

TAXI FORUM

Notes of Meeting held on 20th March 2024 12pm, Sheridan Room, Stafford Borough Council

Present: Julie Wallace, Katie McKinney, Ahrsham Ditta, Tony Blews, Makhmood Hussain, Saeed Akhtar, Colin Jones, Shabir Khan, Babar Nasim, Nurul Goni Rashid, Nurul Alom Rashid, Bill Armstrong, Paresh Thaker, Peter Stock, Ben Sackey, Ijaz Shah, Artur Adhami, Majaid Benaris

This meeting is an open forum.

JDW started the meeting by introducing the subject of SBC's Shared Service agenda with Cannock Chase District Council. It was discussed that SBC are revising their taxi policy and that carbon neutrality will soon play a major role concerning taxi vehicles.

Questions were raised on SBC's climate change/carbon neutral deadline - JDW to confirm this.

Cannock will stop licensing petrol/diesel/LPG vehicles in 2030.

Questions were raised on how the shared service agenda will affect the trade; JDW confirmed this will not be an issue.

Discussions were had on the effectiveness of electric vehicles and charging issues.

Ages of vehicles were talked about; Policy changes are in motion currently, we recognise vehicles aren't cheap to buy, therefore various leniencies will be made in the new Policy to reflect vehicle life, etc.

JDW confirmed that we are extending the life of the vehicles at both ends.

It was clear from this meeting that a taxi fare increase from the trade will be formally requested imminently; an increase to the minimum fare/drop is needed.

Uber were discussed at length, as well as drivers having card machines.

The demand is there in Stafford for Ubers, and if the vehicles aren't parking near ranks, etc. then there is little the Council can do. KM and JDW were out before Christmas and moved on dozens of Uber vehicles that had come into Stafford from Dudley, Solihull, Wolverhampton, Stoke and Birmingham, to mention a few.

It is difficult when operators are fully booked, combined with a shortage of hackney carriages- this is when people are turning to Uber to book a ride home.

JDW is making enquiries with Stoke and Newcastle under Lyme Councils on Uber licensing.

Intel was received that between 7am and 9am is the best time to visit Stafford train station and witness the volume of Ubers around.

It was also reported that Ubers are blocking Bridge Street and SBC drivers could not get past them - this must be reported to the Police.

Card machines have been made mandatory in London as we are now a predominantly

cashless society. Some drivers were for having card machines and others appeared more reluctant.

JDW confirmed she would like to make this mandatory in our new Policy. It was clear that there is a fear of losing money and people not having enough to pay the fare. It was stated that if there are any issues at the start of the journey, then the driver must give a price for the journey and then charge this upfront, so the fare is secured. The taxi marshals could always assist with this.

The roadworks in Stafford were discussed. This is a huge issue for the Trade; however this is down to Staffordshire County Council. Any complaints are to be sent to SCC.

Incentives for new drivers were reviewed, and the need to make Stafford's licence look attractive to potential new applicants. Stafford currently has only 170 drivers.

Out of Town drivers/vehicles were discussed. JDW informed the Forum that we are currently working with Staffs Police on an app that they can use to stop out of town taxis, to encourage enforcement and compliance with Stafford's licensing conditions.

The Trade were asked if they would prefer just one taxi plate, as some surrounding local authorities already provide just one external licence plate; it appeared from this Group that one single vehicle licence plate at the rear of the vehicle is preferred.

It was confirmed that the public do like to see the licence stickers on the side of the vehicles.

Panoramic roofs were mentioned as these are currently not permitted in the Policy - JDW willing to relax this after feedback from the Trade.

Under new DfT guidance, side livery on cars is now no longer mandatory but is still at the discretion of each individual Council.

Praise was received for the taxi marshals.

Damage to vehicles was still occurring, however it was reported that the Police do not appear interested.

It was confirmed that, at present, there is no financial assistance available from the Council to help the trade. MOT providers were discussed, that there is a stark difference in pricing for each of the current providers. Another MOT station is needed.

It was confirmed that Gaolgate Street and Greengate Street are still no-go areas for taxis.

Better information sharing and communication is perhaps needed; hackney carriage drivers are encouraged to be part of the WhatsApp forum.