

### **Taxi Forum 22 March 2023 at 11am, The Hythe Centre, Egham**

Attended by Councillor Jonathan Wilson, and 8 HC drivers (including 1 retired driver).

Robert Smith, Senior Licensing Officer and Jill Tyne, Taxi Licensing Officer

Clare Pinnock, taking notes.

Drivers were welcomed to first forum of the year, there would hopefully be another in July and November, dates to be confirmed and venue likely to be at the Hythe Centre.

Mr Smith confirmed that whilst no items had been put forward by the Trade, Officers did have a few items to be raised and discussed.

### **Medical assessments for drivers - consultation**

Mr Smith advised that a consultation about the frequency of medical assessments for drivers had been released and the Council was very keen for all drivers to respond if they could. This was re-iterated by Councillor Wilson, Chairman of the Licensing and Regulatory Committees, who was pleased by the relatively high response rate to a previous consultation on disability awareness and emphasised that their views were important to help inform their decisions. The consultation was open to all the trade and the public and had been publicised on the Council's social media and website. All drivers had received a copy in the post as well.

Some of the drivers completed their consultation at the meeting and others took away copies plus for their colleagues.

Some drivers felt that their views had not been listened to because they had as a majority said they did not think mandatory training on disability awareness should take place mainly on the grounds of the cost to each driver £45 approximately. It was commented that taking 3 hours out to do the on-line course affected their earnings.

Mr Smith stated that the Equality Act protected disabled people and that undertaking the course protected drivers who needed to know what their obligations were under the changed legislation. It was likely that all licensing authorities would make disability awareness mandatory in due course.

It was agreed that buying disability access cars was a different issue and because they were very expensive, people would need to have sufficient business to justify the adaptations. Some felt there was not a lot of incentive to get special cars.

Mr Smith said that parts of the Equality Act were written in legalese and urged drivers to look at how some of the disability rights group's websites which were more in plain language and easier to understand.

Drivers were reminded that the disability awareness courses had to be completed by 15 July 2023.

Some drivers thought they did not need to do the course because they were aware, others felt the course was a positive step and reinforced that what they were doing was good and 'common sense.'

Having read through the consultation letter drivers were asked for initial feedback about the medical's consultation.

Most of those present thought the proposals looked sensible and was a good idea.

It was explained that the intention was to mirror the DVLA requirements for bus drivers and would benefit most drivers as they would no longer have to undergo as many medicals as they currently did.

Cllr Wilson confirmed that the consultation ended on 17 May 2023 and encouraged people to respond.

### **Taxi Fares**

It was reported that UBER vehicles were taking away trade from licensed taxis who were sitting on the taxi ranks at Egham station and everyone was using UBER instead because they were waiting at the stations.

Mrs Tyne reminded the forum that UBER PH drivers had no geographical barriers, and significantly more drivers (55,000).

It was stated that UBER were bypassing everyone and it was agreed that the legislation had not caught up with technology which wasn't fair to the taxi trade.

Because UBER charged £6.99 minimum (pull off) and the local trade were still cheaper it was suggested that just the pull off rate should go up to £5 but that the other rates should stay the same. People generally thought this was a good idea, especially for shorter journeys and would be competitive.

Mr Smith agreed to survey the trade and then a report could go to the next scheduled meeting of the Regulatory Committee in June 2023. If approved, it would be subject to a statutory consultation period and advertised before coming into force.

### **Meter Dealers**

People were reminded of the various dealers providing meter installation and calibration services in the area.

### **Parking Restrictions at Waitrose in Egham**

Parking at Waitrose in Egham had become a problem for drivers because the previously allowed 30 minutes for waiting had reduced to 15 minutes, resulting in several drivers getting a fine.

Mr Smith confirmed that they were still speaking to the enforcement company at Waitrose to give some allowance to drivers as 15 minutes was not sufficient. Drivers had been told via an email from the Council's Assets and Regeneration team (RBCI) to the Licensing Team that to avoid getting a ticket drivers should move down to the basement where there was 30 minutes free parking and then resurface when their fare was ready. However, there was no signal in the basement, so this did not work unless the person was able bodied enough to go down to the basement car park when they were ready.

It was also reported that this was affecting disabled blue badge holders whose drivers were also getting penalised after 15 minutes despite displaying a badge. Disabled customers had to register to not get a ticket. It was thought that a disabled person could register two vehicles, however, the blue badge is attached to the person, not the vehicle.

It was agreed that the 15 minutes 'standing time' was affecting disabled and elderly and their drivers who arrived early to collect their passengers but would then get fined if their fare took longer to arrive.

It was asked whether there was a no return within a certain time?

Everyone thought that allowing the 20 or so taxis and private hire vehicles that needed to be exempted was reasonable.

Issues were also raised regarding the pre-payment system which did not always work resulting in a fine being issued. Some appeals had been upheld, others not.

The Licensing team would carry on talking to Waitrose and RBCI. Cllr Wilson agreed to take it up with the Leader of the Council.

The meeting ended at 11.38 and everyone was thanked for their attendance.