

## TAXI FORUM

### Notes of Meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2024 11am, Sheridan Room, Stafford Borough Council

**Present:** Julie Wallace, Katie McKinney, Ahrsham Ditta, Makhmood Hussain, Colin Jones, Nurul Goni Rashid, Bill Armstrong, Peter Stock, Dusan Grujic, Guy Herbert, Marisa Castro, Helia Totunsar, Liton Ali

This meeting is an open forum.

As previously discussed, CJ asked the question regarding the ages of vehicles; JDW stated that the updated taxi policy is still in process, however the Licensing Team are being flexible at the moment and are able to give a few months leeway on ages of cars. The taxi policy will also need an equalities assessment in relation to WAVs; the Policy should be in place in the New Year.

JDW reassured members of the Group that once the Policy goes through the Council process, she will attend the meetings in order to justify any changes made to the age of vehicles, etc.

Carbon neutrality is also going to be a major part of the Policy and JDW will be working with our climate change officer at the Borough Council on this, specifically for 'dirty diesels'. The Group were reassured that there will be a period of adjustment for the drivers to think about their vehicles accordingly and what type they need to be purchasing once SBC goes carbon neutral. Only Euro Category 6 cars will be allowed, the older vehicles will be phased out.

DG brought up an issue with the taxi fares, that they have not been set up properly; DG stated that drivers are losing 45 pence after midnight and asked if SBC can organise getting the meters altered. The starting fare currently is £3.10, double time therefore is £6.20. Time and a half is £4.20 but should be £4.65?

**JDW to raise this with Cygnet/Cygnus.**

The Licensing Team haven't received a formal request for a fare increase as yet.

LA asked if we were following suit with Eastbourne and Reading and getting rid of wheelchair accessible vehicles. Due to the Equality Act 2010, we need to have WAVs, however it does seem unfair that this is all focused on hackney carriages, as it should be the private hires that are included in this as well.

A discussion on this was had; WAVs are expensive and disabled jobs are generally pre-booked.

DG mentioned that there was growing difficulty getting a train station permit. JDW stated that we had met with the permit contact at the Station and that it might be worth revisiting the permit list. It was discussed that there were potentially permits that were not being used. Use of the Station rank was sporadic also - PS stated that sometimes drivers can

wait over an hour for a customer.

Licensing to make contact with Station Inspector to ascertain what is happening about issuing more permits but Stafford Borough have no control over this as it is the station that issues permits.

It was suggested that a sign could be put up at Stafford Station with numbers for local taxi companies, in order to avoid customers calling an Uber. **JDW to ask question at the Station. It was also identified that SBC need to renew the taxi cards that list the local operators for the area.**

MC brought up the discussion on Uber and JDW reiterated that we cannot stop them coming into Stafford Borough unless we can prove that they are intentionally plying for hire. It was stated that Uber can geofence locations, whereby they can drop off in one area, but won't get another job sent through to them until they leave that area.

JDW has been in contact with other local authorities, and everyone is experiencing the same problem.

Uber are close to being classified as a 'legal nuisance' due to the amount of legal action taken against them.

Wolverhampton-licensed vehicles and operators were again discussed, namely Smart Cars. Operators can legally apply for licences anywhere; however, it was mentioned that the new Labour government would be looking at the Deregulation Act in order to change things.

BA stated that Wolverhampton City Council were charging a lot less in fees to process applications, however they have employed 130 new licensing officers, and this is influencing renewal fees. It is apparently £600 to fast track an operator licence, for example.

JDW informed the Group that a contact has been made at Wolverhampton regarding enforcement on their licensed vehicles.

The taxi rank by Primark/Costa Coffee was discussed, as it was revealed that this does not get used as a rank due to regular vehicles parking on it to 'nip to the shops', etc. Potentially an advertisement is required to make people aware they can catch a taxi from this rank. Parking enforcement is also required here.

The positioning of this rank and the existing Civic Centre rank was debated. It was also suggested that the Casa rank be moved down closer to the road on Bridge Street, so members of the public are aware a rank is there.

JDW confirmed that SBC would have preferred a further rank at Mill Bank however Staffordshire County Council Highways vetoed this.

It was reported that Uber vehicles are parking on the double yellow lines outside the train station - **Licensing to pass this to SCC for enforcement.**

The nighttime drivers are experiencing issues with cars parking up and driving the wrong way by Casa and on Bridge Street; more frustratingly, the Police are not doing anything about this.

It was reported by the drivers that Police vans are also parking at an angle on the corner

by Casa/Bridge Street, obstructing traffic.

MC reported that bouncers from Casa are shouting at the taxi drivers who are dropping off customers.

It was reiterated that nobody is allowed to drive through the town centre, unless the trip is for a disabled passenger however records should be kept of these trips to justify the journey just in case Police issue any fines.

The rule of 3 was discussed and obtaining licences in other areas.

JDW informed the Group that Jim Button had put forward the notion that in order to standardise taxi licensing across the country, 1 district should be in charge of licensing all vehicles, etc.

CJ to consult with the Chair of the Cannock Taxi Association, Steven Toy.

The subject of card readers was discussed again. JDW reiterated that this would be mandatory in the new Policy document. Discussion took place stating that a mobile smartphone can also be used to take payments these days. A job cannot be refused based on the customer wanting to pay by card.

It was alleged that there are some members of the taxi trade that say to customers that they don't have a card machine even though they do. JDW encouraged drivers present to report this behaviour.

It was stated by the Group that this kind of behaviour is embarrassing for Stafford and is a very strong reason as to why Uber are coming into the town and taking jobs because of the ease of booking/paying.

In the nighttime economy, it was stated that the taxi marshals ask people if they've got cash whilst customers are waiting in the queue, as younger people are tending to favour card. It is rare to have card disputes or issues with fares being cancelled, so this shouldn't discourage drivers from having a card reader.

The general consensus at this meeting was that the trade is quieter than it has been for a long time, and there is a real danger that the taxi trade could be obsolete within 3-5 years.