

LICENSING (TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE) TRADE CONSULTATION MEETING AT SOUTHBROOK RISE, TUESDAY 15th MARCH 2011. NOTES TAKEN BY DEREK JENNINGS.

In Attendance: Councillors, PARNELL (Chair of Licensing Committee) and DRAKE (CP&CD), RICHARD IVORY (RI) Asst Solicitor to the Council, IAN HALL (IH) and JIM MARTIN (JM) (Southampton Hackney Association), DAVE GRIFFITHS (DG) and STEVE FRICKER (SF) (Unite), CLIVE JOHNSON (CJ) and KEVIN MAY (KM) (Southampton Trade Association), DEREK JENNINGS (DG) (Private Hire Representative).

Agenda raised by Unite:

1. The Protocol regarding the Consultation Meeting between SCC and the Taxi & PH Trade.
2. Clarification on Committee's decision regarding CCTV in licensed vehicles.
3. Protocol regarding the Fare Variation submissions by the Hackney Carriage Trade.
4. Timescale involved when issuing new plates.
5. Staffing Levels of the Licensing Department.
6. Clarification regarding the "Ring-fencing" of Taxi and PH Licensing.
7. Clarification regarding CRB clearance.
8. Radio in a PHV is not a requirement in the issue of a PHV licence.
9. Rank Marshals – not enough Rank space – U-turns off of London Road Rank.

RI opened the meeting and apologized for the absence of Richard Black and thought it appropriate that the meeting should still go ahead as we had been waiting since January for this consultation. RI also apologized for the lack of any council staff to take minutes of the meeting due to limited resources and CP suggested DJ should take notes of the meeting as he had started to write.....DJ agreed to this.

1). DG asked what the procedure was regarding these trade meetings as no notes were taken at the August meeting. RI said that as long as the notes were signed off and 'agreed by all parties' then that would be ok, regardless of who took notes/minutes or whether the meeting was official or informal. CD said there used to be an agreement in place for trade meetings. The first half was for licensing issues; the second half was with highways. Although in the last 4 years this seems to have broken down. IR explained that the meetings were now governed by the protocol agreed by the Licensing Committee in 2009. DG and SF requested we have 3 meetings a year, preferably during school holiday times. The trade would like a better framework to go forward and to include highways, disabled groups and to be more constructive in moving forward. Could agendas be agreed and sent out earlier. RI agreed that this would be ok. He would get the necessary people in where needed for future meetings. RI said he was not making excuses but time is precious so 3 meetings would be fine, if needed. IH asked if the police could

be present regarding issues with rank space and marshalling. **RI** would organize prior consultation next time with other departments if required. **CD** inquired if members should be present. **RI** explained that it is part of the meeting protocol. The trade agreed that this would be a good thing if it could be arranged. **CP** suggested 2 constituted meetings a year with the option of a 3 if the trade felt it necessary.

2). Regarding clarification on CCTV issue, **DG** asked why 2 cameras are needed per vehicle when 1 camera was originally agreed? What happened to the review on cameras requested by COUNCILLOR THOMAS at the August 2010 meeting? **RI** expressed his reluctance to discuss this, due to an impending court case. He assured the trade that this was being reviewed, and revised proposals were being worked up to present to committee. He again re-iterated that things were progressing, albeit slowly due to a reduction in staffing levels. **CP** asked what the issue was with multiple cameras in vehicles. **IH** and **KM** both gave examples of various interpretations coming from the licensing dept regarding the fitment of CCTV to multi seaters. **IH** said there wasn't a camera on the market that picks up the whole interior. **KM** pointed out that the camera is activated by the front door opening, not the rear doors. **RI** said he would speak to RICHARD BLACK regarding these issues. **RI** also pointed out that VERIFY were back as a supplier after a price reduction.

3)+4). In respect of the question being raised regarding fare variations and increases by the trade representatives, **CP** said that whenever the trade has a need, you submit it. **DG** commented on the length of time it takes for a fare variation to go through. **RI** explained it was a statutory process and if an objection was raised, it would slow the process even further. **CJ** suggested it takes a longer period of time from being submitted before advertised by the licensing dept. **RI** pointed out that licensing are involved with other aspects of licensing, not just Hackney and Private Hire. Staff shortages are again not helping, but will do what he can to try and speed up the process for further fare submissions. **CJ** pointed out that the quality of service from the licensing dept has been very poor recently, he recalled a meeting several years ago when Private Hire prices were raised in line with Hackney Carriage prices to help resolve these issues. **RI** asked how do you think we rate against Eastleigh and Winchester? **KM** stated that he has vehicles licensed in Eastleigh and his experience suggests that Eastleigh currently rate 8/10 and Southampton 1-2/10. **RI** said that licensing in Eastleigh deal only with Hackney Carriage and Private Hire licensing as all other forms of licensing are now provided by Southampton City Council, he also went on to state that if there was a request from Police or Politicians to prioritise in other licensing areas, e.g.: over a sex shop licensing problem, all licensing staff may need to be put on that as a priority. **RI** also stated that current fees are in line with other Councils nationally. **KM** and **DJ** gave examples of delays and issues currently experienced with the licensing dept, e.g.: 3 month wait over Private Hire Operator License renewals and transfer of Hackney Carriage ownership. **RI** again stated that they are trying to provide the best service they can but in the current climate it is difficult.

5)+6). When the subject of staffing levels and the clarification of ring fencing of Taxi and Private Hire licensing fees was raised, **CP** and **RI** suggested that matters would be looked into and would report back to the Trade with answers to viewed problems. **RI** confirmed that our fees are ring fenced and licensing staff are time recorded. **KM** pointed out that he thought the female licensing staff members do a good job but he felt it unfair for them to be dealing with a lot of grief. **DG**, referred to item 14 on the August meeting which was enforcement and staffing in general. Private Hire and Hackney Carriage licensing fees went up, sex shop fees went down but it appears that resources are down – why? **RI** said that there

has been a huge increase in new applicants to the Trade and he is unable to resource staff levels up and down. **KM** and **CJ** suggested simplifying of procedures; the Trade would be more than happy to sit down with Licensing to produce a clear check sheet for people unfamiliar with the procedures / processes of applications. **RI** agreed that this was a good idea and Richard Black would arrange a meeting to move this forward and explore any good ideas

7). **RI** said a CRB check is CRB check and will look into why there is a discrepancy in CRB procedures after examples given by **KM** who was told that Licensing could not accept other CRBs although **DJ** pointed out that a CRB check that he had was accepted by the Council because it was no more than 6 months old.

8). In relation to radios not being a PHV requirement as was discussed earlier in the meeting, **RI** will discuss with Richard Black.

9). **IH** dangerous to do u-turns on London Road. **CP** asked if there was a sign saying “no u-turn”. **RI** said there is a sign there but it’s a sign for information rather than a legal sign. And at the end of the day it is the trade who are doing the u turns so the answer is in their hands. **RI** went on to say that there are people in this Licensing Authority who do not see buses and HC / PH as one, he does and will try to see that things get better, more awareness of the Trade is needed but currently there is not enough, he promised to bang the drum louder for us all to be treated the same. To this extent the importance of the trade has been highlighted in the draft Local Transport Plan, which is a step forward

Agenda raised by the Southampton Hackney Association:

1. How are the free buses subsidized by the council-especially the night bus at weekends?
2. Severe lack of rank space.
3. No correct signage to stop lorries and coaches proceeding up the High Street towards East Street. Severe congestion is caused.
4. Enforcement?
5. Does the Southampton Trade Association (STA) speak on behalf of the private hire or the taxi trade?
6. Do companies who operate private hire vehicles inform the licensing office when a private hire driver picks up a fare illegally? Present up-to-date computer systems informs the operator where a PHV is situated and what job it is doing.

1). **IH** said his members had concerns over the free buses which are subsidised and taking work away from the trade. **RI** will give a name/names to **IH** to take this issue up with them, as this was not a licensing issue.

2). **IH** had concerns over the lack of rank space on London Road and wanted to know if it would be possible to have a feeder rank in Asylum Road/Bellevue Road? This may reduce congestion. **RI** agreed with the trade that rank space is becoming a problem in Southampton, especially the centre areas. He proposed the trade do a list of the top 5 ranks with issues and he would look in to it. The train station (down side) is mostly private land and they are not interested in working with people on this. He will try

and influence, but has proved difficult in the past. IH mentioned that rank space is diminishing due to 'pinch points', 'bus stops' and 'street furniture'. RI mentioned a further Halcrow report in the future and advised these issues will be taken in to account.

3). IH asked about inadequate signage at the top end of the High Street to stop HGV's especially the foreign drivers turning down East Street. This always leads to congestion and just recently damage to other vehicles including a Taxi. RI pointed out that this was a Highways issue. IH said that despite phone calls and e-mails, there had been no response from Highways. RI suggested that Highways would be at the next meeting. He was hopeful.

4). IH enforcement, where is it? Private Hires illegally picking up in town. What happens if a complaint is brought up? RI advised that enforcement does take place regularly but it is not publicised for obvious reasons. If a complaint or offence is brought to their attention and with 'evidence' the offenders would be dealt with, with out fail but hard evidence is required. RI said the council do not PROSECUTE, as it is not generally within its powers to do so. The POLICE do.

5). IH asked who do the STA represent, is it the companies and owners, or drivers? Is it possible to wear 2 hats? RI stated that they wished to consult with the trade in any way. He felt that what was important was as long as things progressed and everyone agreed to the minutes and outcomes of the meetings he would be happy with that. KM suggested that both companies and drivers could be represented. Due to bad relationships in the past maybe it is time to re-think. CD said there used to be a formula in place. RI stated again that members and officers were not concerned over who is representing 'as long as we move forward' and representation is in line with the agreed protocol mentioned above. IH when the consultation was formed in 2009, it was the way forward.

6). IH wanted to know if the radio circuits can tell when a private hire is picking up illegally? KM pointed out that they would know if the drivers meter was switched on, although the driver would be unlikely to do so if picking up illegally. IH asked if CCTV can be used in the complaint of an illegal pick up? RI said no. CCTV can only be accessed on the request of the police or if a formal complaint is raised to licensing.

8). IH pointed out that there will be 8 extra taxi's coming on later this year, a further Halcrow report and the Equality Act is still out. Would this have an impact on the trade in Southampton? RI It will most likely have an impact. Richard Black and John have done some work on this but I am unable to say anymore at this stage.

In summary RI agreed to take up the points that could not be answered at the meeting, discuss with Licensing and ensure a written response was given to all (and posted on the Licensing Notice board)

All those in attendance agreed that it was a long overdue meeting and had proven to be productive and all hoped we had something to build on for future meetings.