



Minutes of the meeting of the HACKNEY CARRIAGE CONSULTATIVE PANEL held on MONDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2006 at 12.00 NOON

Present: Councillor Miles (Chair)
Councillors Carruthers and Dransfield (substitute for Councillor Box)

Also Present: P Kirkham (Hackney Carriage Association), V Dry (Partially Sighted and Blind Representative), J Henderson (Disabled People Representative) and B Roland (General Secretary of the Private Hire Association)

Officers: R Comitti (Commercial Manager), T Shulver (Senior Enforcement Officer), C Henderson (Enforcement Officer), M Bandali (Passenger Transport Section) and P Taylor (Committee Manager)

Apology Councillor Box

Number of Public Present: 40

1.0 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

RESOLVED

That Councillor Miles be elected Chair of the Hackney Carriage Consultative Panel for the meeting.

2.0 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

In response to a request for an update on Minute 7.0 (13 March 2006), the Commercial Manager informed the Panel that there had been a marginal improvement in the percentage of local taxi vehicles passing the random vehicle tests.

Councillor Dransfield expressed concern that the failure rate remained high and suggested that the safety assessment of local taxi vehicles should be a standing item on the agenda for the Panel until the failure rates had been reduced to an acceptable level.

In response to a request for an update on Minute 2.0 (13 March 2006), the Panel were informed that additional lighting had not yet been provided at the Xscape taxi stand. Officers agreed to pass on the concerns of the trade regarding this matter to the Environmental Directorate of the Council.

RESOLVED -

1. That the Minutes of the meeting of the Hackney Carriage Consultative Panel held on 13 March 2006 be approved as a correct record.
2. That an update on safety assessments of local taxi vehicles be received as a standing item at the Hackney Carriage Consultative Panel, until such time as the Panel considered the failure rates had been reduced to an acceptable level.

3.0 TAXI CARD SCHEME

The Panel received a report on the Taxi Card Scheme that was being piloted in Milton Keynes. The scheme would provide subsidised taxi rides to disabled people and older people who had difficulty using the bus and who did not have access to a car. Taxi drivers who wanted to join the scheme would receive training on disability awareness before they were accredited.

The initial pilot would be evaluated by the Centre for Integrated Living and, if found to be successful, it would be implemented with a proper full scheme from April 2007.

Representatives of the trade were invited to approach the officer from the Passenger Transport Section after the meeting if they had any questions concerning the scheme.

4.0 UPDATE ON BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR STRETCH LIMOUSINES

Representatives of the trade advocated the enforcement of Best Practice Guidelines concerning stretch limousines. This was highlighted as an increasing problem due to the rising popularity of such vehicles with the public.

The General Secretary of the Private Hire Association suggested that, as these vehicles could not legally be used by more than 8 people, it was the responsibility of local authorities to regulate them.

The Commercial Manager stated that this was an area of concern and that there had been a significant growth in the number of these vehicles plying their trade within the region over the last 12 months.

Councillor Carruthers emphasised that it was the duty of the Council to ensure public safety and suggested that stretch limousines should be subject to the same regulations as other private hire vehicles.

Councillor Dransfield expressed concern that the Council could only enforce what it was legally permitted to, and suggested that the Panel ask for clarification of the legal situation to be submitted to the Regulatory Committee.

RESOLVED

That a report be submitted to the Regulatory Committee to clarify the legal position regarding the licensing of stretch limousines.

5.0 UPDATE ON ADVERTISING ON LICENSED TAXIS

Representatives of the trade expressed concern that private hire vehicle companies had been advertising on hackney carriages. It was suggested that this could cause confusion to the customer, as they would be unsure whether they were using a hackney carriage or a private hire vehicle and, correspondingly, what price they should be paying for the service.

The Commercial Manager stated that this matter had been raised at a meeting of the Regulatory Committee on 12 October 2006 (Minute reference R30). The Committee had resolved that a report be prepared on the authorisation of advertising on hackney carriages. The hackney carriage trade were to be included in the consultation for the report, which was to focus on the level of advertising permitted.

6.0 UPDATE ON THE TAXI MARSHALS SCHEME

Representatives of the trade reported that the Taxi Marshals Scheme had so far proved to be a success, but asked for clarification to be provided concerning funding of the scheme.

The Commercial Manager stated that Xscape provided all the equipment and signage but that the rest of the cost was currently being met by the Taxi Licensing department. This arrangement, however, was not viable in the long term and other funding options were being pursued. The Panel noted that a similar scheme in Bath had proved so successful that the police had taken over the cost of the project, and it was hoped that the success of the scheme in Milton Keynes would help to ensure continued funding.

Councillor Dransfield suggested that a report on the Taxi Marshals scheme could be presented to the Community Safety Partnership in order to raise awareness of the project and to help find possible sources of funding.

Representatives of the trade expressed concern that the area that the scheme operated in was not large enough and asked that the Hackney Carriage Association be included in any discussions concerning future re-development of the site.

7.0 UPDATE ON TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE LICENSING IN LIGHT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S BEST PRACTICE GUIDANCE 2006

The General Secretary of the Private Hire Association requested clarification of the Council's response to the government's best practice guidance for taxi and private hire vehicle licensing.

The government guidelines advised local authorities to consider how accessible the vehicles they licensed as taxis were for disabled people (which included – but was not limited to – people who needed to travel in a wheelchair). The guidelines encouraged local authorities to introduce taxi accessibility policies for their areas.

The guidelines responded to the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 which lifted the exemption previously given to vehicles used to provide public transport services, including taxis and private hire vehicles.

The Milton Keynes Hackney Carriage Association advocated consultation with disabled users to determine their requirements and had invited witness to the meeting to explain their needs. Disabled users of hackney carriages and private hire vehicles advised the Panel of the following:

- That licensing regulations needed to recognize that not all disabled users had spinal injuries and that a variety of provisions for disabled users should be encouraged.
- That a mixed fleet allowed disabled users to choose the most appropriate solution for their needs.
- That visually impaired users often found it difficult to identify taxis and private hire vehicles. Access to the vehicle was also difficult because door handles were not very easy to find.
- That disability awareness training for drivers of hackney carriages and private hire vehicles would make a considerable difference.

The Panel suggested that the issues of specially adapted taxis not being able to proceed to the head of the taxi rank to pick up a disabled user and rear loading vehicles not being allowed enough room to use their access ramp/lift should be raised at the Transport Group.

RESOLVED –

That a report be presented to the Regulatory Committee on the Council's taxi accessibility policies in light of the Government's Best Practice Guidance 2006: Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing, with a view to reviewing the Council's current policies.

8.0

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED -

That the Hackney Carriage Consultative Panel be held every 3 months, with the next meeting taking place in February 2007.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 1.23 PM