

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of a Meeting between Members, Taxi Proprietors and Officers held at Knowle, Sidmouth on Thursday, 16 April 2009

Present:

Councillors:

Graham Godbeer (Chairman)
Chris Gibbings (Vice Chairman)

Steve Dean – Dean's Taxis
Robert Fowler – Ant Time Anywhere
Steve Glover – Steves Cars
John Huffer – Horseshoe Taxis (East Devon Taxi Association)
Paul Johnson – self employed
Dave Lean – Viking Cabs (Exmouth Taxi Association)
John Osborne – self employed
Nina Peters – Sid Valley Cars
J Simeone – Storm Force
Mick Simpson – Direct Cars
Iain Sparks – Sparkys
Vikki Sparks - Sparkys
Philip Thomas – Lympstone Private Hire
John Tucker – Sid Valley Cars
Nic Wathes – self employed

Skills UK
Gary Charles
Wayne ?

EDDC Officers
John Tippin – Licensing Manager
Douglas Jackson – Licensing Officer
John Loveridge – Licensing Officer
Rachel Perram – Democratic Services Officer

The meeting started at 2.12pm and finished at 4.02pm.

*34 **Apologies**

There were no apologies received for absence.

*35 **Report of last meeting**

The report of the meeting held on 28 October 2008 was received as signed as a true record.

***36 Matters Arising**

National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) for the Taxi Trade (Minute no. *25 refers)

The Chairman was pleased to announce that certificates would be handed to a number of drivers at the end of the meeting. This was a great achievement and drivers were congratulated for attending and completing the course, which could only add to the professionalism of the service in East Devon.

Parking on taxi ranks and enforcement of the problem (Minute no.*26 refers)

The Licensing Manager advised the meeting that the problem that had existed with the taxi rank and a Honiton market trader had been resolved as the trader no longer operated at this market.

Police duty and policy for late night crowd control in Exmouth (Minute no.*27 refers)

The Secretary for the Exmouth Taxi Association advised that their members had met with the Police to discuss problems in Exmouth. They had a most useful and informative meeting.

***37 Presentation by Skills UK**

The Chairman welcomed Gary Charles from Skills UK to the meeting.

Mr Charles advised the meeting that a Road Passenger Vehicle NVQ was available throughout the UK and was a 12 week course. From this level, drivers may wish to consider progressing to an Operating and Transport Management Course, which was part-funded.

The meeting was advised that, once qualified, drivers could promote their qualification to customers either by a window sticker or tax disc holder.

The Chairman was pleased to note that so many drivers had participated in the NVQ scheme so far and that it was good for drivers to have a qualification to back up their skills. There were no plans for EDDC to introduce mandatory training for drivers, although Skills UK advised the Board that some districts had started to introduce this requirement.

***38 Taxi ranks in Exmouth, Seaton and Honiton**

Exmouth Strand Presentation

Jill White, Urban Design Officer for Devon County Council gave a presentation to the meeting on the consultation work for the proposed regeneration of the Strand area of Exmouth. This work was being carried out in conjunction with EDDC and Exmouth Town Council. The meeting was advised that two phases of consultation had already taken place with the public, traders and some taxi firms in Exmouth. The regeneration of the Strand area had been identified as one of the core projects needed to help Exmouth and its town centre. Consensus had been reached that a degree of pedestrianisation in the area would be good, as would a change in traffic flows in the surrounding streets. It was proposed that Rolle Street revert to two-way traffic for its whole length and the sides of the Strand be made a pedestrianised zone with restricted loading areas for businesses.

The third phase for consultation was to take place in the town shortly and drivers were encouraged to make their comments and proposals known at these events.

Concern was voiced about the considerable reduction of taxi rank spaces in the proposed Strand design. Suggestions from the meeting included a change in the traffic flow in Victoria Road – which could allow for more taxi rank spaces. The meeting was advised that another option was to allow the Strand bus lane to be used late at night as a taxi rank.

The Chairman thanked Ms White for updating the meeting and for her presentation, even though the latest design had not offered many solutions to taxi parking issues in the Strand.

Seaton

The Licensing Officer, Douglas Jackson, advised the meeting that he had spoken to Paul Wilson, of Devon County Highways. Although not able to attend this meeting, Mr Wilson gave his assurance that traffic orders for the Seaton Taxi ranks would be resolved within the next six months. The Licensing Officer would keep in contact with Devon Highways to ensure that this happened as scheduled.

Honiton

The meeting noted that there had been problems with the rank in Honiton for a number of years. Terry Fairbrother, Honiton Street Market Inspector had made a proposal to provide 7 spaces at Manor House, which was over the road from the original site. This would give an increase of 5 taxi ranks spaces. This proposal had been approved by Honiton Town Council, as well as market traders in the town. Paul Wilson from Devon County Highways would prepare plans for consultation. The Chairman and Vice Chairman would also chase progress on this matter with Devon County Council.

***39 No smoking and signage in taxis and private hire vehicles**

The Licensing Officer, Douglas Jackson, advised the meeting that EDDC had unfortunately run out of 'no smoking' stickers. Attendees were reminded that it was a legal requirement to display signs of at least 70mm in diameter in both the front and back of vehicles. These could be purchased from a number of outlets.

***40 Dress standard of drivers of licensed vehicles**

The Licensing Manager advised that a number of Councillors had raised concern over the standard of dress amongst some drivers in the district. The meeting was advised that a Taxi Policy was being produced, which would go out to consultation before being adopted. The Licensing team had looked at best practice amongst other authorities in the creation of the policies proposed.

***41 Fitness of vehicles following late night checks on hackneys in the Exmouth area**

The Licensing Officer, Douglas Jackson, expressed his team's disappointment and concern over the problems that had been identified at the random checks that had been conducted recently in Exmouth. The poor standards identified had been subject to negative press coverage, which was unfortunate and reflected poorly upon the service provided in that area.

Drivers were encouraged to report any vehicles that they felt would not comply with required standards. They were also advised that the police would prosecute future offenders. The Exmouth Drivers' Association welcomed checks on vehicles. The meeting was advised that it was the Council's preferred policy to try to resolve any problems verbally in the first instance, with drivers being given the opportunity to try to rectify any problems before enforcement action was taken on drivers. The Council had an enforcement policy which was part of the Licensing Policy. Any enforcement matters could be brought to the Licensing and Enforcement Committee.

***42 Advertising guidelines on licensed vehicles**

The meeting was reminded that a clear policy existed with regard to the size and type of advertising that was permitted on and in vehicles. This policy referred to any type of advertising material and was clear in its guidance, but excluded temporary advertising.

In response to a question as to whether it was illegal to advertise pricing in vehicles, the Legal Executive would look into this matter and reply on this matter.

The Licensing Manager advised drivers that any advertising materials which were found in vehicles and were in breach of guidelines, as well as possibly compromising public safety, would be challenged and action taken accordingly.

***43 CCTV in licensed vehicles**

The meeting was informed that best practice suggested the use of CCTV in vehicles was considered to be a good proposal. CCTV however was an expensive option, costing in the region of £1,000–1,500 to fit per vehicle. Systems would also need approval of the Licensing Committee before being fitted.

One driver provided details of a system called 'Cabserve', which cost in the region of £600. This system downloaded to a hard drive, which could be accessed by Cab Serve as necessary, once an incident arose. Drivers were advised that any system required clear customer signage, with any access to data only being permitted to the Police or other approved authorities.

***44 Fares and Fees**

Fares

The Licensing Manager advised the meeting that any proposals for fare increases would be presented at a meeting of the Licensing and Enforcement Committee (which met 4 times a year). Meetings for the forthcoming year were scheduled for 9 June, 22 September, 1 December and 2 March 2010.

The Chairman suggested that small increases would be much more preferable to customers than a sizeable leap every three years.

The drivers felt that they did not need to increase fares in this current economic climate. They were reminded that if this situation should change that any proposals for increases needed to be submitted to the Licensing Manager 4 weeks before a Licensing and Enforcement Committee meeting.

Fees

Drivers were advised that the Council was trying to minimise any increases in fees. Last year's increase was 4.1%, with the proposal for 2009/2010 being 2.5%. The CRB had not notified of any changes to their fees and the Council was not planning to apply an increase to their administration charges or badge fees.

***45 Any other business**

Section 75 Exemption

A driver requested further information from the Licensing Manager over private hire stretch limousines.

The meeting was informed that EDDC would license some of these vehicles provided they met the Council's licensing criteria and accommodated no more than 8 passengers. Any

proposals to licence this type of vehicle would be considered by a Sub Committee of the Licensing and Enforcement Committee. VOSA is able to licence not only stretched limousines that carried a greater number than eight people but could also licence vehicles carrying eight and less people. However the licence issued by VOSA is a Restricted Operators licence which requires all passengers to be carried at separate fares (similar to a coach operator) and all journeys must be at least 15 miles. There is general concern in the industry over the safety of this type of vehicle.

New Sidmouth Taxi Ranks

In response to a complaint about the signage for taxis in Sidmouth, the Licensing Manager would look into this matter with the Highways Department.

*46 **Next meeting**

The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 28 October 2009 at 2.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Knowle.