

FALKIRK COUNCIL

MINUTE of MEETING of the TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE CAR FORUM held in the MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS, FALKIRK on WEDNESDAY 18 NOVEMBER 2015 at 10.00 a.m.

FORUM MEMBERS

PRESENT:

Councillor Jim Blackwood; Laura McNelly (Bruce/Blue Star Taxis); Derek Martin (Grange Radio Taxis); Alan McFadzean (McFadzean Taxis); John Kennedy (Stenhouse TOA); and Alan Dickie (Tartan Radio Taxis).

CONVENER:

Councillor Jim Blackwood.

COUNCIL OFFICERS

PRESENT:

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

ALSO IN

ATTENDANCE:

Chief Inspector Cheryle Cowan, Sergeant Gregor MacKenzie, and PC Helen Auld, Police Scotland; and Paul Wilkinson, Eco Stars.

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Patrick Taggart, Fleet Services Manager; Roy Kerr (Grange Radio Taxis); Jennie McCartney, Falkirk Area Disability Access Panel; Emma Bruce (representing private hire car operators); George McBlaine, Taxi Operator; and Lennox Ainslie (Bo'ness Community Council).

2. MINUTE

Decision

The minute of the meeting of the Taxi and Private Hire Car Forum on 11 August 2015 was approved.

3. ORDER OF BUSINESS

Councillor Blackwood advised of a variation to the order of business from that detailed on the agenda for the meeting. The following items have been recorded in the order that they were taken.

4. TAXI TESTING STATION

The Forum received an update from Gordon Speirs on behalf of the Fleet Services Manager.

The Testing Station was currently operating with one member of staff short due to a member being in hospital and possibly off work for a period of five months.

The Forum formally requested that its best wishes for a speedy recovery be conveyed to the staff member.

Decision

The Forum noted the information provided.

5. COUNTER TERRORISM AWARENESS AND SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME

The Forum received presentations from Sergeant Gregor MacKenzie and PC Helen Auld on the current issues being nationally and globally and associated measures to address the threat and raise awareness of counter terrorism and serious organised crime.

PC Helen Auld highlighted the principal issues and mitigation measures to address the terrorism threat. These included:-

- The range of threat level categories including critical, severe, substantial, moderate and low;
- The UK threat level of “severe” indicating that an attack was highly likely; and
- The measures within the multi agency CONTEST Strategy and the key elements being to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism (prevent), to stop terrorist attacks (pursue), to strengthen our protection against a terrorist attack (protect) and to mitigate the impact of a terrorist attack (prepare).

The above measures aimed to assist in addressing the threat by reducing the vulnerability and the risk. The highest threat level was defined as “critical” meaning that an attack was imminent.

Tailored briefings were provided by the Police Scotland Counter Terrorism Security Advisor (CTSA) covering issues including general security, mail handling, telephone bombs and suspicious packages.

Sergeant Gregor MacKenzie then provided information on issues associated with Serious Organised Crime (SOC) and the measures of combating the problem including detailing the guidance for specified Scottish authorities on the duty in the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism and the Scottish Government’s Serious Organised Crime Strategy setting out the multi agency measures for Scotland to reduce the harm caused by Serious Organised Crime.

The Strategy stressed the importance of detecting and disrupting Serious Organised Crime through prevention at source; cutting off the markets and the recruitment opportunities supporting organised crime.

The multi agency approach required measures to divert people from becoming involved in SOC and using its products, to disrupt SOC and organised crime Groups, to deter serious organised crime groups by supporting private, public and third sector organisations to protect themselves and each other and identify, detect and prosecute those involved in this type of crime. It was emphasised that each and every person had the responsibility to help the community and the police to keep everyone safe.

Decision

The Forum noted the information presented.

The Convener, on behalf of the Forum, thanked Police Scotland for their informative presentations.

6. DON'T BE A BYSTANDER - YOUR ROLE IN PREVENTING SEXUAL CRIME AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The Forum received a presentation from Inspector Cheryle Cowan, Police Scotland on the range of agencies in partnership in the Forth Valley area working to raise awareness of sexual exploitation and to stress the importance taxi and private hire car drivers' front line role in raising the awareness of sexual exploitation and assisting in its prevention in the area.

Inspector Cowan presented to the Forum a clip from a short information film entitled 'Don't be a Bystander' which illustrated the importance of everyone being vigilant of any danger to women particularly when they were in a social situation and alcohol was being consumed. The film and presentation highlighted the danger to women from observers turning a blind eye to the issue and that taxi drivers could play an important part in having a watchful eye when witnessing any danger to women. The consequence of sexual assault and rape could be avoided in many cases. Taxi drivers are an integral part of the nighttime economy and come into contact with a range of people travelling throughout the area on an evening.

The devastating impact on the individual, their family and the wider community was emphasised as was the imperative that all members of the community should be vigilant to recognise the signs of danger to women in this social situation and how to report it and if possible prevent this occurring. It was stressed that this issue was a shared responsibility by everyone and that no-one should be a bystander.

Inspector Cowan stressed the importance of a partnership between the police and the taxi and private hire car trade and advised Forum members that a similar presentation could be provided to taxi and private hire car drivers at any time.

In addition the important advice and information contact details included:-

- Advice on keeping safe on a night out: www.scotland.police.uk/keep-safe
- Information on sexual health, including details of support services for victims of sexual crime or gender-based-violence: www.centalsexualhealth.org
- Victims of crime - Police Scotland on 101 or 999 in an emergency.
- Support through Crimestoppers on an anonymous basis on 0800 555 111 or providing information at www.crimestoppers-uk.org/give-information.

The Convener, on behalf of the Forum, thanked Police Scotland for their informative presentation.

Decision

The Forum noted the information presented.

7. FALKIRK TOWN CENTRE FESTIVE ARRANGEMENTS

The Assistant Manager, Falkirk Delivers indicated that the Taxi Marshalling Service would operate in New Market Street and Meadow Street, Falkirk on 11, 12, 18, 19, 24, 26 and 31 December 2015 from 10 p.m. until 4 a.m. Street Pastors and Community Wardens would be on duty on those dates and during those hours. A total of 4 staff would be at each taxi rank. This coordinated approach would be launched by Police Scotland on 20 November 2015.

Dialogue was currently taking place with Network Rail to encourage its support for the Safer Streets initiative at Falkirk Grahamston train station. Funding was also being sought also for night economy information packs.

The prevalent problem of empty bottles being left in the Town Centre and that drinking may be taking place in taxis. Street Pastors had reported that bottles could be used as weapons.

The above initiatives all contributed to its Friendlier in Falkirk strategic objective and project Griffin for the wellbeing of all in the Falkirk Council area.

Decision

The Forum members noted the benefit of the scheme and the other measures in place.

8. ADDITIONAL ITEM - ECO STARS

Further to information being presented to the Forum meeting in November 2014, 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 environment performance of commercial vehicles.

As previously highlighted taxis in particular spent more time within Town Centres than domestic use cars. It was therefore imperative that the emissions from these vehicles were reduced and their importance was recognised by bridging public transport gaps and contributing to the evening economy. The membership of the scheme was free; there was an improvement in vehicle fuel efficiency, a reduction in emissions and a benefit to the environment. Interest free loans for vehicle adaptations were also available from the Scottish Government.

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

- Free advice on fuel consumption matters; and
- Positive publicity and a badge of honour for taxi and private hire car operators and drivers.

Guidance notes and an application form were available on the Falkirk Council website: www.falkirk.gov.uk and completed application should be submitted to ECO Stars Fleet Recognition Scheme Administrator, Minster House, Minster Pool Walk, Lichfield, Staffordshire WS13 6QT and further information was available on telephone number 01543 416416 or at ecostars@ttr-ltd.com

The Convener thanked Paul for his informative update.

9. UPDATE ON REVIEW OF TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE CAR LICENCE DURATION

The Licensing Co-ordinator provided an update on the work of the Policy Development Panel, 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 Panel had agreed on 18 September 2015 to recommend to the Council's Executive the following and this accordingly was approved by the Executive:-

- Taxi and private hire car licence duration
 - to amend the taxi and private hire car/operator licence duration to include a three year renewal option whilst maintaining the current option of an annual renewal should that be the preferred choice of the licenceholder; and
 - the frequency of hackney tests be reduced from biannual to annual tests for those licensed vehicles aged under three years.

- Late hours catering terminal hour
 - the terminal hour for late hours catering establishments within Falkirk Town centre be amended to 2.30 a.m. Sunday to Thursday inclusive and 3.30 a.m. Friday and Saturday; and
 - during the festive period and Bank Holidays (as defined in the Licensing Board's Statement of Licensing Policy) 3.30 a.m. Sunday to Thursday inclusive and 4.30 a.m. Friday and Saturday. The policy as it relates to the terminal hours for non town centres and the town centres of Denny, Stenhousemuir, Bo'ness and Grangemouth would remain unchanged.

Decision

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

10. TAXI TARIFF SCALES AND FARES

The Licensing Co-ordinator advised the Forum that a report would be submitted to the meeting of the Council's Executive on 1 December 2015 recommending the appropriate scale of fares and charges for the hire of taxis licensed by the Council.

It was important that consultation on the charges be as comprehensive as possible and that any increase be evidence based. With this in mind the Forum was asked at previous meetings to provide evidence that there was a proven need for charges to be increased. No feedback came from the taxi trade. The report to the Executive would therefore recommend no change and to maintain the fare scales and charges at current levels. Following the decision of the Executive the fare scales would be advertised and should written representations being received in respect of the published proposals, a further report will be submitted to the Executive for consideration. Otherwise the fares would stand.

Decision

The Forum noted the report and the information presented.

11. FALKIRK WHEEL/ THE HELIX TAXI STANCE

Further to discussions at meetings during 2013 and 2014 in relation to the increase in taxi ranks in the area to include the Falkirk Wheel and the Helix, the Licensing Co-ordinator advised that the matter was still being pursued with the landowner Scottish Canals.

Decision

The Forum noted the update.

12. ANY OTHER COMPETENT BUSINESS

Festive closure of Municipal Buildings, Falkirk

The Licensing Co-ordinator advised the Forum Municipal Buildings, Falkirk would close for over the festive period commencing Christmas Day until Tuesday 5 January 2016.

13. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS DURING 2016

The Forum noted that the dates for meetings of the Forum during 2016 would be confirmed in due course.