

**LICENSING AND REGULATORY COMMITTEE SPOKESPERSONS  
WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF THE HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND  
PRIVATE HIRE TRADE**

**MEETING HELD REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS  
ON 25 JANUARY 2022**

**PRESENT:**

L&R Spokespersons:

- Councillor John Kelly (in the Chair)
- Councillor Mike Prendergast
- Councillor Carran Waterfield

Councillors also present:

- Councillor Gordon Friel
- Councillor Paulette Lappin (Cabinet Member, Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)

Trade Representatives:

|                       |   |
|-----------------------|---|
| Mr Alan Campbell      | Central Cabs, Southport                   |
| Mr Michael Denning    | Aintree Garage Association                |
| Mr Scott Day          | South Sefton Hackney Carriage Association |
| Mr Matthew Freckelton | Uber                                      |
| Mr Joseph Johnson     | Berry Street Garage Association           |
| Mr Trevor Jones       | North-West Taxi Association               |
| Mr Peter Robertson    | All Whites, Southport                     |

Disability Advisor

Ms Paula Hodson

Training Provider

Mr Frank West (The Learning Curve Group)

Officers:

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Mr Peter Moore  | Head of Highways and Public Protection          |
| Mr Mark Toohey  | Principal Licensing Officer                     |
| Mr Andy Cain    | Team Manager, Sefton One-Stop Shops             |
| Mr Mark Quillan | Head of Customer Service, Sefton One-Stop Shops |
| Ms Ruth Appleby | Democratic Services Officer                     |
| Ms Amy Dyson    | Democratic Services Officer                     |

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**1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, in particular Mr Scott Day who had recently become a Trade Representative for the South Sefton Hackney Carriage Association, following the sad passing of Mr Richard Jarman.

**2. RICHARD JARMAN**

The Chair advised the Committee about the passing of former Trade Representative Mr Richard Jarman, who had represented the South Sefton Hackney Carriage Association (SSHCA) for 13 years.

Councillor Friel paid tribute to Richard Jarman who had worked with diligence and enthusiasm on behalf of the SSHCA and who was held in high regard by fellow trade representatives and taxi drivers and Sefton Councillors and officers alike.

The Committee observed a minute's silence as a mark of respect and in memory of Richard.

**3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr Tony Crabtree (North Sefton Hackney Carriage Association); Mr Adrian Hughes (All Whites Southport); Mr Paul Mclaughlin (Delta Merseyside) and Mr Mark Sanders (Sefton Private Hire Fleet Operators Association).

**4. MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

**5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of any disclosable pecuniary interests or personal interests were received.

**6. PROCESSING LICENCE APPLICATIONS**

Two items had been submitted by Trade Representatives on the processing of Licence applications during the Covid pandemic.

**6.1 Licence Delays**

The Committee considered an item submitted by Mr Scott Day (South Sefton Hackney Carriage Association) requesting reasons behind the

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delays in issuing vehicle licence plates and the action being undertaken to resolve this.

Mr Day indicated that himself and colleagues would be happy to work with Sefton Council to help provide some permanent or temporary solutions that might assist the Council in processing licence applications and renewals.

Mr Mark Quillan (Head of Customer Service – Sefton Council's One Stop Shop [OSS]) indicated that Sefton Council acknowledged that there had been delays in a number of licensing processes - in particular the renewing of plates; and that there were multiple reasons for this.

- With over 6,000 licensed drivers as at March 2020, Sefton had a significant number of vehicle and badge licence holders - one of the biggest in the country.
- Under the old ways of working, taxi customers were allowed to “drop-in” as and when they wished.
- At its peak the OSS Officers were interviewing over 140 customers a day, had no control of who was coming in, when they were coming in and why they were coming in. However, they all got dealt with on the same day of their visit.
- With the arrival of the pandemic the Bootle and Southport Once Stop Shops had had to close and the operational approach changed.
- Following the completion of a comprehensive risk assessment the Bootle OSS reopened on 14th September 2020. This was the only OSS to open across the Liverpool City Region.

Mr Quillan set out the reasons for the delays in processing the licence applications:

- The reopening and the control measures of the Risk Assessment ultimately brought its challenges and started the delays in licence processing.
- The One-Stop Shop was now only able to offer an “Appointment only” service.
- Maximum number of staff allowed in the office to allow for social distancing meant that only 5 booths could be opened, as opposed to 11 booths pre-pandemic.
- Reduced opening hours. 9.00 am to 5.00 pm changed to 10.00 am to 4.00 pm
- Working from home meant that OSS officers were not able access scanners, photocopiers and other consumables which had slowed down productivity.
- At the time it had been very difficult to make any forward plans as the pandemic rules changed from month to month.

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- Customer Services had experienced a high volume of staff sickness or requirements for staff to self-isolate.

Mr Quillan indicated that to address the delays and backlog, Council Officers had met with the Leader of the Council and a number of Councillors and the following measures had been put into place:

- A return to normal opening hours of 9.00 am to 5.00 pm.
- Staff at Bootle OSS working weekends on urgent processes.
- Two of the administrative / reception staff at the Bootle OSS were currently being trained to be upskilled to work as Taxi Licensing Officers.
- Funding to recruit two additional staff for a short-term period had been applied for.

Mr Quillan acknowledged and thanked the Trade Representatives for offers of support and funding for the recruitment of more staff and whilst the gesture had been appreciated, the Council had not been able to accept the offer, due to the maximum number of staff allowed to work in the office.

Mr Quillan indicated that it was believed that the OSS had made excellent progress with its existing workload since returning from the Christmas break and was now working on new and the renewal of vehicle plates that were received on 14<sup>th</sup> January 2022. This was a significant step forward from the position in November/December 2021 and the OSS had auto renewed all drivers up to 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022.

He emphasised the importance of keeping up the momentum and get further ahead with dates for processing – the OSS was looking at bringing the auto-renewal process for drivers to an end by 4<sup>th</sup> February.

Mr Quillan stressed that the OSS still had a risk assessment in place and had been informed by the Council's Director of Public Health that the case numbers in the Liverpool City region remained very high. As such, caution had had to be exercised - and appointments at Bootle OSS rather than a return to the drop-in facility would have to remain in place for the foreseeable future.

Arising from discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Mr Scott Day raised the issue of difficulties experienced by less tech-savvy drivers in completing on-line applications /sending emails. Councillor Lappin indicated that Sefton at Work at Cambridge Road could be approached to provide IT training / support to drivers.
- Mr Trevor Jones raised concern with the use of 'Officer' speak on the on-line application process – suggested that notices could be

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posted in the OSS explaining the application process step by step in plain English.

- Concern was expressed that Wolverhampton City Council had processed a number of licenses for drivers who operated in Sefton, which had implications for effective enforcement. Mr Joe Johnson (Berry Street Garage Association) indicated that one of the conditions of licenses issued by Wolverhampton was that vehicle checks could be carried out by any local licensing authority. Mr Mark Toohey (Principal Officer) indicated that since deregulation, licensed drivers could operate anywhere in the country and were not restricted to the area the licence was issued. He stated that in the event of a large influx of Wolverhampton licensed taxis he was happy to liaise closely with Wolverhampton and Merseyside Police for the establishment of joint enforcement.

Mr Peter Moore (Head of Highways and Public Protection) concluded that Sefton's taxi licensing service had continued to operate throughout the pandemic. The Council welcomed offers of help and support and suggestions for improving the service. Medium and long-term measures were being explored and developed to improve and streamline the taxi licensing service – this was not just in response to the Covid pandemic, the Council was identifying improvements to back-office systems and ways of processing payments, etc. and the Council would continue to work closely with the Trade in this respect. Sefton Council had an excellent history of working closely with the trade and intended for this to continue. At the same time the Council had to heed the advice of local public health experts. National Government would make decisions about how to manage the pandemic, but local knowledge was essential – and the Council was tapping into local intelligence to keep risk assessments relevant and live.

**RESOLVED:**

That the issues raised and the actions being taken to address the delays in processing licensing applications be noted.

**6.2 Berry Street Garage Offer**

The Committee considered an item submitted by Mr Joe Johnson (Berry Street Garage Association) on Berry Street Garage's (BSG) formal offer of assistance to the Council and the Trade to help deal with current licensing issues.

Mr Johnson indicated that delays in processing licence renewals had had a negative financial impact on businesses and individuals, due to lost income. To help address the issue, BSG were offering a 'one stop' where drivers could apply to have their vehicles tested, documents checked and have license plates issued. Mr Johnson stated that this service could be carried out free of charge to the Council. BSG carry out 60% to 70% of

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vehicle tests checks they were already photocopying and scanning licence applications to send via emails to the Council.

Mr Alan Campbell (Central Cabs, Southport) indicated that he had experienced difficulties recruiting new drivers, with delays in processing applications exacerbated by delays in the processing of medical and DBS checks. He reiterated Mr Johnson's comments about the negative financial affects this had had. He suggested that a 7-day turnaround was not unreasonable. Mr Frank West (Training Provider – Learning Curve Group), offered his support to Mr Campbell in the recruitment of drivers in Southport.

Councillor Lappin (Cabinet Member – Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services) indicated that the Council was giving serious consideration to improving the taxi licensing service but stressed that the use of non-Council providers in renewal of licence applications was a complex issue which would entail privatising part of the taxi licensing service and would require a decision by the Cabinet.

Mr Mark Toohey indicated that work was being undertaken to make it easier for new drivers to obtain medical and DBS checks. He also reiterated what Councillor Lappin had said, that Cabinet approval would be required for non-Council providers to provide a taxi licensing service; and would require a full tendering process. A business case would need to be formed and among the issues to be considered would be data protection, payment systems, and so on.

Mr Joe Johnson thanked Councillor Lappin and Mr Toohey for their helpful comments and emphasised that BSG was offering a free licensing service. He requested that a further meeting be held with Councillor Lappin and Officers to discuss the issues raised. Councillor Lappin indicated that as a Member of the Cabinet she wouldn't be able to attend such a meeting.

Mr Peter Moore (Head of Highways and Public Protection), indicated that he understood the offer and what it would give the local trade if the Council was to accept. However, he emphasised that the Council had to comply with public procurement regulations and couldn't operate in the same way as the private sector and measures taken would have to be undertaken methodically to ensure that the Council did not breach procurement regulations. There could be no perception that the Council was doing something wrong or operating in an anti-competitive way.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the issues raised and the actions being taken to address the delays in processing licensing applications be noted; and
- (2) Mr Mark Toohey be requested to approach Sefton at Work at Cambridge Road about support being made available for

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drivers in completing their on-line licence applications and renewal forms.

## 7. LIVERPOOL CITY REGION GRANTS

The Committee considered an item submitted by Mr Trevor Jones (North-West Taxi Association) requesting details of the grants given by the Liverpool City Region (LCR) to hackney carriage and private hire drivers to support them during the Covid Pandemic (as in payment [1] and payment [2] and how much they received in total. Also, how many drivers were not eligible because they did not live in the LCR.

Mr Mark Quillan (Head of Customer Service – Sefton Council’s One Stop Shop [OSS]) indicated that in October 2020 it had been announced that a £1.5 million-pound Covid fund would be made available to support local Taxi Drivers. This fund would be available to all drivers who lived within the Liverpool City Region and would be allocated proportionately to each local authority. With 15,109 licenced drivers across the Liverpool City Region, it had been confirmed that each driver would be allocated £100 from the fund.

At the time it was estimated that Sefton had 6,746 licensed drivers, therefore the allocation to Sefton would have been £674,600. Mr Quillan stressed that Sefton was not given this amount - it was available from the Liverpool City Region for those drivers who were eligible and who applied to the LCR for the grant.

Mr Quillan indicated that in Round 1 of the grants, whilst there had been an estimated 6,746 drivers licensed with Sefton, only 4,402 Sefton drivers fulfilled the eligibility criteria for the grant – namely those who:

- (1) were licensed by Sefton Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020; and
- (2) who lived within the boundaries of the Liverpool City Region.

There were a further 2,344 Sefton licensed drivers who lived outside of the Liverpool City region and were therefore not entitled to the grant.

Sefton Council had written to all of the 4,402 eligible drivers explaining the scheme and the process for applying for the grant which was via an online e-form. The window to apply was open for six weeks and in that time, 2,620 completed online applications were received.

2,620 grants of £100.00 each had been paid - totalling £262,000, therefore, £412,600 of the monies had not been spent.

Mr Quillan indicated that in January 2021 it had been announced that further Taxi Grant funding would be made available (Round 2) and on this occasion, the grant to be paid out would be £200.00 per driver.

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All of the 2,620 drivers who had applied and qualified for the grant in Round One were paid the £200.00 and a reminder was sent to all drivers who did not apply in Round One, which resulted in a further 604 new online applications submitted and subsequently each paid the £200.00. 3,224 grants were paid out in the second round of funding which equated to £644,800. 1,178 Sefton licensed drivers did not apply for the second round of the grant.

Mr Quillan concluded that a total of £906,800 in grant money had been paid out to Sefton taxi drivers.

**RESOLVED:**

That the update on Liverpool City Region grants issued to Sefton taxi drivers be noted.

**8. HMRC TAX CHECKS**

The Committee considered an item submitted by Mr Mark Toohey (Principal Officer – Sefton Council) providing information about new rules regarding the HM Revenues and Customs (HMRC) tax conditionality checks which were due to come into force on 4 April 2022 and would require drivers to undergo a tax check to renew a taxi/private hire licence or to apply for the same type of licence with a different licensing authority.

A copy of a Tax Check Factsheet explaining the change and how it would affect drivers was attached to the agenda. Further information could also be found at the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complete-a-tax-check-for-a-taxi-private-hire-or-scrap-metal-licence>.

Mark Toohey indicated the intention to work closely with Andy Cain (One Stop Shop Manager) to cascade the information down to drivers with help from the Trade Representatives. Initially for most drivers, the Council had the duty just to inform the HMRC change was coming in, but at some stage further down the line drivers would be required to provide tax check codes, otherwise the Council wouldn't be able to issue hackney carriage/private hire licenses.

Councillor John Kelly asked whether the Council would be able to help drivers complete the tax forms. Mark Toohey indicated that Councillor Lappin had mentioned the Sefton at Work Scheme, and he would make contact to see what help was available to help drivers both with the IT involved in completing the on-line form and the tax code aspect.

Frank West indicated that his team were geared up and ready to help drivers and knew how to get the HMRC code. He suggested that a booth might be made available in the One-Stop Shop with an iPad or touch screen where drivers could get the code straight away.



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Matthew Freckelton (Uber) indicated that Uber were currently preparing communications for drivers on HMRC code and asked how the code could be provided to the Council once generated. Mark Toohey indicated that he and Andy Cain would consider this matter and notify the trade in due course.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the information about the new rules regarding the HM Revenues and Customs (HMRC) tax conditionality checks which were due to come into force on 4 April 2022, be noted;
- (2) Trade Representatives be requested to help to cascade information about the new rules to their drivers;
- (3) Mr Mark Toohey be requested to contact Sefton at Work at Cambridge Road, to enquire about support for drivers with regard to support from drivers with licensing applications incorporating the new HMRC tax conditionality checks; and
- (4) consideration be given to the provision of a booth in the One Stop Shop with an iPad or touch screen where drivers can access their HMRC tax code.

**9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

RESOLVED:

That it be noted that the next annual meeting of the Licensing Regulatory Committee Spokespersons with Representatives from the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Trades will be held at **10.30 am on Tuesday 24 January 2023.**