

## **East Devon District Council**

### **Report of a meeting between Members, Taxi Proprietors and Officers held at Knowle Sidmouth on Thursday 2 June 2011**

#### **Present**

Steve Hall (Chairman)

Jim Knight (Vice Chairman)

#### Taxi Proprietors/Drivers

Alan Hill (AJs Taxis, Exmouth)

Brian Bailey (AJs Taxis, Exmouth)

John Matthews (Peaks Taxis, Sidmouth)

Nina Peters (Sid Valley Cars, Sidmouth)

Dave Lean (Viking Cars, Exmouth), Chairman Exmouth Taxi Association

Rupert Crofts (Ocean Cars, Sidmouth)

George Shorters (AJs Taxis, Exmouth)

A Walker (Peaks Taxis, Sidmouth)

#### EDDC Officers

John Tippin, Licensing Manager

Douglas Jackson, Licensing Officer

John Loveridge, Licensing Officer

The meeting started at 1405 and ended at 1525

#### **Apologies**

Apologies were received from John Huffer, (East Devon Taxi Association) Adrian Phillips, Steve Dean and John Tucker

#### **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting

## **Exmouth and Honiton Ranks**

The Licensing Officer, Mr Jackson, reported that the Exmouth Strand rank had been in place for a few months now and he had been asked by Mr Lean (Exmouth Taxi Association) to ask the question "The Strand rank is not viable , what does the Council intend to do about this".

Mr Lean in support of his question produced a survey he had completed which he said indicated that the Exmouth taxi drivers were not happy with the rank. Mr Hill was surprised at this survey because he said it was the first he had heard about it and he was the largest taxi firm in Exmouth.

The drivers stated the 4 ranks in Victoria Road were now in use, but that still did not stop considerable queues of taxis at peak times.

There then followed a vigorous debate in relation to how the ranks could be improved in the Strand and Victoria Road. Various solutions for improvements were suggested. The Licensing Officer, Mr Jackson, pointed out that there were other ranks in Exmouth that could also be used. Mr Bailey stated that a lot of private vehicles parked on the rank outside of Capels fish and chip shop and the Church Street rank near the Post Office was already well used. Mr Jackson said he would contact the Parking Services Manager at EDDC to try and arrange some attention to be paid to the ranks.

The drivers expressed concern about both ends of the Strand rank. Both were squared off making access to the rank, especially at busy times, very difficult. It has meant that to get use of the whole length of the rank taxis sometimes have to reverse into a space. This has caused some serious road traffic incidents as the end of the rank is near a bend and unsuspecting motorists have not expected to come across a vehicle manoeuvring into the rank at that point. The Exmouth representation suggested that an instant improvement would be for both ends of the rank to be splayed allowing access and egress at an angle. A letter was shown to the Committee from DCC stating it was not going to change the layout of the rank.

Councillor Knight pointed out that he was involved in the creation of the Seaton ranks and that probably the best way forward was for the Exmouth taxi trade to consult their own County Councillor as the placement of the ranks and any changes had to be agreed by the County and approved by the County Councillor. It was further suggested that all the Exmouth taxi trade get together and develop a unified recommendation which they should put in writing to EDDC. The District Council could then request a site meeting with DCC, the County Councillor for the area and the taxi drivers to see if there was a solution to the problems that were described by the taxi drivers

Mr Jackson pointed out that the rank at Honiton was working well.

## **Action**

Douglas Jackson will await a response from the drivers and proprietors in relation to the problems with the ranks and how they think they can be improved. He will then liaise with DCC with a view to setting up a site meeting to include the proprietors and the County Councillor to try and resolve the issues.

Douglas Jackson will also liaise with Parking Services Manager in order that the Civil Enforcement Officers are aware of any issues with parking problems on the ranks and can deal with them when necessary.

## **Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle**

Mr Jackson pointed out there was a shortage of licensed WAVs in the EDDC area and encouraged proprietors to consider purchasing that type of vehicle. He could give no update in relation to changes in the legislation since the last meeting. Mr Crofts pointed out that they were expensive to buy and that the EDDC 4 year rule was restrictive in that an older WAV to buy would be less expensive to purchase. It was pointed out that older vehicles could, under certain circumstances, be approved for licensing by the Committee however many older purpose built taxis often only came on the market because they were worn out, hence the Council would need to view any exception to the rule with care.

## **CRB System Update**

Mr Jackson told the meeting that the CRB had reviewed the legislation relating to CRB checks and had decided that the law did not permit them to carryout enhanced CRB checks on a taxi drivers, therefore only standard checks would be completed on drivers, until the matter was clarified. The cost was cheaper at £49.00. It also appeared to be a quicker system as many checks were coming back in 10 to 14 days. The Licensing Manager advised that the LGA were having a look at the issue and currently support the reintroduction of enhanced checks.

## **Smoking Legislation**

The proprietors were reminded that no smoking signs must be displayed in all compartments of their vehicles and that no taxi or Private Hire driver and passengers were permitted to smoke in taxis. Those found doing so could be dealt with by way of fixed penalty notice or by report, depending on evidence available. FP notices could also be issued for failing to display the no smoking signs.

## **Vehicle Maintenance and MOTs for Vehicles Over 8 Years Old**

Mr Jackson reminded the drivers that MOTs were required twice a year for licensed vehicles that were over 8 years old. This was more frequent now as drivers seemed to be keeping vehicles for longer. He asked that drivers adopt a responsible attitude, and if they saw their vehicles had reached the 8 year mark, to obtain the necessary MOT/Compliance test. He also requested that a rolling programme of maintenance occurred on the vehicles, to ensure vehicles were kept in a good condition, instead of an attitude of "I'll fix it when it breaks". There had been previous incidents of un-

roadworthy vehicles in our area and vehicles had been taken off the road by Licensing Officers.

### **Recent Legislation Updates**

Since the last meeting there were no legislation updates, but there had been a query in relation to seat belts and the law as it relates to taxi drivers and private hire vehicles. Mr Jackson explained the law relating to the wearing of seat belts and how it affected taxi drivers and their passengers, including children.

### **Fares**

Mr Huffer (not at meeting) requested that the following question be put to the meeting "was there to be an increase in fees ". A discussion took place on this issue with Alan Hill, Nina Peters, Brian Bailey and Dave Lean agreeing that fares should stay as they are due to the economic climate.

During this discussion the Licensing Manager explained that the Council's taxi licensing budget was balanced for the year 2011/12 and therefore there would be no licensing fee increase required this year. It was suggested by one of the taxi trade that as they would not be seeking a fare increase there was an opportunity for the trade and the Council to get some positive press coverage. This proposal was unanimously agreed by those present.

### **Action**

That the Licensing Officer contact the EDDC press officer (Nick Steven) to see if a press release was viable and if it was to prepare a suitable release.

There was no other business.

The Date of the next meeting will be Wednesday 26 October 2011 commencing at 2.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Knowle, Sidmouth.