

GENERAL PURPOSES LICENSING COMMITTEE

Wednesday 12th September 2007

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: The Chair (Councillor Turner), The Vice-Chair (Councillor Sareva), Councillors Brundin, Cook, Clarkson, Keen, Royce and Williams

OFFICERS PRESENT:- Jill Cramer (Taxi Licensing), Lois Stock and Daniel Smith (Legal and Democratic Services).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:- Mr Rowland (National Private Hire Association) and Mr Mohammed (Royal Cars).

14. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies were given.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

16. MINUTES

Resolved to confirm as a correct record the minutes of the General Purposes Licensing Committee held on 17th July 2007.

17. APPLICATION FOR INCREASE IN FEES CHARGED FOR PRIVATE HIRE OPERATOR, HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE AND DRIVING LICENCES

The Transport and Parking Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended), concerning an application for an increase in fees for private hire operators, hackney carriage and private hire vehicles, and driving licences. Jill Cramer (Taxi Licensing) introduced this report to the Committee and gave the following additional information:-

- (1) Taxi Licensing was self-financing. It was not known how Oxford's fees compared with those from similar cities. Nearby District Councils did not run self-financing schemes, but they did not necessarily have a dedicated taxi licensing service. Their licensing officers generally dealt with a wide variety of licensing issues apart from that of taxis. If greater regulation and enforcement was required, there had to be the means to pay for it.

- (2) A full consultation on fees was carried out in 2005. Letters inviting views on the present proposed increase had been sent out, and one reply from COLTA had been received. Copies of reports presented at the current meeting had been sent to the taxi trade associations.

Mr Mohammed addressed the meeting. He felt that Oxford's fees were quite expensive and that the taxi regulations were quite strict. He would welcome more investigation into fees levied by other comparable local authorities, and would prefer there to be more consultation on issues that would affect the taxi trade.

Resolved to increase the taxi licence fees from 1st November 2007 as follows:-

- (1) Operator Fees increased to £980 (£490 for three vehicles or fewer);
- (2) Driver and Vehicle Licences increased to:-
- (a) Hackney Carriage - £351
 - (b) Private Hire Vehicle - £262
 - (c) Hackney Carriage Driver - £115
 - (d) Private Hire Driver - £101.

18. CRITERIA AND CONDITIONS OF FITNESS FOR HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES – WHEELS AND TYRES

The Transport and Parking Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended), concerning the criteria and conditions of fitness for hackney carriage and private hire vehicles (wheels and tyres).

Resolved: to approve the amendment to the Criteria and Conditions of fitness for Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles as outlined in the report of the Transport and Parking Business Manager.

19. CRITERIA FOR NEW APPLICANTS FOR HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE DRIVING LICENCES

The Transport and Parking Business Manager submitted a report (previously circulated, now appended), concerning the criteria for new applicants for hackney carriage and private hire driving licences. Jill Cramer presented this report to the Committee.

Daniel Smith (Legal) clarified that an applicant for a taxi licence had to provide acceptable evidence of his/her licence, and prove that he/she was a fit and proper person to be a taxi or private hire driver. It was the responsibility of the applicant to prove that he/she was a "fit and proper" person, and the Committee was being asked how this "fit and proper" status could be satisfactorily established.

Mr Rowland (National Private Hire Association) addressed the Committee. He pointed out that EEA licences were acceptable in the UK, and that overseas applicants as taxi /private hire drivers were asked to bring with them a certified copy of their past driving record which was capable of being checked. Should there be any doubt about a prospective driver's ability, there was a test for taxi drivers which some local authorities used.

Members of the Committee made the following key points:-

- (1) There was a desire to treat everyone equally, but there was also a need to carry out robust checks so that the travelling public could be protected.
- (2) It was important to have an independent way of checking an individual's licence.
- (3) It might be possible for the Hackney Carriages Committee to make judgements on individual applications where the officers were in doubt about the application, although there was also a feeling that this was going beyond that Committee's designated role.
- (4) It should be remembered that applicants from Europe had to adjust to driving on what was, for them the "other" side of the road, and sufficient time was needed to allow for people to make this adjustment.
- (5) Response rates from different European licensing bodies varied, although it was felt that any authority issuing a driving licence should have records that could be checked.

Resolved to ask appropriate officers to look at ways of improving the Council's procedures in the light of giving everyone equal treatment, but with the abiding aim of ensuring the safety of the travelling public; and then report back as soon as practicable.

20. DATE OF NEXT MEETINGS

Resolved to note the following dates:

24th October 2007
16th January 2008
8th May 2008

The meeting started at 9.30 and ended at 10.20pm.