

**FALKIRK COUNCIL**

**MINUTE of MEETING of the TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE CAR FORUM held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on TUESDAY 12 MAY 2015 at 10.00 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); Alan McFadzean (McFadzean Taxis); Alex Sinclair (Stenhouse TOA); Jennie McCartney, Falkirk Area Disability Access Panel; Lennox Ainslie (Bo'ness Community Council); Doug Nicol (Independent Taxi Operator); James Buchanan, Flemings Taxis; and Alan Dickie (Tartan Radio Taxis).

**CONVENER:**

Councillor Jim Blackwood.

**COUNCIL OFFICERS**

**PRESENT:**

Bryan Douglas, Licensing Co-ordinator; Brian Samson, Licensing Enforcement Officer; Gordon Spears, Fleet Services; Jacquie McArthur, Economic Development Officer; and Antonia Sobieraj, Committee Services Officer.

**1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Patrick Taggart, Fleet Services Manager; and Charles Fullerton (Independent Taxi Operator); and George McBlaine, Taxi Operator.

**2. MINUTE**

**Decision**

**The minute of the meeting of the Taxi and Private Hire Car Forum on 17 February 2015 was approved.**

**3. DENNY TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION**

The Forum heard from Jacquie McArthur, Economic Development Officer who provided an update on the Denny Town Centre Regeneration work. A copy of the spring issue of the Denny Town Centre Regeneration magazine was circulated. The presentation included the following information:-

- That a new library and 10 retail units were due for completion as part of Phase 1 in the next 18 months;
- The main car park and taxi rank for completion by 18 May 2015;
- The full Phase 1 Town Square development for completion by 2017;
- The later Phases aiming to follow thereafter;
- The impending public consultations relating to Phase 3;

- The closure of the car park; and
- The marketing information and associated leafleting to all households in the Denny area.

The Forum members requested clarification as undernoted issues:-

- The severity of the steep ramp at the library and the problem of access for wheelchairs and the disabled generally;
- The need for clarification on where the taxi rank was to be located; and
- The issues associated with the busy junction at the post office.

Jacquie McArthur clarified:-

- That dealing with the site levels had been a significant challenge for the project design team. After much work and consideration, it was proposed that ramps and stairs would be deployed to meet current accessible standards; and
- The options for taxis in the meantime included the Alexander site. This had now been resolved with the area behind the temporary retail village being identified as a temporary site during the regeneration project.

The Denny Regeneration Office could be contacted on telephone number 01324 590973 or on [www.falkirk.gov.uk/dennyregen](http://www.falkirk.gov.uk/dennyregen) or email [jacquie.mcarthur@falkirk.gov.uk](mailto:jacquie.mcarthur@falkirk.gov.uk)

The Convener thanked Jackie for her informative presentation.

## **Decision**

**The Forum noted the information presented.**

## **4. TAXI TESTING STATION**

The Forum received an update from Gordon Speirs on behalf of the Fleet Services Manager as requested at the previous meeting. He also undertook to answer questions in relation to the operation of the Testing Station. Should he be unable answer questions he would seek clarification from the Fleet Services Manager. The Licensing Co-ordinator also undertook to convey any feedback on specific issues to the Fleet Services Manager.

The points of clarification included:-

- The retest time slots had been reassessed to be more flexible as requested by the Forum but so far there had not been a great demand for these;
- That the two additional MOT testers were now in post; and
- That in terms of defective bulbs being replaced by a driver if the MOT had failed for that reason, this would create no problem but should this include other failures cognizance would take place of the time taken and health and safety issues in line with VOSA rules.

## **Decision**

**The Forum noted the information provided.**

### **5. UPDATE ON REVIEW OF TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE CAR LICENCE DURATION**

The Licensing Co-ordinator advised Forum members that the Council's Executive at its meeting on 30 September 2014 had agreed to establish a Policy Development Panel of Elected Members, chaired by Councillor Blackwood, with a remit to review certain areas of licensing including the current Council policy relating to the duration of taxi and private hire car licences.

The Policy Development Panel was currently considering the present one year licence duration. At the last meeting of the Forum the views were sought on the merits of introducing a three year licence for driver and operators. The Forum members considered that as well as maintaining the current practice of an annual licence, the option of a three year licence on renewal was appropriate with an initial probationary period for new entrants. The Forum members indicated that they would welcome a discounted fee for a three year licence.

The Licensing section had carried out a benchmarking exercise with other local authorities and the average discount offered was 10% (£270 per licence). In addition, a survey on the Falkirk Council website had been completed by 36 respondees and revealed:-

- 25% favoured the current situation,
- 25% favoured a three year option;
- 5% favoured a two year option; and
- 5% favoured a three year licence on renewal.

## **Decision**

**The Forum noted the progress of the Policy Development Panel review of licensing polices.**

### **6. ENTERTAINMENT EVENT AT FALKIRK STADIUM - TOM JONES**

The Licensing Co-ordinator advised Forum members that between 8,000 and 9,500 people were expected to attend the Tom Jones concert on Saturday 1 August 2015 at Falkirk Stadium commencing at 8 p.m. and concluding at 10.30 p.m.

The next pre operations meeting including the operator, the Scottish Ambulance Service and Police Scotland would take place in the following two weeks.

Members raised the undernoted issues at the previous event in 2014:-

- The need for appropriate taxi pick up and taxi/private hire drop off arrangements in close proximity to the Stadium; and

- The drop off/ pick up arrangement last year at the Helix for the Rod Stewart concert being wholly unsuitable due to the poorly lit footpaths and the limited car park.

The Licensing Co-ordinator would raise the issues highlighted by Forum members at the forthcoming pre operations meeting.

### **Decision**

**The Forum noted that the Licensing Co-ordinator would raise the issues highlighted by Forum members at the forthcoming pre operations meeting.**

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

Further to discussion at the previous meeting the Licensing Co-ordinator invited the views of the Forum in respect of the review.

Discussion took place on the following:-

- The low inflation rate and falling fuel prices;
- The cost of replacing vehicles and other costs to drivers and operators;
- The costs of changing the meter;
- The range of issues associated with any increase;
- The impact on any increase in the tariff on the most vulnerable in the community; and
- That any suggested increase in the tariff rate would require to be fully justified and evidenced.

Following discussion the majority of the Forum members considered that there would be benefit from a review of the tariff rate and that discussions should take place with trade colleagues with proposals discussed at the next meeting.

In addition, the Licensing Co-ordinator advised of a situation that had been brought to the attention of the licensing section the previous week by a member of the trade in respect of calendar meters. It would appear that the meters did not recognise the recent public holiday and that the meters did not have future public holiday dates programmed. Licensing officials had been in discussions with meter companies to establish what had happened and also to local agents who undertake meter adjustment normally after a tariff change has been introduced. All operators will be written to in due course and advised of any necessary arrangements.

### **Decision**

**The Forum:-**

**(1) noted**

- (a) that any suggested increase in tariff would require the submission of evidence for consideration; and**

(b) the position regarding the meter; and

(2) agreed that members would discuss proposals with trade colleagues and submit evidence of the need for a review for the next meeting.

## 8. VEHICLE AGE

The Licensing Co-ordinator referred to a reduction in the number of operating wheelchair accessible vehicles since the amended vehicle specification policy came into force.

Taxi drivers and operators on the Forum confirmed that these vehicles were not the first choice of drivers or many disabled persons who were not wheelchair users as they could not get into them.

The Forum heard anecdotal evidence from member Jennie McCartney who explained the difficulties she regularly encountered when trying to pre-book a wheelchair accessible car at weekends.

The Forum considered a range of issues that may address the declining numbers of wheelchair accessible cars including the possible relaxation of the policy relative to the age of wheelchair accessible vehicles. The Licensing Co-ordinator undertook to monitor the trends in relation to the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles on the road to explore measures to maximise the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles available to the public.

### Decision

**The Licensing Co-ordinator would report to future meetings on the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles and measures which could increase the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles.**

## 9. TRAINING

The Licensing Co-ordinator intimated that discussions were currently taking place with training providers training for new drivers.

The Licensing Coordinator would provide further updates in due course.

### Decision

**The Forum noted that updates would be provided as information became available.**

**10. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS**

(a) Taxi Apps

The Licensing Co-ordinator reported on the recent developments in Information Technology through Taxi Apps for the booking of taxis through a mobile phone. The Forum members noted the development of this technology.

**11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS DURING 2015**

The Forum noted that the next meeting would take place at 10 a.m. on Tuesday 11 August 2015.

The following meeting would be held at 10 a.m. on Wednesday 18 November 2015.