

Notes of Taxi Forum 11 July 2019 at 11am – Chertsey Hall

Attended by 10 drivers/operators, Councillor John Furey, Robert Smith, Senior Licensing Officer and chaired by Councillor Derek Cotty, Chairman of the Licensing and Regulatory Committees, Runnymede Borough Council.

Apologies were received from Councillor Elaine Gill.

Councillor Cotty welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. Idling while waiting for jobs etc

Mr Smith had received a request from two drivers to remind people not to have their engines running while waiting on the rank. This was to reduce pollution. To date the borough did not have any byelaws about this but one driver reported they had been fined for this at Heathrow.

2. Smoking on the ranks

Mr Smith had also received a request from some drivers to request that colleagues stopped smoking while on the ranks – stood outside their vehicles and letting the smoke drift into other people's cars. A video had been sent in by one of the drivers showing the proximity of the cigarette bin to the rank which was causing problems, including a potential fire risk. Mr Smith would contact South Western Railways about this with a view to getting it removed and/or relocated.

3. Rank Etiquette

Mr Smith had received complaints about some drivers queue jumping at Egham Railway station but they were reluctant to confront the other drivers and had asked for the matter to be raised at the forum. Those present said that it was normally accidental for this to happen but would mention it to colleagues to be more vigilant about managing the ranks.

4. New App Based Platforms

Those present at the forum were aware of some new app based platforms. In addition to Uber, Ola! And XoooX (a booking platform) were mentioned. There was some discussion about the legalities of these operators whose activities were adversely affecting the trade. It was noted that the Law Commission report recommendations if adopted by the Government might assist.

5. Unlicensed Driver and Vehicle

Mr Smith reported that the incident of an unlicensed driver was still being investigated. The trade were anxious for him to be dealt with as soon as possible. Another driver working for Uber had been reported to them and he had been suspended pending action by Uber. It was reported that Transport for London were not as quick in responding to complaints as we would like.

6. DashCams

Most of those present said that they did have dashcams but that they only pointed outside the vehicle. Mr Smith advised that a recent case of flytipping had been investigated successfully

using evidence produced by a driver from the dashcam of his vehicle. He urged drivers who witnessed criminal activity to report it and provide vehicle registration numbers if recorded.

7. Thefts of cash from vehicles

Unfortunately there had been a number of incidents of this nature, particularly if drivers left cash in their vehicles overnight. Some drivers reported they had experienced this and agreed to tell colleagues to be aware of this problem.

8. Annual report on Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing

Mr Smith drew people's attention to his annual report, recently considered by the Regulatory Committee and available on the Council's website. He agreed to send it as an email to the drivers/operators.

It was asked whether the Council could make Private Hire Licensing easier as there were too many drivers and it was also felt by some that the knowledge test was too difficult. It was also thought that having sat nav made the locations part of the test less relevant and that it was not held as frequently as drivers would like especially if they had to take a re-test as it resulted in long delays before they could drive. Mr Smith agreed they would look at this and had been comparing Runnymede's knowledge test with other councils, noting that some do not have a knowledge test. He had reviewed last year's test results and found that 50% of those who failed had done so on the questions relating to the law for example use of mobile phones and wearing seatbelts. Mr Smith quoted from a Castlepoint Council (Essex) article on the subject and gave this to one of the drivers present at the meeting.

Gemini were hoping to recruit additional drivers and were also working on improving their app to make it more attractive to students who tended to use Uber.

Councillor Cotty confirmed their commitment to considering these issues when the policy was renewed in March 2020.

An important issue was raised with regard to safeguarding and underage students using Uber without the account holder being present. It was suggested that the school in question should be geofenced to prevent this happening. Mr Smith agreed to raise this with Uber. Mr Grinham agreed to provide Mr Smith with further information and the relevant part of Uber's conditions that addressed this issue. Mr Smith confirmed that they promoted Runnymede's licensed taxi and private hire operators at Royal Holloway but that students often came to university with Uber already installed on their phones so it was difficult to persuade them to use the licensed operators in the borough.

9. Heathrow ULEZ and speed cameras

An email had been sent to drivers advising them that Heathrow ULEZ was being introduced from 2022 but that the final details were not yet known. London Hackney Carriages would be exempt. The older diesel vehicles would be affected the most. It was reported that more and more Uber drivers were operating in Egham and issues with their driving ability were raised.

With regard to speed cameras it was thought these recorded the average speed of vehicles which caught a number of people. Mr Smith reminded drivers that getting points on their licence for speeding could affect their livelihood when it came to renewals.

10. AOB

The following points were raised:

- Uber and Transport for London and the frustration of not being able to control them or have a say in their licensing rules which were less rigid than Runnymede's.
- Inexperienced drivers working for Uber and making it less safe for everyone else
- Safety of using satnavs
- Cross Border Hiring – clarity required
- No authority to say that local drivers could only operate in the borough
- Southend Council and Uber
- Getting fined for using the bus lane in Reading; subsequently registered vehicle with them to avoid getting fined as they only seem to recognize London black cabs as legitimate taxis

Councillor Cotty closed the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance.

The next forum would be held at the Hythe Centre in Egham, in the fourth quarter of 2019, the date to be confirmed.

The forum finished at 11.55 am.