

## FALKIRK COUNCIL

**MINUTE of MEETING of the TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE CAR FORUM held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on THURSDAY 19 MAY 2016 at 10.30 a.m.**

### **Forum Members**

#### **Present:**

Councillor Jim Blackwood; Laura McNelly (Bruce/Blue Star Taxis); Andrew Buchanan, Flemings Taxis; Roy Kerr (Grange Radio Taxis); Jennie McCartney, Falkirk Area Disability Access Panel and Lennox Ainslie, Bo'ness Community Council.

#### **Convener:**

Councillor Jim Blackwood.

### **Council Officers**

#### **Present:**

Bryan Douglas, Licensing Co-ordinator; Brian Samson, Licensing Enforcement Officer; Brian Pirie, Democratic Services Manager, Jacquie McArthur, Economic Development Officer and Thomas Ross, Licensing Standards Officer.

#### **Also in**

#### **Attendance:**

Chief Inspector Cheryle Cowan and Sergeant Marie White, Police Scotland; and Paul Wilkinson, Eco Stars.

### **1. Apologies**

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Gordon Spiers, Fleet Services; Alan McFadzean (McFadzean Taxis), Emma Bruce, (representing private hire car operators); George McBlaine, Taxi Operator; Alex Fleming and Sarah McKenzie, Assistant Manager, Falkirk Delivers.

### **2. Minute**

#### **Decision**

**The minute of the meeting of the Taxi and Private Hire Car Forum on 1 March 2016 was approved.**

### **3. Delivery of Alcohol**

Thomas Ross, Licensing Standards Officer explained that in Falkirk there were over 400 premises that were licensed to sell alcohol. These consisted of a mix of establishments including traditional off-sales.

He explained that it had been brought to the attention of the Licensing section that some taxi drivers were delivering alcohol to customers' homes. Drivers delivering alcohol were in contravention of the Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 and that were committing an offence which can result in the driver being charged by the Police and given a level 3 fine of £400. He said that the purpose of attending the Forum today was to get the message out to drivers who may be unwittingly committing an offence.

The Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 covers the delivery of alcohol by taxi drivers from vehicles and speaks clearly of the criteria which should be in place regarding this matter. The premises which are dispatching the alcohol should keep a day book and a delivery book or an invoice should be kept with the details of the person delivering the alcohol.

Both the premises and the deliverer of alcohol should record the following information; otherwise they would be committing an offence.

The information referred to is:-

- (a) the quantity, description and price of the alcohol; and
- (b) the name and address of the person to whom it is to be delivered.

Further to the information which should be held by the premises and the person delivering alcohol, a person who refuses to allow a Police Constable or a Licensing Standards Officer to examine any vehicle or receptacle in use for the delivery of alcohol, or any day book kept or delivery book or invoice carried commits an offence.

Taxi drivers should not deliver alcohol without seeking proper legal advice. Equally taxi booking office staff should make sure that this practice, if on-going, is not encouraged.

The Convener thanked Thomas for his informative presentation

**The Forum noted the presentation.**

#### **4. TAXI TESTING STATION**

The Forum received an update from the Licensing Co-ordinator due to apologies having been submitted by Gordon Spiers, Fleet Services.

Changes to testing arrangements had been implemented relating to an annual test for cars under 3 years old following on from the introduction of the new policy in April 2016.

Previous arrangements have now been reintroduced and the number of testers is more than enough to cover the slots available at all times. As a result there should generally be no issues booking a test slot.

It was advised that the testing station routinely moves Council MOT tests to ensure the maximum slots for taxis at all times.

Concern has been expressed by the testing station about vehicles being changed after the slot being booked. Whilst the testing station understands that this can happen, the frequency of this is such that it is creating unnecessary problems. The practice needs to stop as it would not be allowed at a DVSA test station. If the practice continues the testing station will consider levying additional charges.

The testing station was contacted about vehicles being pulled for the meter not being sealed even though they had just been tested. As a result all testers have been reminded that this must be done as part of the test without fail. The meter will only be tested and sealed if the vehicle passes its test and is therefore safe for the road.

There followed general discussion by the Forum on difficulties at times obtaining testing slots and the sporadic appearances at the Forum by a representative from the testing station. Councillor Blackwood noted the concerns and said he would discuss matters with the testing station direct.

### **Decision**

**The Licensing Co-ordinator would seek to arrange a meeting with the testing station and ensure, where possible, future representation at Taxi Forum meetings.**

## **5. DENNY TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION**

Jacquie McArthur explained that the Denny Town Centre Regeneration was progressing and Phase 1 was nearing completion. The Phase 1 proposals consist of 10 retail units, a library, a community room, improved parking and a town square. In terms of Phase 2, B&M Retail Ltd had made a provisional commitment as the main operator but has since changed its focus and had dropped its interest in the town centre. The site could now be re-marketed. Jacquie McArthur touched on the Phase 3 proposals which included a charette/community space.

Inspector Cowan enquired about unit space and possible co-location to ensure a community police presence. This would also assist greatly in building up trust and confidence in the Police.

In response to a question from Councillor Blackwood on taxi rank provision in the new town centre, Jacquie McArthur confirmed that there will be new provision.

### **Decision**

**The Forum noted the update.**

## **6. TAXI STICKER INITIATIVE**

Inspector Cowan advised that her attendance at the Forum was in follow up to the presentation she gave in November 2015 "Don't be a Bystander". She reminded the Forum that the purpose of the presentation and the interactive video was to raise awareness within the taxi community of sexual exploitation and to emphasise the important role each driver can play by being vigilant of any potential danger to women, particularly in a social setting/ weekend evenings with alcohol being consumed.

Inspector Cowan explained that following the presentation stickers were produced for display in taxis providing details of the 'Don't be a Bystander' initiative; namely:-

- **Recognise/ respond to abuse;**
- **Exploitation should happen**
- **Prevent violence – It could be you!**
- **Report any concerns**
- **Talk to us – if you're worried**

The sticker also had a QR (Quick response) matrix barcode which could be scanned to progress to the Police Scotland website for a point of help. Although the Council had issued a sticker to every taxi and private hire car operator, the uptake in terms of vehicles displaying the sticker was not great. Inspector Cowan encouraged all operators to display the stickers and made a direct plea to the big taxi companies to lead by example. Local interactive sessions could be arranged with taxi/private hire car firms/operators at a time suitable for the drivers.

Inspector Cowan confirmed that having the stickers displayed on buses was planned soon. She also made reference to the recent introduction of audio recording in one taxi company's cars and said this technology can greatly assist the Police in investigating matters. She left some literature for circulation and thanked the Forum for the opportunity to address them once again.

The Convener, on behalf of the Forum, thanked Inspector Cowan for her update and urged all operators to display the stickers in their cars.

### **Decision**

**The Forum noted the update.**

## **7. ECO STARS**

Further to information being presented to the Forum meeting in November 2015, the Forum received an update from Paul Wilkinson, Eco Stars on the benefit to taxi and private hire cars from involvement in the scheme which rated the environmental performance of vehicles.

A brief summary was provided on two other Scottish Councils which had piloted the Eco Stars Fleet Recognition scheme for taxi and private hire cars and these were:-

- Dundee City Council – 14 Members; - 210 vehicles; and
- Fife Council – 15 Members - 92 vehicles.

Falkirk currently has 4 Members covering 15 vehicles

Members of the Forum were encouraged to join the Falkirk scheme and the benefits included:-

- Free advice;
- Saving money;
- Saving fuel;
- Reducing the environmental impact; and
- Helping to raise the environmental profile.

The process of joining included meet at a convenient location and time, completing the paperwork, provide Eco stars with a fleet list, completing a “road map” and certificates for the schemes joined.

The Convener thanked Paul for his update and encouraged the trade to join the scheme.

**The Forum noted the update.**

## **8. TAXI TARIFF SCALES AND FARES**

The Licensing Co-ordinator referred to the previous meeting of the Forum when he had advised that an appeal had been lodged with the Traffic Commissioner by an operator unhappy at the decision taken by the Council to maintain the current tariff rate. He confirmed that the Traffic Commissioner had since written to the Licensing Authority advising that she had declined to proceed with the appeal.

**The Forum noted the update.**

## **9. WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VEHICLES**

The Licensing Co-ordinator confirmed that there were currently 102 private hire cars with 12 being wheelchair accessible (WAV) – 11%. The taxi fleet had 429 taxis with 92 being wheelchair accessible – 21%. He confirmed that options to encourage greater uplift of WAV type vehicles onto the fleet would continue to be explored with any early proposals brought before the Forum for consideration and discussion.

Jennie McCartney explained the difficulty often encountered when she attempts to exit WAV taxis/ private hire cars in the town centre and suggested that consideration could be given to dedicated WAV dropping off points/ dedicated bays.

### **Decision**

**The Licensing Co-ordinator would provide numbers of WAV vehicles at future meetings and any options which could encourage greater numbers of these vehicles onto the road.**

## **10. ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS FOR LICENSING OFFICES**

The Licensing Co-ordinator advised that this item had been requested as an agenda item for discussion by a member of the Forum and invited Roy Kerr to address the Forum in this regard.

Roy Kerr explained his frustration at the new arrangements whereby the taxi trade had to park at the front of Municipal Buildings, Falkirk and make their way to the Licensing office at the back of the Buildings. He said that there may be individuals who would struggle with the long walk and said consideration should be given to allowing such individuals through the car park barrier to enable them to park close to the office reception.

The Licensing Co-ordinator advised that should any visitor to the Licensing offices have mobility issues then they could either park in the dedicated disabled bay at the front reception area or one of the other bays and enter the main reception where Licensing staff can be contacted and will thereafter attend to them direct.

**The Forum noted the position.**

## **11. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS**

### **(a) Refurbishment of Falkirk Steeple**

Jacque McArthur advised that the refurbishment work of Falkirk's iconic Steeple will be carried out over a 39 week period as part of the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI). The specialist restoration work will include repairs to stonework, renovation work to clock faces, mechanisms and bells.

### **(b) Membership of Forum**

The Licensing Co-ordinator advised that Tony Marzsol had expressed interest in becoming a trade Member of the Taxi Forum.

(c) Helix/ Kelpies Taxi stance

The Licensing Co-ordinator confirmed that he had no further feedback to report.

**12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The Forum noted that the next meeting would take place on Thursday 19 August 2016 at 10.00 a.m. (subsequently changed to Tuesday 20 September).