

ECM PRIVATE HIRE/HACKNEY CARRIAGE TRADE REPRESENTATIVE MEETING MINUTES

Thursday 24th April 2024

Bolton Town Hall

Present:

Cllr Sue Haworth (SH)	Executive Cabinet Member (Chair)
Cllr David Chadwick (DC)	Executive Cabinet Member
Garry Parker (GP)	Assistant Director
Andrew Bolan (AB)	Head of Regulatory Services
Patricia Clyne(PC)	Licensing Manager
Lisa Timmins (LT)	Senior Licensing Officer
Mahmood Akhtar (MA)	BPHA
Yasif Khan (YK)	BPHA
Charles Oakes (CO)	BTDA
Nosipho Khumalo (NK)	Executive Support

Apologies:

Cllr Andrea Taylor-Burke	Vice Chair
Cllr Sean Fielding	Chair
Joe Fox	Principal Engineer Highways
Benjamin Brookfield (BB)	GMP

1. Apologies

As above

2. Introductions

As above

3. Minutes from last meeting

SH covered last meetings minutes.
Actions to be addressed during the meeting.

4. Safeguarding / CSE Training update

Discussed training and access to the online portal. PC advised comms are due to be circulated to all who have not completed the training by 31/10/24 when the free training finishes. After this period, anyone who has not completed training to satisfy the conditions of licence will have to pay to complete.

YK reported:

- (1) People are unable to log on if they have previously used the portal. PC suggested it may be because people have either started and not finished the course or booked on and not attended.
- (2) Drivers have not received certificates.

Action:

YK to ensure that affected people address the access issue with the provider.

LT to contact the provider to ensure certification for online training is received when people complete the training. Item to remain on the agenda for future updates.

5. BPHA:

a. Medicals

YK/PC - discussion ensued on issues of concern around medicals in particular using 3rd party provider, cheaper charges of around £50, and the possibility of changing providers. PC advised the 3rd party provider would require permission in order to be commissioned to complete medicals. The new officer starting on 29th April will help in development of this matter.

PC reported she is still in conversation with one of the doctors in the GP Bolton Federation, who wants to understand more about problems with medicals. PC will engage indicating that issues with availability and cost of appointments are delaying the medical certification completion.

YK expressed concerns about the way medical forms are handled and believes that drivers shouldn't be penalized for GP errors. LT emphasized that it is the drivers' duty to ensure GPs complete the appropriate sections of the form and these are checked before leaving the surgery and submitted to Licensing. LT pointed out the two sections on the form causing problems.

Action:

SH suggested Trade Reps collate and submit to licensing their suggestions on what would work best for them on the form, so that issues can be looked into for improvement.

CO recommended digitizing forms to retain data for longer periods for drivers to be able to make electronic updates when needed. SH made Trade Reps aware that the Council is working to improve things. Informed digital taxi licensing is on the Council's agenda. **SH reminded Trade Reps to make sure that any topics they would like to discuss are added to the agenda, as this item was not on it.**

b. Fees

Trade Reps have requested a fee reduction, but it has not yet been taken into account. According to SH/PC, 2% inflation increase added in April is standard. PC stated that even though the financial year has ended, finance officers are still working on the accounts, recharges, officer work costs, timesheets, etc., and that it will probably take until the end of May or the beginning of June for the licencing accounts to be verified and fees considered, once completed we would communicate this with the Trade Reps.

CO proposed that Bolton review its fees to try and deter drivers from relocating to Wolverhampton, who have lower entry levels. PC/SH comments that both councils operate on different policies and standards and it would be difficult to do this.

Action:

PC/LT to update Trade on fees once the accounts have been finalised.

c. Dual badges

YK questioned the dual badge system changes. PC clarified that there were worries about notable declines in HC's and that efforts are still being made to address concerns about costs and type of car and to survey trade and identify any problems.

Regarding the hackney carriage, she has met with UBER, who informed her that they are developing a system to allocate HC's to operate on the UBER app. They are starting their pilot program in London and will eventually expand their trials to other cities. YK advised some drivers already hold two badges. There are worries of income loss as no other options for those that only have 1 badge.

PC stated that a few hackney drivers have requested an extension of the current 15-year term on vehicles and that we would need to consider policy, on age restrictions, fleet type for the hackney trade in Bolton, and any related matters.

CO on hackney drivers leaving for private hire. This has an impact on income, between £60K and £70k for a vehicle when earnings are uncertain. **PC suggests that in order to discuss and review these issues, they should be included on the agenda.**

CO was concerned that issues that are raised and discussed with the Council are not settled. PC reaffirmed that a review of the HC and dual badge system is planned. CO mentioned rear loaders and an application not dealt with. Trade Reps aware, according to PC, that each driver must submit their own application. Drivers have been asked to do this in order for the LERC Committee to consider the request.

CO mentioned the distinction between general HC and individual rear loader vehicles. SH stated that dual badge and HC matters are a priority and she is keen for the HC trade to get involved. While policy directs and guides us, there might be times when we can think of some situations as policy exceptions. **SH request that the trade get items on our agendas and she is glad that Trade is making a contribution.**

YK mentioned a previous meeting where officers and ECM came to site to talk about problems. Trade found that meeting useful and hope it becomes a regular occurrence. PC reported capacity issues with interaction. The new officer, due to start on 29th April, will be covering a range of issues, related to project and policy development and issues, etc. We will need to evaluate how we get issues, achievement and projects completed with constant demand on day to day.

Action:

PC/LH to arrange a meeting hackney carriage drivers.

PC/LT to continue to look at dual badges.

6. Feedback from the site visit at Bolton Interchange

Defer to next meeting for discussion when a Highways Officer is present.

7. **AOB**

There was talk of restoring the Police Operation 'Taxi Watch'. YK/CO are worried about Trade's personal safety, drivers at night report feeling more alone and subjected to abuse. PC has followed up with BB for an update. Noted that a meeting with the Police and Trade Reps will be scheduled. PC agreed to share MA contact information with BB. SH expressed satisfaction with the positive feedback received regarding 'Taxi Watch' and urged the trade to take advantage of the system and keep pushing for improvements on the issues at hand.

Incab Technology and body cams and dash cams were recommended by AB for areas where assault is rife. PC advised that dash cams would require authorization and that CCTV would require permissions, along with related policy work.

YK in light of the most recent assault in the Tonge Moor area which was reported three times to police, but police never showed up – a persistent problem and common practice. MA pointed out that the victim did not identify the incident as racial, and YK affirmed that drivers typically leave out racial details from incident reports to avoid appearing biased. The location of the offenders' homes is unknown, and details of the assault including pick-up and incident site are available at the operator. SH/PC requested that MA/YK make sure the victim is assisted if they are wanting to act in finding the perpetrators by giving the investigating officer all the information they need. YK referred to drop-in centres in neighbourhoods such as Salford; and suggested Trade in Bolton would benefit from one.

Issues of concern raised include:

- Abuse of drivers;
- Private hire and private vehicles parked in spaces not designated for them (train station).
- Inability to modify layout; possibly in need of barriers to divide parking areas (train station).
- A new camera and traffic control system (train station).
- Larger, more noticeable signs (train station).

PC proposed that a separate meeting with Trade Reps and highways colleagues, related to ranks and the train station issues would be necessary to discuss the issues.

Action:

YK will give PC/LT the Case Ref number so they can follow up with GMP.

MA/YK to continue to encourage drivers to report incidents.

Future meetings

Cllr Chadwick will provide his availability for future licensing team meetings.

Trade Reps to let licencing know if they are not available when meetings are arranged.

The next meeting will be arranged in due course, after the Elections.

Next meeting: TBC – after elections.