

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE CAR FORUM held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on TUESDAY 1 MARCH 2016 at 10.30 a.m.

FORUM MEMBERS

PRESENT:

Councillor Jim Blackwood; Laura McNelly (Bruce/Blue Star Taxis); Emma Bruce (representing private hire car operators); Roy Kerr (Grange Radio Taxis); and Lennox Ainslie (Bo'ness Community Council).

CONVENER:

Councillor Jim Blackwood.

COUNCIL OFFICERS

PRESENT:

Bryan Douglas, Licensing Co-ordinator; Brian Samson, Licensing Enforcement Officer; Kay Minto, Licensing Assistant; Sarah McKenzie, Assistant Manager, Falkirk Delivers; and Antonia Sobieraj, Committee Services Officer.

1. APPOINTMENT OF CONVENER

The Clerk invited nominations for the office of Convener.

Councillor Blackwood, following nomination at the meeting, indicated his willingness to serve as Convener.

Decision

The Forum agreed that Councillor Blackwood duly serve as Forum Convener for a period of one year.

2. APPOINTMENT OF DEPUTE CONVENER

The Convener invited nominations for the office of Depute Convener.

Lennox Ainslie, following nomination at the meeting, indicated his willingness to serve as Depute Convener.

Decision

The Forum agreed that Lennox Ainslie duly serve as Forum Depute Convener for a period of one year.

3. APOLOGIES

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Patrick Taggart, Fleet Services Manager; Gordon Spiers, Fleet Services; Jennie McCartney, Falkirk Area Disability Access Panel; and Alan McFadzean (McFadzean Taxis).

4. VALEDICTORY

Prior to the commencement of business, the Convener on behalf of the Forum expressed its sadness at the death of Alex Sinclair (Stenhouse T.O.A) and referred to his major contribution to the work of the Forum over a number of years. The Forum's condolences were conveyed to Mr Sinclair's family.

5. MINUTE

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Taxi and Private Hire Car Forum on 18 November 2015 was approved.

4. TAXI TESTING STATION

The Forum received an update from the Licensing Co-ordinator due to apologies having been submitted on behalf of Gordon Speirs, Fleet Services.

The Testing Station had recently employed an additional tester Marc Borduea who was now in post.

Decision

The Forum noted the information provided.

5. PUBLIC PROCESSIONS

The Licensing Co-ordinator provided an update on the work of the Policy Development Panel, chaired by Councillor Blackwood. The Panel's remit was to review certain areas of licensing including the policy relating to the duration of taxi and private hire car licences. In addition, the Panel was reviewing the activity of public processions and had instructed officers to prepare a draft public processions policy for consideration. This would involve consultations being undertaken with relevant stakeholders.

The Licensing Co-ordinator summarised how public processions were administered within the district:-

- That on average 90 public processions took place annually;
- That the Council was notified of a procession and consultations took place with the Council's Roads Services, Police Scotland, the Scottish Fire and Rescue

Service and community councils/organisations or individuals who were asked to be notified of processions in their area;

- That the Council did not give approval for processions but could place conditions or prohibit them if there were sufficient cause;
- That the processes undertaken by the Council followed the Scottish Government guidance for processions; and
- That the Council has a dedicated webpage where details of planned processions could be found.

The Licensing Co-ordinator invited comment from Forum members on the operation of processions generally which would be conveyed to the Policy Development Panel.

The Forum raised the importance of the public being made aware of the roads which would be closed during the processions.

Decision

The Forum noted the progress of the Policy Development Panel in relation to the progress of a public procession policy.

6. UPDATE ON TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE CAR LICENCE DURATION

The Licensing Co-ordinator referred to a letter that had recently been sent to all operators in respect of the taxi tariff review and advised that the letter also explained that from 1 April 2016 all driver or operator licenceholders who renewed would be offered the option to renew for the usual one year or now for a three year period.

At the time of the letter being prepared it was not known if an incentive could be offered by way of a reduced application fee for the three year option. This position had now changed.

The Council had recently agreed to the new fees and charges for 2016/2017. There was a modest increase in licensing fees which was set against a backdrop of no fee increases in recent years.

The new fee levels from 1 April 2016 were:-

- Taxi/ Private Hire car driver renewal - £105 (an increase of £5);
- Taxi/ Private Hire Car Operator renewal - £130 (an increase of £10);
- Three year driver renewal option - £252; and
- Three year operator renewal option - £312

The Licensing Co-ordinator also stated that from 1 April 2016 licensed cars under three years of age would be subject to an annual taxi inspection test.

Decision

The Forum noted the verbal update.

7. TAXI TARIFF SCALES AND FARES

The Licensing Co-ordinator advised that following on from the decision of the Council to endorse the status quo, the “new fare scales” were advertised in the local press and no representations had been received. All operators were thereafter advised in writing of the position. An appeal was subsequently lodged with the Traffic Commissioner by an operator unhappy at the decision taken by the Council to freeze the fare levels. The Council had not been advised of the Traffic Commissioner’s findings as yet and whether the appeal would be upheld.

The Forum noted the position.

8. WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VEHICLES

The Licensing Co-ordinator confirmed that since the policy on vehicle types changed three years ago, there had been fluctuations in the numbers of wheelchair accessible vehicles. The overall percentage of wheelchair accessible taxis reduced from 22% to 18% although this decline was temporarily arrested the previous year with an upsurge in new wheelchair accessible vehicle applications. Since this time however a couple of wheelchair accessible vehicles had been lost to the fleet through the retirement of licenceholders.

The issue of wheelchair accessible vehicles was again raised by Jennie McCartney, a member of this Forum and also a member of the Falkirk Area Disability Access Panel. She was unable to attend this meeting but had requested that the issue be highlighted again at this meeting.

The Licensing Co-ordinator advised that Jennie McCartney had written to the Falkirk Herald earlier this year referring to an incident within the Newmarket Street, Falkirk taxi Rank where she had approached a wheelchair accessible taxi only to be informed by the driver that the wheelchair ramp for his vehicle was not working. Consequently he was unable to take her in his car. This was a clear breach of his operator licence conditions which stated that the wheelchair accessible vehicle must be wheelchair accessible at all times.

Jennie McCartney had thereafter approached another wheelchair accessible vehicle taxi to be told that due to his positioning in the rank he would only be able to take collect her round the corner. She then waited for half an hour and was not collected. The matter was investigated but the drivers in each case were not identified.

The Licensing Co-ordinator stated that the Council took a dim view of situations where wheelchair users were treated in the way highlighted in the instances referred to. He confirmed that any future occurrences and where driver identities were established, there could to a suspension hearing organised to be heard by the Civic Licensing Committee. In such circumstances the driver would be required to attend and should the case be proved the licence could be suspended.

The Licensing Co-ordinator stressed the need to explore measures to maximise the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles on the road thus making them available to the

public. Forum members were invited to make comment on possible solutions to increase the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles on the road.

The Forum members made comment as undernoted:-

- That the Dial a Journey funding by the Council affected their business and that neither taxi nor private hire car drivers benefited from this funding;
- That there should be the option for the Council to provide a financial incentive to taxi and private hire cars to use wheelchair accessible vehicles; and
- The need for a relaxation of the policy relative to the age of wheelchair accessible vehicles to five years.

The Licensing Co-ordinator in response to the above suggestions highlighted the possible increase the level of air pollution and the non adherence to environmental policies from a relaxation of the age of vehicles.

The Licensing Co-ordinator stated that the matter of wheelchair accessible vehicle numbers would continue to be monitored and measures to address the problem would continue to be explored. This issue would remain a standing item on the Forum agenda.

Decision

The Licensing Co-ordinator would update the Forum at future meetings on the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles and the measures which could increase the number of these vehicles on the road.

9. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

(a) Taxi Ranks, Falkirk Wheel and the Helix

The Licensing Co-ordinator advised that updates were still being sought from the Council's Economic Development Unit and the landowner Scottish Canals.

(b) Tourism Training

Further to confirmation at previous meetings of the importance of taxi and private hire car drivers as front line ambassadors for visitors to the area, the Licensing Co-ordinator advised that Tourism related training would be provided to the Forum members and the taxi and private hire car trade generally by the Council's Economic Development Unit. This could involve, for example, an officer attending a Forum meeting to provide information. The Licensing Co-ordinator undertook to invite officer representation at a future Forum meeting to provide information on the Tourism related training available and to provide an update on the Denny Economic Regeneration Project.

Decision

The Licensing Co-ordinator would contact the Council's Economic Development Unit for representation at a future meeting to provide

information on the Tourism related training available and to provide an update on the Denny Economic Regeneration Project.

(c) Project Griffin

The Assistant Town Centre Manager advised that Project Griffin would take place on Wednesday 16 March 2016 at 3.00 p.m. at City in Falkirk and would last approximately two hours. This course was designed to provide attendees with information on the methods of protecting oneself in cases of a terrorist attack. The sessions were fully accredited. Should members be interested in attending contact should be made direct to Sarah McKenzie, Assistant Manager, Falkirk Delivers.

(d) Rank at the Warehouse Nightclub, Falkirk

The Licensing Co-ordinator advised that that the Manager of the Warehouse Nightclub had recently contacted him to indicate that the informal rank located at the nightclub was unused by taxi companies and requested that companies use this rank.

The Manager had offered at his own expense to pay for Taxi Marshalling at this location. The Forum welcomed this development and would lend its support.

(e) Potholes

Lennox Ainslie referred to complaints submitted to Bo'ness Community Council from local residents. The Community Council had advised that residents should contact the Council's Roads Development Unit and suggested that taxi and private hire cars should be provided with contact details for the Roads unit. This was agreed and the Licensing Co-ordinator undertook to provide this information

(f) Opening of Bo'ness Road

Lennox Ainslie advised that Bo'ness Road would be opened in the near future.

(g) Membership of Forum

The Forum suggested that the membership of the Forum should be reviewed in the light of a number of members failing to attend. This would be considered further at a future meeting.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Forum noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 19 May 2016 at 10.00 a.m.