

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Taxis Committee
Thursday 11th November 2021 at 6.00 pm
in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor A Hopwood (Chair)
Councillor K Lewis (Vice-Chair)
Councillors I Bevan, R Body, B Challenor, J Cowell, P Drake, E Lawrence and W Sullivan

Officers:

S Smith – Team Manager (Licensing and Waste Enforcement) (Directorate of Public Realm),
T Holder – Solicitor and L Jury - Democratic Services Officer (Directorate of Finance and
Legal).

Also in attendance:

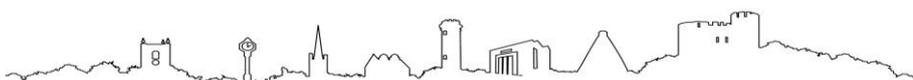
Mr M Ali (Waterfront Cars and Dudley Hackney Carriage Association) and Mr R McMaster
(Allied Vehicles) for agenda item no. 5 only
Mr J Scobie – Assistant Team Manager (Licensing and Waste Enforcement) – for agenda
item no. 8 only.

31 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors M
Aston and D Harley.

32 **Appointment of Substitute Members**

It was reported that Councillor W Sullivan had been appointed as a substitute Member
for Councillor D Harley and Councillor J Cowell had been appointed as a substitute
Member for Councillor M Aston for this meeting of the Committee only.



33 **Declarations of interest**

No Member made a declaration of interest, in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct, in respect of any matter considered at the meeting.

34 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14th October 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed.

35 **Application for consideration as a Hackney Carriage Vehicle – Peugeot Premier Rifter**

A report of the Acting Director of Public Realm was submitted to consider whether the Peugeot Premier Rifter should be licensed as a Hackney Carriage.

The Team Manager (Licensing and Waste Enforcement) presented the report and in doing so, advised that the former Legal and Property Committee at their meeting on 13th September 1989, had resolved that no vehicle should be licensed as a Hackney Carriage vehicle unless such vehicle had been purpose built as a Hackney Carriage and had been adapted to carry wheelchairs. It was noted that at the time, only two vehicles met the criteria. However, since that date other vehicles had been approved, as detailed in paragraph 4 of the report.

Mr S Guillatt of Allied Vehicles, in conjunction with Mr M Ali from Waterfront Cars, had made an application for the Peugeot Premier Rifter to be licence as a Hackney Carriage vehicle and a copy of the brochure for the vehicle was attached as Appendix 1 to the report submitted. It was noted that the Fleet Compliance Officer at the Narrowboat Way Inspection Centre, together with the Licensing Officer, had inspected the vehicle on the 10th September 2021 and their comments had been forwarded to Committee Members and interested parties and a summary of the comments was presented.

In conclusion, the Team Manager (Licensing and Waste Enforcement) advised that Mr R McMaster from Allied Vehicles and Mr M Ali from Waterfront Cars, were in attendance at the meeting to address the Committee and answer any questions that Members may wish to raise. It was noted that a Peugeot Premier Rifter vehicle was available in the Member's car park should Members wish to inspect the vehicle.

Mr Ali stated that many of the vehicles listed in paragraph 4 of the report submitted were no longer available and the fleet currently in use was in need of replacing and it was envisaged that several more applications would be submitted to the authority to consider licencing more vehicles, especially for disabled clients. The economic and ecological advantages of the Rifter, in comparison to other hackney carriages, were presented and concern was raised with regard to the number of drivers that were leaving the hackney carriage trade and the need to address this issue and encourage drivers back into the trade to accommodate disabled users.

Mr McMaster advised on the two types of wheelchair accessible vehicles noting that outside London there were approximately 24,000 wheelchair accessible taxis, half rear access and half side access and that Hackney Carriages driven in Dudley were predominately side access vehicles. It was noted that the rear loading vehicle was more prevalent in the UK as it provided a much lower ramp line than the side access vehicle and wheelchair users had shown a preference for this vehicle model, as the wheelchair when inside the taxi faced forwards in comparison to side access vehicles where the wheelchair user faced backwards. It was advised that a seat could also be included beside the wheelchair for a carer, and in response to comments made by Officers when the vehicle had been inspected, it was noted that a taxi sign and a taxi meter could be fitted to the vehicle to make them acceptable for the taxi trade.

The Team Manager (Licensing and Waste Enforcement) echoed the comments made by Mr Ali with regard to the reduction in hackney carriage drivers, noting that there had been a 40% reduction in Dudley due to the introduction of mobile apps, the cost of hackney carriages in comparison to private hire vehicles to buy and the increased use of private hire vehicles to carry out non-licensed activities such as food and parcel deliveries.

Following the presentation of the report, a Member questioned whether the expansion of hackney carriages was necessary due to the extensive use of mobile apps to order taxis, whether the vehicles were used in other Boroughs and concern was raised with regard to there being no spare wheel available. In reply, Mr Ali confirmed that the taxi vehicles supplied outside the Merry Hill Centre were hackney carriages only and were used by many customers, especially disabled users due to the facility to carry wheelchairs, as many disabled users were dropped off by relatives/friends and needed to use a wheelchair accessible taxi to get home. It was noted that nursing homes also used hackney carriages. The lack of a spare wheel was acknowledged due to the space required for a wheelchair; however provision was made for a temporary spare replacement, as was the case in other hackney carriages and some private hire vehicles. It was noted that this vehicle was used in other Boroughs.



Members raised concern with regard to paragraph 2 of the report submitted, which stated that the Committee had resolved in 1989 that no vehicle should be licensed as a hackney carriage vehicle unless it had been purpose built as a hackney carriage, and that the Committee were now being asked to licence a vehicle that did not adhere to this policy. In response, the Team Manager (Licensing and Waste Enforcement) advised on the policy that had been produced predominately for safety reasons to stop drivers buying vehicles and carrying out their own conversions, asking to be licensed as a hackney carriage, in comparison to vehicle shells that had been supplied to manufacturers who had carried out approved second stage conversions into hackney carriages and adapted the vehicles to accommodate wheelchairs.

At this juncture, the Committee adjourned to allow Members to leave the room to view the Peugeot Rifter Vehicle that had been supplied by Allied Vehicles.

The Committee reconvened at 7.00pm and after a short discussion and taking into consideration all the concerns and comments raised by all parties at the meeting, the Committee:

Resolved

That the application to licence the Peugeot Premier Rifter as a hackney carriage, be deferred to a future meeting to enable the current policy with regard to the licensing of vehicles as hackney carriages to be reviewed.

36 **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Resolved

That the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information relating to an individual(s) as defined under Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

37 **Review of a Private Hire Driver's Licence – Mr ZA**

A report of the Acting Director of Public Realm was submitted to consider the review of a private hire and hackney carriage driver's licence in respect of Mr ZA.

Mr ZA was not in attendance at the meeting as he had contacted Officers to say that he was unable to attend as he had been displaying Covid 19 symptoms. Mr ZA had been asked to confirm a Covid test result, however, he had failed to do so and could not be contacted by Officers. Therefore, the Committee determined to hear the application in his absence.

A legal summary was provided by the Solicitor who also referred to the offence committed by Mr ZA which had been heard in Court, in Mr ZA's absence, where the District Judge found the case proved.

Resolved

That following careful consideration of the information contained in the report submitted, the Private Hire Driver's Licence in respect of Mr ZA be revoked with immediate effect, due to the offence committed, amounting to reasonable cause to show that he was not a fit and proper person to hold a licence.

Mr ZA would be informed of his right to appeal the Committee's decision.

38 **Review of a Private Hire Driver's Licence – Mr NGSA**

A report of the Acting Director of Public Realm was submitted to consider the review of a private hire driver's licence in respect of Mr NGSA.

Mr NGSA was not in attendance at the meeting due to illness and the Committee determined that the application be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee, to enable Mr NGSA to attend.

Resolved

That consideration of the application for the review of a private hire driver's licence issued to Mr NGSA be deferred to the next meeting to enable Mr NGSA to attend the meeting.

The meeting ended at 7.25pm.

CHAIR

