

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report of a Meeting between Members, Taxi Proprietors and Officers held at Knowle, Sidmouth on Monday, 26 October 2009

Present:

Councillors:

Graham Godbeer (Chairman)
Chris Gibbings (Vice Chairman)

Taxi Proprietors:

Brian Bailey
Steve Dean – Dean's Taxis
John Huffer – Horseshoe Taxis (East Devon Taxi Association)
A J Hill
Paul Johnson – self employed
Dave Lean – Viking Cabs (Exmouth Taxi Association)
Nina Peters – Sid Valley Cars
Sam Sampson
John Tucker – Sid Valley Cars

EDDC Officers:

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

The meeting started at 2.07pm and finished at 3.40pm.

***34 Apologies**

There were no apologies received for absence.

***35 Report of last meeting**

The report of the meeting held on 16 April 2009 was received as signed as a true record subject to clarification on the details of two attendees.

***36 Matters Arising**

Presentation by Skills UK (Minute no. *37 refers)

Members of the meeting heard that one taxi operator had registered their interest in the Road Passenger Vehicle NVQ (National Vocational Qualification) with Skills UK representatives after the last meeting. Since this time, no contact had been received from them. The Licensing Officer would supply contact details for this company after the meeting.

Seaton taxi rank (Minute no.*38 refers)

The Licensing Manager reminded the meeting that in 2005 the Council had agreed a number of taxi ranks for Seaton but Devon County Council had still not put them in place. In recent months concern had been expressed about the location of the Eyrecourt Road rank

agreed in 2005. The Licensing Manager, Cllr Jim Knight, Ward Member, and Paul Wilson from Devon County Highways would be having a site visit to look to resolve this.

Matters Arising (cont'd)

Sidmouth Taxi Rank Signage (Minute #45 refers)

Members were advised that a site visit had taken place after complaints were received with regard to signage on the rank at the top of High Street – no obvious problems were seen. It was believed that the metal sign had been turned around by revellers which had been the cause of the problem. Members heard that members of the public were still using this rank for parking, although the Vice Chairman advised that Civil Enforcement Officers patrolled these ranks very regularly and gave tickets where problems were found.

***37 Proposed legislation for disabled transport**

The Licensing Officer updated the meeting on a recent pre-consultation document published by the Government. It appeared that the Government were still progressing forward with their desire for all vehicles to be disabled person friendly. Requirements for vehicles were likely to include minimum door opening size, floor areas inside vehicles and minimum acceptable head heights.

The legislation would apply to both private hire and hackney carriage vehicles.

The Chairman suggested that drivers might like to give consideration to the needs of disabled passengers when they came to changing their vehicles in the future. However it was important to consider that when the legislation was passed that a requirement for vehicles to comply with regulations was likely. The exact requirements were not known at this stage.

***38 Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) checks**

The Licensing Officer advised that with the introduction Independent Safeguarding Authority there would be changes to the checking process for those working with children and vulnerable adults. These new checks would not affect the checks carried out by the District Council, as the ISA check could not be applied to taxi drivers. Drivers registered in East Devon already took enhanced CRB checks and that would not change.

Taxi companies that had driving contracts for schools would be affected by the ISA checks. Monitoring was continuous with this body as opposed to a 3 yearly check with CRB.

Members heard that information was not shared by the CRB between different government authorities. This meant that when companies worked across a number of districts CRB checks needed to be taken for each area.

***39 MOTs for vehicles over 8 years old**

The Licensing Officer, Douglas Jackson, reminded those at the meeting that MOTs were required twice yearly for vehicles over 8 years old (6 monthly). It was important that drivers remembered to have these tests done as it would affect any insurance claims that may need to be made relating to incidents involving these vehicles. EDDC kept this information on a database and it was their policy to remind companies if their paperwork became overdue however it is still the vehicle proprietor's responsibility to ensure that their vehicles were properly tested and insured.

*40 **Late night enforcement**

The Licensing Officer made drivers aware that a programme of vehicle examinations was planned for the forthcoming months – these would be carried out across the district.

*41 **New Honiton ranks**

The Licensing Manager, John Tippin, reported that the Licensing and Enforcement Committee had agreed the positioning for two new ranks in Honiton. A public notice had been placed in the local newspaper and to date, no unfavourable comments had been received – the deadline was 4 November for feedback.

The next hurdle for the physical creation of the rank was for Devon County Highways to road-paint the spaces. A meeting was scheduled with DCC on 24 November.

*42 **Proposed new Exmouth ranks and temporary rank provision**

Members of the meeting heard that work to regenerate the Strand in Exmouth was scheduled to start in February 2010, and finish in November 2010. There would be no ranks on the Strand whilst this work was underway. A report outlining temporary arrangements for an 8 bay rank in Rolle Street would be considered by the Licensing and Enforcement Committee on 24 November. The provision and siting of permanent ranks would be subject to consultation at the beginning of 2010.

Drivers expressed their concern over the positioning of the temporary rank, which would be directly outside a new Tesco Express store planned for the town centre. This location would clash with delivery vehicles for this store.

Drivers proposed that the contractors for the Strand development gave consideration to the possible early completion of the new permanent ranks in the Strand area. This would mean minimum disruption to drivers and their customers in the regeneration programme. Paul Wilson would be visiting EDDC on 24 November to discuss Highways issues with the Licensing team.

RESOLVED that drivers write to Paul Wilson at Devon County Highways outlining their concerns/proposals for town centre taxi rank provision, copying in the EDDC Licensing Team, in advance of his visit to EDDC. Correspondence would be raised and chased by officers and councillors at that meeting.

*43 **Hackney Carriage Fares**

Members discussed the possibility of increasing fares as there had been an increase in the Retail Price Index (RPI) since the last adjustment.

RESOLVED

1. that in the current economic climate, an increase in fares were not considered to be commercially viable.
2. that the Committee would review fares again in April 2010.

*44 **Any other business**

Exemption Certificates

In response to a query regarding the possibility of obtaining an exemption certificate to use a licensed vehicle for other purposes than business, the Licensing Manager confirmed that this was not possible.

Licensed driver numbers

Members of the meeting heard that driver numbers had remained fairly static during the economic downturn. Concern had been raised at a previous meeting that unemployment in other fields might lead to people joining the taxi trade.

Greener vehicles

Members discussed the effect that the global directive to car manufacturers to reduce their CO2 emissions might have upon their future choice of vehicles. This meant that many companies were producing vehicles that had smaller CC engines, but were designed to produce greater BHP. Members were interested to hear if changes would be proposed from EDDC over the minimum requirements for engine sizes as a result.

The Licensing Manager reported that he had been advised that although smaller engines were now being produced in greater numbers, that these vehicles lacked the torque required for heavy payloads with many passengers and possible luggage. It was important that licensed vehicles be fit for purpose. The District Council would however keep this issue under review.

*45 **Next meeting**

The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 7 April 2010 at 2.00pm in the Council Chamber, Knowle.