

## Notes of Taxi Forum 14 November 2019 at 11am – The Hythe Centre, Egham

Attended by 6 drivers/operators, 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. Licensing fees 2020/2021

Mr Smith reported that the Licensing fees for Taxis had been considered by the Regulatory Committee on 12 November. There had been no increases to the fees because the Council wanted to encourage new drivers to the trade. The fee structure needed to be stabilised before any further review. A deficit of approximately £40,000 for 2020/2021 was reported and drivers were advised that if fees were set on the basis of full cost recovery it would be too expensive for drivers. It was asked what the Council did in terms of budgeting for the next 3 to 5 years and drivers asked why local authorities couldn't work together to combat UBER that they said was killing the trade. Mr Smith said that they were one of the few local authorities that had responded to the survey by the Local Government Association (LGA) to lobby for primary legislation and solutions including national standards and conditions to make licensing more consistent and fair to the trade. To date, the Government had not acted on this but it was thought this would not resolve the situation of competition from app based operators. Some drivers were very frustrated by this and wanted the Council to do more, and Government to do more to help for example promoting the taxi trade to younger potential drivers. Mr Smith maintained they were doing all they could through the LGA but that it wasn't their role to recruit new drivers.

There was a lengthy discussion about app based operators, technological changes and the different market and the steady fall in the number of drivers. Some compelling examples of how this affected the trade locally were given, especially with the high population of students whose only experience of using taxis was through app based operators via their mobile phones. Drivers felt let down and perceived that nothing more was being done. Mr Smith made it clear that the Council had done everything it could to make the Government aware of the effect UBER was having on the local trade and for their part had carried out enforcement with TFL.

One local operator (Gemini) was looking to expand into an app based model and was actively looking for more drivers and it was confirmed this was all in order. Mr Smith confirmed that he was not in receipt of an application from UBER but could not prejudge the outcome if they complied with the Council's requirements including having an office based in the borough.

To combat any illegal activity, if any Private Hire vehicles were parked up on the taxi ranks in the borough, drivers were urged to send the details including photographs to the Licensing team to be followed up with Transport for London (TFL). Mr Smith advised that clamping vehicles was no longer lawful. A joint enforcement date with TFL was planned for a date to be confirmed in December.

Councillor Cotty expressed his sympathy with the local trade and said they would continue to do all they could to address the situation within the confines of current legislation.

## 2. Vehicle Licence Applications.

Mr Smith reminded drivers of the need to have all their papers in order when renewing their licences to avoid delays.

## 3. Vehicle Platings

Mr Smith advised that vehicles needed to meet the Council's standards to continue being plated. Drivers stated that in the current climate it wasn't financially viable to do some of the more minor repairs and felt the team were being overly 'picky' about minor issues. An example was given by Mr Smith and he referred drivers to the criteria that were set out on the vehicle application form and said that currently there were no plans to re-introduce the age limit on vehicles and re-iterated that the criteria was the same regardless of the age of the vehicle.

## 4. New Operator's Licence granted to OLA

Mr Smith advised that the Council had very recently granted an operator's licence to OLA who had been discussed at the last forum. It was confirmed that they did work with Hackney Carriages and cross-border hiring, which was lawful between operators and must be recorded properly. Their head office was in London but they had a satellite office in the borough. It was understood they were making a number of applications across the country. Drivers stated this would further affect the trade and expressed their discontentment. Mr Smith stressed that OLA was a different operation to that of UBER and were keen to comply with all conditions.

## 5. AOB

The following points were raised:

- Communications with the Licensing team, particularly by telephone. The team would be asked to make calls out dialling a given prefix so the number would be recognised.
- Safety issues on the ranks at Egham Railway Station. Unfortunately, no progress had been made since the site meeting in 2017. South Western Railways had confirmed lack of funds to improve the situation.
- Tinted windows and the Knowledge test – an opportunity to make representations on this could be through the Runnymede Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy consultation. Mr Smith stressed the need for people responding to the consultation to evidence their representations and views
- Mr Smith gave those present copies of the consultation and urged them to complete it – it was available on line on the Council's website and could also be downloaded to complete by hand. There were planned consultation events on 22 November and 2 December at the Civic Centre.
- TASH and use of UBER and safety issues were being progressed

Councillor Cotty closed the meeting by re-iterating the Council's aspiration to create a level playing field for drivers and operators and thanked everyone for their attendance.

The next forum would be held at Chertsey Hall, in March 2020, the date to be confirmed.

The forum finished at 12.10pm