

ECM PRIVATE HIRE/HACKNEY CARRIAGE TRADE REPRESENTATIVE MEETING

28th August 2024, 11:00 – 12:30

BOLTON TOWN HALL

Cllr Haworth (SH)	Executive Cabinet Member (Chair)
Cllr Chadwick (DC)	Chairman LERC
Garry Parker (GP)	Assistant Director
Andrew Bolan (AB)	Head of Regulatory Services
Lisa Timmins (LT)	Senior Licensing Officer
Benjamin Brookfield (BB)	GMP
Mahmood Akhtar (MA)	BPHA
Charles Oakes (CO)	BTDA
Yasif Khan (YK)	BPHA
Nosipho Khumalo (NK)	Executive Support

Apologies:

Cllr Taylor-Burke (ATB)	Vice Chair LERC
Patricia Clyne (PC)	Licensing Manager
Joe Fox (JF)	Principal Engineer Highways

1. Apologies – LT

As above.

2. Introductions - All

As above.

3. Minutes from last meeting - SH

Matters arising from previous minutes:

Road works and road closures: Trade confirmed they are receiving road closure updates. Reps. to share comms. with trade and encourage them to sign up so they can receive comms. direct. JF not attending today, item deferred.

Action: Item to remain on the agenda and Chair requested advance notice if JF is not attending so that cover can be arranged.

CO advised that trade finds it demoralising that the issues discussed at this meeting never get resolved, i.e., medicals, issues at the train station, etc. Chair acknowledged the concerns and delays and informed of major changes (policy work) that the licensing team are finalising, to be shared with trade in due course. The licensing team is massively affected by the Government decisions and changes and capacity within the team. Trade is thankful of the effort being made by Cllrs Haworth and Chadwick to progress issues, but equally unresolved issues lead to lack of confidence in Trade Reps by drivers. **Action: Add as Trade agenda item 'demoralising issues'.**

4. Bolton Interchange, highways general – JF

Congestion and access on Deansgate through Topp way, Bark Street following a fire incident at the pub on Deansgate. Drivers were unaware of this incident and didn't understand why they have to take an alternative route. YK said about 70% of taxi drivers do not receive notifications because they are not on the WhatsApp group but are contactable via operators. YK asked chair to check with those taxi drivers that do contact her direct, if they are affiliated to the members association. Must be encouraged to join. The cost of membership is £52 per annum.

5. DBS update – LT

SH noted that things are progressing well. LT will have further updates. YK noted that most members have done their DBS. Some drivers not on the WhatsApp group may not be receiving comms. LT advised that it's important that people complete their DBS and respond to communications from the licensing team. **ACTION: LT to send a wording to YK to share with members to ensure they are subscribed ASAP.**

6. Safeguarding update – LT

LT updated that 2 safeguarding training sessions are scheduled for next week, and 84 people are booked on to date. Trade to ensure they complete the training because it will no longer be free after 31st October 2024 and we'll be looking to take further action. No ability to renew licence if training has not been completed and taxi drivers / applicants will need to pay. **ACTION: LT to issue reminder comms. to trade to ensure they take advantage of the free training.**

MA asked why there are different rules for different councils. CO stated that most drivers do not see the benefit to completing this training. That this problem is not unique to Bolton. SH suggested CO take a message to trade that this training is a Government requirement that all Local Authorities, Licensing Units are bound by.

7. Hackney Working Group (roll forward to allow for data to be collated) – LT

CO asked for feedback from hackney discussions that the trade had been excluded from receiving. SH asked trade to allow officers more time to collate the information and share with trade at a later date. CO noted that some taxi drivers were less positive about the feedback received. MA said the feedback he received was that issues were discussed in detail; were positive and are keen to learn more on the efforts being made to improve things for trade.

Further updates at the next meeting.

YK – trade needs an outlet to raise issues. SH asked reps. to remind drivers to advise the licensing team if they encounter problems. CO said trade are concerned about loss of face-2-face contact, that some drivers are not computer savvy. SH suggested drivers could also ask family members to help. Reps. to make drivers aware of the free training available at the Central Library.

8. Door stickers and front plates

Trade would like the door sticker issues resolved. SH was concerned about the contradictory information being sent to her about this issue about other council's decisions; and asked Trade to ensure the info they provide is accurate. Noted that Bristol and London have changed theirs.

SH acknowledged a rise in attacks around and since the recent riots and advised that Bolton at cabinet level is currently making no move towards door sticker changes but is mostly following what GM or government reports may decide. The ECM is continuing to look at changes going on at other councils.

SH will investigate to understand how Bristol and London have conducted theirs.

CO stated that Wolverhampton do not have door stickers. GP updated that Wolverhampton cannot use magnetic stickers but there's been no confirmation that stickers have completely been removed. This is an enforcement, not policy issue.

MA asked why Bolton wasn't emulating the improved system London is using. GP advised Bolton is on a standardised offer for GM councils. MA/YK was concerned that Trade was not consulted when this offer was initially discussed, in particular safety for drivers as they continue being targeted, including racially due to stickers. GP advised of ongoing conversations at executive level where trade issues are a priority. SH suggested an incident register to record the number of attacks. LT noted one incident was reported to the police. Hoping Taxi Watch will help report issues, so we know about them. Stickers also help us identify issues on the ground should there be incidents.

9. Taxi Watch

BB reported an initial taxi watch meeting took place last week. Metro, Westhoughton, Horwich attended. Looking to increase involvement of more drivers / operators, GMP in all neighbourhoods via the BAND App. Once this is fully up and running and the proposal is completed, planning to meet every 2-3 months at Astley Bridge police station.

YK reported some traders are not receiving emails. BB will ensure CO/Trade reps are added to BAND App. SH reiterated that the purpose of BAND App is to inform, improve communication and the safety of drivers. SH thanks GMP for all of this work and also the effort taxi trade reps are putting into this.

BB leaves.

10. Trade rep items

MA asked how long it would take the council to remove age limit and acknowledged this will be expensive and challenging for the council to deal with and suggested going electric might not be ideal. CO asked why the council is allowing rear loaders in school transport. GP noted rear loaders are mainly used by SEND (Special educational needs and disabilities) as school transport. YK does most of the school runs and advised some taxis are push on and do not have wheelchair ramps. LT advised the vehicles have different specifications and this will be looked at as part of the Hackney Working Group. Chair added that the HWG considered the 15-year policy.

10.1 Age limit for Hackney carriage.

MA referred to a driver who has gone through this type of application and wondered why the hackney extension was refused yet same age vehicle could work as private hire which has no age limit. Drivers are saying they cannot afford to buy new vehicles. SH advised that applications are considered by the Licensing Committee on an individual basis that Councillor involvement is also governed by law. Chair asked trade not to lose hope because issues are being discussed with GM Mayor to consider the best way forward, that it's important for trade to record issues and keep up to date records.

10.2 Declaration of previous convictions

MA asked why Trade has to declare all previous conviction when these are already recorded by Licensing. LT clarified that convictions need to be declared to remove ambiguity and to ensure licensing has all the necessary information to keep correct and up to date records because its 3 years between renewals and often drivers believe they have declared convictions when they haven't. SH reiterated the importance of Trade recording and keeping own records so that they can

refer to these when they update forms or make applications. It's the only way for both parties and to cover risk.

10.3 Fees

YK requested progress on fees and concerns about the expiry dates on the plates. SH explained that the running of the service is what constitutes fees and constant demand on resources. Not possible to avoid the work involved in supporting trade, admin, queries, licenses, etc. CO was keen to know the position of the council on savings. Is the council in surplus or deficit? Trade reps need sighted on issues to be able to understand and explain to members. **ACTION: Role over to next meeting**

10.4 Medicals

Trade are keen to get an update on medical ASAP. LT/PC are working on medicals and will update trade via email in due course. SH advised of positive progress, to be shared with Trade soon about drivers having more choice, where funds are being spent, and annual medicals, all likely to reduce costs. **ACTION: LT to ensure Trade items are first on the agenda going forward.**

11. AOB - All

CO was concerned that the long agenda does not allow enough time to discuss issues of high concern.

ACTION: SH advised trade times to be heard first

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 16th October, 11:00 – 12:30, Dido Suite, 2nd Floor, Albert Halls