

Notes of Taxi Drivers Forum 25 May 2022 at 11am

Attended by 13 drivers/operators, also attended by Jill Tyne from Licensing and chaired by Robert Smith, Senior Licensing Officer, Runnymede Borough Council.

Apologies were received from Councillors T Burton and J Wilson.

Mr Smith welcomed everyone to the meeting. Mrs Tyne explained that Cliff Cox, former Licensing Officer had sadly passed away and she continued to provide 12.5 hours per week in the office as it had been decided not to replace the gentleman that took over from him when he retired. People expressed their condolences.

1. Department for Transport best practice consultation

Mr Smith reminded everyone about the recent Department for Transport consultation on best practice in the taxi trade. He encouraged everyone to read it and advised that it was being looked at by the Council's Regulatory Committee at its meeting on Monday 6 June. A response from the Council would be agreed at this meeting to meet the deadline for responses of 20 June 2022. The consultation was very lengthy but could be viewed online and/or downloaded via the Council's website news page for the trade.

[Hackney carriage and private hire news and information – Runnymede Borough Council](#)

2. Hackney Carriage fares in Runnymede

There was a general discussion about the shortage of drivers and fewer being licensed than ever before owing to the app based competition, the after-effects of the pandemic, and less restrictive conditions of vehicles and drivers in other local authorities. Some app based competitors were perceived to have cheaper fares when in fact Runnymede's were generally lower.

Runnymede's fares had not been increased since 2014. The trade had been surveyed about this and a few responses had been received indicating that fares should be increased owing to fuel prices, VAT and the cost of living. This would also be considered by the Regulatory Committee on 6 June.

3. Annual taxi report and reports considering changes to taxi policy on tinted windows

Mr Smith would be presenting his usual annual report to the Councillors at the same meeting as the other matters. The agenda would be available to view on the Council's website later that day

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There was some discussion about tinted windows and the feeling of the Trade was that the policy should be changed because of the expense and inconvenience. People were generally against CCTV in taxis and felt that they were being disadvantaged because of cases elsewhere that had now been addressed by the requirement to do safeguarding training and increased DBS checks etc Mrs Tyne agreed to let one of the drivers know how he could obtain the online certificate having completed the on-line course.

Some people felt that there were so few drivers now because Runnymede's rules were too restrictive and out of step with the trade and its needs. There was also some discussion about the Knowledge Test which was also on the agenda. One operator repeated their suggestion that private hire drivers who were only employed to do school runs should not have to do the topographical knowledge test and could have a badge denoting this.

Some people thought the knowledge test was too difficult but acknowledged that the Hackney carriage drivers test was more so. Mrs Tyne explained it was not practical or cost effective to do verbal knowledge tests. The private hire test gave a list of the locations drivers were expected to be familiar with so it was considered this was achievable with there being fewer questions than in previous years.

Mr Smith encouraged people to look at the agenda and it was confirmed that if the Trade wanted to attend, they were welcome to, but there was no public speaking at these meetings so people could contact the Councillors on that Committee if they wanted views to be heard. It was agreed to send details of the Committee to one of the drivers [done later that day]

4. Any Other Business

The lack of taxi ranks in Egham was discussed as was the situation at Egham Station. Unfortunately, despite the need for ranks in the new Egham development being raised with relevant Officers in the past, they had been told it was now too late.

Mr Smith advised that the arrangement the Council had with South Western Railways was very beneficial and better than in neighbouring authorities where drivers had to negotiate individually with SWR and pay much more to use the station ranks.

Electric vehicles were discussed in the context of how expensive they were and another disincentive to new drivers joining the trade. There was also a lack of infrastructure to support it without a County-wide approach.

Hackney Carriage drivers were reminded of the requirement to use their meters and not agree a fee in advance unless it was an 'out of borough' journey. Drivers were free to charge less than the metered price.

It was queried whether taking payments on a mobile phone whilst the engine was running was acceptable and Mrs Tyne agreed to look into this.

Drivers had appreciated the Covid grant received from central government via the Council.

It was suggested that to promote local trade that designated areas be introduced for locally licensed vehicles only as it was thought to be the case in Oxford for example. It was asked whether this could be considered as part of future regeneration projects in the borough.

Mr Smith confirmed that although the Council could not advertise the local trade on the Council's website they did do all they could to promote locally licensed trade with

schools, colleges etc where they could. Mr Smith also encouraged people to raise issues and concerns with local Councillors and thanked everyone attending the forum.

The forum finished at 12:05 pm.