

6th January 2021 – 11am

GBC Taxi Driver Working Group Meetings

Attending: Mark Lees (Regulatory Services Manager) - ML, Mandy Francis (Licensing Manager) - MF, Cllr Lee Croxton (Chair) - LC, Cllr Nirmal Khabra (Taxi Driver) - NK, Denny Stewart (Taxi Driver) - DS, Dhannjit Sihota (Taxi Driver) - D, Vickii Batchelor (taking minutes)

Apologies: Barry Firmin (Taxi Driver)

ML - Introduced the meeting and stated that main purpose of meeting was to discuss the revised policy and anything else the trade would like to discuss.

There are a number of changes in the policy, largely arising from the new national standards that must be incorporated, but it is not otherwise a large overhaul to the same extent as during the last revision. The consultation for the policy is still open, and ends on Friday 8th January 2021.

MF – Requested to mute when not speaking as it decreases signal interference.

DS – Comments and queries from the trade:

- Dual Plating
- Vehicle standards – Euro 6
- Clarification on extra inspections
- CCTV
- Operators – Staff (controllers) requiring a DBS check

Dual plating

DS – Is dual plating allowed?

ML – It is not legally prohibited to licence in more than one place, however it is generally frowned upon as it makes it difficult to comply with different authorities regulations.

MF – Also if you have different tariffs in different authorities with differing fares, it would make it more confusing ensuring the right fare with for the right authority is chosen. Meters should be calibrated to the maximum tariff(s) set by the local authority. It would be impossible to calibrate the same meter for more than one authority. For example Gravesham may have tariffs 1, 2 & 3 and Maidstone may also have tariffs 1, 2 & 3. The meter would therefore have to be calibrated with tariffs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6 which would not comply.

NK – Drivers are thinking of joining TfL as there is more business there. Customers are going for the cheaper fare so the GBC drivers are missing out. This would reduce GBC income from licence fees.

ML – Comments are taken on board. However dual plating makes it very difficult for the council to regulate. Hackney & Private Hire fees are cost-neutral and not designed to be profitable. We made it policy to not dual plate upon request from the trade, and have had numerous calls to enforce the requirement since its implementation. If the trade feel strongly

about it, it may however be time we re-visited it. This can be put forwards in the consultation response for Member consideration.

DS – Could it go on Private Hires only?

ML – It is more viable but all Hackney's are dual licensed, so it would mean having to look at separating the dual licence which would not be favourable for drivers and would require a significant policy change.

DS – Feel we should have a choice rather than no choice.

ML – The trade do already have the choice of where they are licenced/who they drive for. We have to consider the ability to regulate, which is the main concern with dual plating.

NK – If you work for TfL-Uber, then you are Private Hire anyway. A lot of the contracted work/school runs are being taken by them as they are cheaper.

LC – Requested clarification about working for Uber, and GBC

ML – Clarification provided

MF – A vehicle that is Hackney licenced by GBC, cannot be Private Hire elsewhere. There is case law that confirms this.

NK – Asking if it can be done if vehicle is Private Hire only.

ML – Legally, yes, but the concerns would remain as also discussed. Bear in mind if a vehicle is only licensed as Private Hire, then it cannot be hailed or sit on a rank. There would be a question mark over the benefit of being dual licenced though, for if all work would be done through the TfL licence and Uber, then what would be the benefit/purpose of retaining a GBC licence too, and having to pay for it? Would that not make dual licencing pointless?

D – When you're sitting on the rank, you may be getting a job every 1½ hours and making about £6. If you work for Uber, then you can work for an office with GBC and do school runs, as well as getting the work from Uber.

ML – Points taken on board. One possible theoretical solution, which would require extensive consideration, would be if Uber held an operator licence locally as this would enable local regulation and locally licenced drivers to work under their existing licences.

NK – When Uber came along, it was just in London. Now they are in Dartford, Gravesham and even Medway.

ML – We will take this away and put it in as part of the consultation for Member consideration. If all authorities had Uber though, and all drivers worked for them, then surely everyone would be in the same situation of there not being enough work for all of the drivers, putting everyone back to square one.

D – Felt that if 250 GBC drivers became Uber drivers, then the current ones would head back to inside the M25.

LC – Is this being asked for by a lot of the drivers?

DS – We are not in a level playing field. This is something that always comes up. It's becoming a case of 'If you can't beat them join them'.

LC – Is this from all drivers?

DS – Not all, but a vast majority that are relatively new to the trade. Not all the drivers need to work full-time, but % wise, about 70-80%

LC – Thank you

NK – 60-70% would take up the offer of being dual-licensed with Uber.

D – This would help and reduce numbers on the rank. The fewer drivers on the rank, the more work for them. It would help the drivers, as the younger drivers could work with Uber and are comfortable with the app, and the older drivers who are not so comfortable using the app.

LC – Any other points from the policy?

Vehicle Standards – Euro 6

DS – Page 12 – 2.6.4 – Euro 6

It is not clear as to whether it would apply to currently licenced vehicles, or newly licenced vehicles.

ML – From April, would all the vehicles not meet this?

DS – No, vehicles licensed up to 2015 are Euro 5.

ML – GBC want to be carbon neutral by 2030. Prior to the consultation, this was discussed at management level, and it was asked, 'Did the policy go far enough'? We are in a difficult position, as would like all the trade to be electric, but of course we would need the charging infrastructure in the borough in order for that to happen. This was clearly a step in the right direction that gave the smallest impact on the drivers.

It would be interesting to know how many drivers this would affect.

DS – In the current financial situation, it is a big worry. Some drivers are not working due to medical conditions or due to their family.

ML – Re-read the passage in the policy and can see how the wording is ambiguous.

DS – Could we not say that by 2030, all vehicles need to be at least Euro 6?

ML – By 2030, we want all vehicles to be electric, ideally.

D – Are talking fully electric, or hybrid?

ML – That is something for a future conversation.

NK – Could we not give them until 2024/25 to change to Euro 6?

DS – By which time it would only be the WAVS that would not be Euro 6.

MF – To clarify with point 2.6.3 – WAVS are not included.

DS – Agreed

LC – Any other consultation issues?

Clarification on extra inspections

DS – Extra inspections at 6 monthly intervals. Currently, we have 2 MOTS a year, and an annual inspection done by the council.

It's not about having to do it; it is about the extra cost that would be involved.

ML – It is something we plan to introduce to ensure public safety and maintain high standards through ensuring safe and compliant vehicles, but we are not currently at a stage of introducing it. At that time, the cost implications would be carefully considered.

MF – Clarification – MOT's are every 6 months?

ML – Yes, however the trade's question is about the extra cost of council inspections.

LC – Anymore?

CCTV

DS – Page 16 – 2.14.4 – CCTV

Just for confirmation, you are dropping the mandatory condition of having CCTV installed in vehicles?

ML – Yes

Medicals

DS – Medicals – annual checks for those over 65. Page 23 – 3.10.15

Obviously it is for public safety and driver safety, but is it viable in the current situation?

ML – Formal guidance relating to the Group 2 Medical Standards states that those over 65 should have annual medical checks and this is something therefore that we would seek to incorporate in the policy following Member approval.

Operators – DBS for staff

DS – Page 73, section 19. Controller needing a DBS

ML – Explained this is now national standard and the reason is that, in practice, controllers are the ones responsible for discharging the drivers/vehicles and have access to personal data, know when a customer is away, etc. It is important therefore that they are fit and proper people.

NK – DBS update service is £13 a year. Is there an extra cost?

ML – Not for enhanced DBS checks. The DBS update service is a fixed cost and allows the Licensing Team to perform enhanced DBS checks as often as required. Basic DBS checks cannot be carried out via the update service and therefore need to be carried out individually at the licence holder or individuals' expense. Everyone should already be on the update service due to existing policy requirements.

MF – Advised that the update service represents a significant saving for licence holders, e.g. £13 per year compared to two hard-copy checks per year at a cost of £60 per check, and so is very worthwhile.

NK – What about Passenger Assistance?

ML – Passenger Assistance is dealt with by KCC.

LC – Anything else?

DS – No

NK – Going back to the medical, the retirement age is 66-67; could they not be lined up?

ML – No, the medical age is a standard requirement set out in the Group 2 Medical Standards.

LC – Anything else?

All - No further comments made

LC – This meeting has been minuted and shall be discussed between LC and ML, before taking it to Committee.