on board appropriate aspects of the Maldon and Uttlesford Council models. It was also agreed that the fares structure aspect should be subject to detailed consideration. With regard to the delay in issuing licences as a result of time taken to

complete criminal record checks, Members concurred with Officers that, notwithstanding the position in other parts of the County, licences should only be issued once full checks have been made.

Responding to Member questions, the Corporate Director (Finance & External Services) advised that-

- It is vehicles which are licensed and the plate stays with the vehicle.
- The Council's current conditions provide that a driver must have held a driving licence for a period of 3 years prior to having their own vehicle. With the Maldon District model, an application can be made for vehicle registration the moment a driving licence has been acquired. Operators holding plates have to be registered in the same way as drivers.
- Communication with drivers and operators could include the detail of suggested proposals, together with copies of the Maldon and Uttlesford documents.
- The finalised management structure could have an effect on costs.

The Sub-Committee then undertook item by item consideration of the suggested areas of work set out within the report. It was recognised that a number of these were addressed within the proposals set out above.

Responding to Member questions, the Corporate Director (Finance and External Services) advised that-

- There has been some improvement in response times from the Criminal Records Bureau by virtue of a combination of pressure and developed working relationships.
- The Council had introduced an element of financial pump priming in the first stages of setting up the Taxi Voucher Scheme.
- Officers would further review the situation relating to disabled persons parking bays situated in the High Street, Rayleigh rank area and report back as appropriate.

The Corporate Director reported that a request had been received that the notes of January consultation meetings held between drivers and operators be made available. Responding to Member questions, the Corporate Director confirmed that the information within the notes had been replicated in the public report before the Sub-Committee.

A Member commented that releasing the notes could demonstrate an open approach. Other Members observed that releasing such notes

was not usual practice and should not be necessary given the report contents. The non-availability of the documents to the general public was also a factor. The Sub-Committee agreed a motion moved by Councillor P F A Webster and seconded by Councillor Mrs R Brown on this matter.

In terms of moving forward, Members agreed that it would be appropriate to convene a meeting as early as possible to address the question of fare structure and that information on current fare arrangements for the Maldon, Uttlesford and Castle Point Council areas would assist consideration.

Resolved

- (1) That, subject to detailed consideration of fare structures, the proposals set out above form the basis of the review.
- (2) That Officers review staffing levels in the Hackney Carriage Office as considered appropriate, subject to there being financial break even.
- (3) That Officers come forward with proposals to resolve the ranking problems at Spa Road, Hockley Road, High Street, Rayleigh and Rochford Square, being mindful of the need for a balance between all interested parties.
- (4) That details of the existing knowledge test be circulated to Members.
- (5) That the Council's concerns at delays at the Criminal Records Bureau be raised with the Local Government Association and with both local Members of Parliament with a request that it be raised with the Home Office as soon as possible.
- (6) That Officers consult with drivers, operators and a sample of persons in receipt of the Taxi Voucher Scheme on the position on third plate holding viz-a-viz the Disability Discrimination Act.
- (7) That a peer review be undertaken with Maldon, Uttlesford and Castle Point Councils, to include an identification of areas where those Councils feel their own arrangements could be improved.
- (8) That it be recommended that the Council does not provide free accommodation for driver training but would expect to know details of the training.
- (9) That it be recommended that there be no change to the current provision for vehicles to carry signage/advertising, subject to compliance with laws and there being no detriment to the Council's conditions.

- (10) That it be recommended that the new fare structure come into effect from 1 October 2002.
- (11) That it be recommended that the review of charges for licensing functions dovetail into the 2003/04 budget process?
- (12) That the notes of the January consultation meetings not be made public.
- (13) That the next meeting of the Sub-Committee be scheduled for 10.00am on 5 August 2002 to give specific consideration to fare structures. CD(F&ES)

note: Councillor C R Morgan wished it to be recorded that he had voted against resolution (12) above.

The meeting commenced at 10.00am and closed 11.12am

Chairman: _____

Date: _____