

TAXI TRADE FORUM
THURSDAY 13 JULY 2017

Present: – Councillor Mike Nelson (Chair), Andy Glover (Interim Licensing Manager), Peter Heywood (Revenues Manager), and Dianne Scambler (Democratic Services Officer)

Members of the Committee Present: Councillors, Jane Bell, Mary Green, Harry Hancock

Other Attendees Present: Councillor Jacqui Mort – Cabinet Member (Public Health, Safety and Wellbeing), Stephanie Fairbrother (Licensing Officer), Chris Ward (Licensing Officer)

The Interim Licensing Manager, Andy Glover, welcomed everyone to the Taxi Trade Forum and introduced the Chair of the Forum, Councillor Mike Nelson who is the Vice Chair of the General Licensing Committee, along with officers of the Licensing Team who were present at the meeting.

It was explained that the Taxi Forum had taken longer than anticipated to arrange and that the intention was to hold them quarterly just after a General Licensing Committee so that matters considered at that meeting relating to the trade, could be fed back and any notice of proposed consultations given. The Forum was a two way partnership and the aim was to build up a good working relationship between the Authority and the Trade.

A lot of information was available on the Council's website for the benefit of the trade and drivers and operators were encouraged to read the Council's licensing documentation that included licensing policy, conditions and by-laws.

It was accepted that it had been a challenging year for everyone involved with Licensing in South Ribble and some changes had already been introduced that would improve on previous practices. A number of additional improvements were currently in the pipeline and the Council wanted to use this forum as a way of clarifying the situation, to give advance warning of changes to processes and highlighting a number of forthcoming consultations.

The Interim Licensing Manager outlined those changes that had already been undertaken that included, a new Convictions Policy and changes to Committee Hearings, in relation to what applications would be considered by Councillors and new procedures that had been implemented by officers to ensure that everyone received a fair hearing.

The trade were then informed of a number of proposed changes to existing policies that would be consulted on that included:

- Supporting vulnerable users through the carrying of assistance dogs and people in wheelchairs.
- Roadworthiness of Modified Licensed Vehicles
- Qualifications
- Safeguarding Training
- Tobacco (smoking and Signage)
- Tints
- Executive Hire (Private Hire)

- Digital/GPS taximeter's
- Seating numbers
- Intended Use Policy

The taxi trade would be written to shortly detailing all proposals and the Chair urged everyone to respond, as any views will be heard by members of the General Licensing Committee before a final decision is made.

In response to the information delivered by the Interim Licensing Manager, representatives of the Trade raised a number of issues.

It was explained that any driver that assisted a member of the public past 1.5metres away from their vehicle required additional insurance and asked for the Council to explore the implementation of a blanket cover for all taxi drivers when considering the changes to policy regarding the supporting of vulnerable users.

Representatives of the taxi trade that were present disputed the need for drivers to undertake the prescribed BTEC qualification, stating that it did not enhance the role of the driver as it was more about a common sense approach rather than learning new skills and knowledge. The cost of the course was £200 and operators found difficulty encouraging prospective drivers to enroll given the cost and course content. As the course related to all matters regarding the driving of a taxi Members were confused as to why the trade considered the course inappropriate and the Chair offered to undertake the course on behalf of the Committee and report back.

Drivers were unhappy that there had appeared to have been no consultation regarding the increased cost of plates and whilst it was explained that the increase had been advertised in the Lancashire Evening Post as was legally required to do so, there was an acceptance by the Council that greater consultation needed to take place in the future.

Other issues that were discussed at the meeting included the length of time it takes to process an application, the age limit placed on cars and problems relating to drivers from neighbouring authorities.

Finally in response to concerns from the trade regarding issues raised in the past the Chair, reiterated the promise that had been made by the Interim Licensing Manager that the team were looking to improve on relations between the Council and the Taxi Trade and urged the representatives present to pass this on to other members of the trade. The Committee wanted to work in partnership with the taxi trade to improve on past performance and develop a great service for the residents of the Borough. The Chair thanked everyone for attending and hoped that more people would be encouraged to attend future meetings.

It was AGREED that a greater notification time for the date for the next meeting of the Taxi Trade Forum would be given and that the Council would look at different ways of advertising this date. A note of this meeting would also be displayed on the Council's website.