

Wednesday 25th April 2018 at 10:30
Odd Down Sports Centre
Taxi Forum

Chair:

Councillor Bob Goodman (BG), Cabinet Member for Development and Neighbourhoods

Council Officers:

Cathryn Brown (CB), Team Manager – Environmental Protection and Licencing

Andy Dunn (AD), Team Manager – Parking Services

Paul Garrod (PG) Team Manager – Traffic management and network

Aled Williams (AW), Environmental Protection Manager

Alan Bartlett (AB), Public Protection Team Leader

Mike Dando (MD), Senior, Public Protection Officer – Licencing Enforcement

John Dowding (JD), Senior Public Protection Officer

Fiona Moffatt (FM), Environmental Information Officer

Emily Sheppard (ES), Apprentice

Other Attendees 14 Members of the Trade

Introduction:

BG introduced himself and welcomed all to the meeting. He asked the officers to introduce themselves.

Licensing Update:

Taxi Tariff:

CB confirmed that the Single Member Decision for a 4.9% increase had been agreed.

JD confirmed that the new taxi tariff cards are being printed at present and will be sent to the drivers in due course. He also confirmed that meter tests completed before the tariff change would be accepted.

Review of Taxi Policy:

CB explained that a review was necessary for two reasons:

- 1) To align the policy with the air quality improvements required by the National Air Quality Plan
- 2) To fulfil a recommendation from a recent OFSTED report about all drivers having mandatory training regarding safeguarding and child sexual exploitation

B&NES Council is currently in the minority of local authorities which do not require this type of training as a mandatory requirement.

One member commented that the training needed to be effective to ensure that it was not just a 'tick box exercise'. Another member stated that he had just completed a course with Uber and 'it was well worth doing'.

Proposals for a Clean Air Zone in Bath:

CB and AW gave a presentation about the proposals and took questions from the group. These included:

Q- Will buses be exempt?

CB and AW confirmed that buses would not be exempt from the policy.

One member expressed concern that taxi drivers could not afford to buy a vehicle which is compliant.

Another member explained that he was selling his vehicle and looking at buying a fully wheelchair accessible vehicle which has a Euro 5 standard engine- he cannot afford to buy a Euro 6 standard engine (which would be compliant) and wouldn't be able to afford to upgrade in two years' time.

Q- Will taxi drivers be given extra time to comply with the requirements?

CB and AW discussed the possibility of 'sunset periods' for taxis and private hire vehicles and explained that there was a Clean Air Fund provided by Government to assist in mitigating for any negative impacts of introducing a Clean Air Zone. They reminded the group that not everyone would be charged if their vehicle was already compliant and they welcomed conversations from drivers on how it was going to affect them.

AW went on to explain that this is more than just air quality, economic and health reasons also play a part and it is about balancing all these factors.

Q-Is it BANES or the Government bringing in the clean air zone policy?

CB explained that the Council has been told by the government, along with 27 other local authorities, that it must comply with NO₂ limits by 2021 at the latest because Nitrogen Dioxide pollution, caused by vehicle emissions, exceeds required limits at several hotspots in the city.

Three options for a clean air charging zone have already been put forward by the Council, only one of which includes charging high-polluting cars as well as buses, lorries, taxis and vans.

Q- Are motorbikes exempt?

CB confirmed that motorbikes are exempt.

Q- Will the charges apply 24/7?

CB stated that it is still under consideration.

A member expressed the view that the Council should not rush into making decisions about this. BG confirmed that decisions were not being rushed into and the Project Team is working closely with the Government.

A member of the trade queried why taxi drivers in London do not have to pay congestion charges? CB suggested because there was an exemption in place around congestion charges in London but emphasised that the charge being proposed in Bath was not a congestion charge.

Update following meeting:

TfL website confirms that Taxis and PHVs are exempt from paying the Congestion Charge when actively licensed with London Taxi and Private Hire (TPH). The exemption for PHVs only applies to private hire bookings.

A vehicle will be removed from the register of exempt vehicles on the surrender, expiry or revocation of the licence.

Another member stated that any solution for drivers needs to be cost effective.

Q- A member wondered that if they bought a full electric vehicle, would it be able to be licenced straight away?

CB explained that the taxi policy needed to be amended to do this and this is happening in 2018.

Q- Will classic vehicles be exempt?

CB stated that this was under consideration.

Q- It was suggested by a member of the trade that measures need to be put around the clean air zones, otherwise traffic will try to divert around them.

CB confirmed that the emergence of 'rat runs' was being considered.

Q- When will all the decisions be in place?

CB explained that a final measure from the current short list of three, must be decided upon in September 2018. The full business case for this measure must be agreed by December 2018. In 2019, the Council must implement the chosen measure.

Q- Some members of the trade raised concern that 2021 is too soon and that they need time to change their vehicles. Can it be extended until after 2021?

BG confirmed that they don't have the option to change the time frame, but they could think about introducing 'sunset periods'.

Q- If a non-compliant car travelled from Bristol to Bath in one day could it be charged twice as both cities are looking to have Clean Air Zones? It could be that drivers would decline the fare.

AW explained that the focus is on trying to change behaviour and so, yes it could be charged twice.

CB invited members of the trade to come forward and join a working group to assist the Council in reviewing the taxi policy and helping the project team understand the implications for the trade in introducing a clean air zone. BG encouraged members to come forward and express their views and opinions so that the Project Team could properly take account of them in their final recommendations.

Q- How much will the clean air charge will be?

CB said no decision has been made and people are being surveyed about this.

Traffic Management update:

A member of the trade asked what was happening with the bus lane near to Odd Down Park and Ride?

PG confirmed the configuration of the lane is being changed at the moment for an experiment. The bus lane is being moved to the right hand lane where buses and other vehicles going to the Park and Ride/Combe Hay can use it, in order to reduce the volume of queuing traffic. If there is no improvement, then it will revert back to how it was.

One member said that traffic flows on the bus lane by the A46 roundabout on London Road should remain the same as it helps with pollution. PG explained that as the air quality has improved in that area, it will probably stay as it is. A decision on whether to make the extended bus lane permanent is expected during the summer.

PG informed the trade about major highway schemes coming forward in 2018.

- Keynsham Bypass will be resurfaced and this will start on 8th May involving lane closures, including Hicks Gate.
- Lower Bristol Road is being resurfaced from Windsor Bridge to McDonalds which would be completed in an overnight closure.
- A road widening scheme and upgrading of the traffic signals at the A39/A36 Bences Garage junction is expected to start in July/August.
- Major works will take place at the A36 Lower Bristol Road/ Brougham Hayes junction in the summer to upgrade the traffic signals and to ease congestion near the bus stop by the petrol station.

A member of the team expressed his concern about the first set of traffic lights by the bus station. The lights are different timings, which leads to a number of incidents.

PG explained that he is aware of this issue and that it is all part of the same project to review the signalling on Dorchester Street, Bath.

Another member said that every Saturday morning, the underground car park in Bath Southgate is full the barrier is up, cars drive around looking for a space or they have to loop back around to go back to Avon Street creating pollution. There needs to be an electrical sign which says that the car park is full before you get to the junction of Avon Street and turning right to come to Southgate.

PG explained that there are existing electronic car park guidance signs but they currently do not display information on Southgate car park because the owners recently changed their car park IT system, which is not connecting to the council's signs. The team has been in touch with Bath Southgate which is aware of the problem and are trying to get it fixed.

A member asked about the phasing of the traffic lights at Sainsburys, Pinesway during the non-peak hours, overnight. The lights stay on red but there is no traffic passing through- could this be looked at?

Update post-meeting:

These those signals are linked to the ones at the Brougham Hayes junction in order to keep traffic moving at busier times (i.e., so vehicles don't have to wait at a red signal for long at one junction after only just receiving a green light from the previous junction). The team are going to investigate whether the link in the evening until the morning peak period can be removed, so that this set of signals can operate independently then and be more reactive to demand.

Parking update:

AD explained that the camera technology for the Bus Gates system has been upgraded to improve the image quality to reduce the number of wrongly issued tickets.

Currently Parking Services is recruiting for nine vacancies in its Civil Enforcement Team.

A driver stated that cars are still parked along George Street on double yellows. AD went on to say Enforcement Officers have patrolled at night but have received verbal abuse from the public. If vehicles are causing an obstruction then the Police have powers to resolve

An issue was raised about the limited number of parking spaces on the Orange Grove taxi rank due to the Spring Fair over the weekend of 12-13 May 2018. Taxi drivers are going to be driving in circles, which increases pollution levels. They should have a legal right to have a rank. Will the queuing area by the Guildhall be suspended?

AD confirmed that he will look into this. 04/05/18 – The no loading/no waiting area in Orange Grove will be suspended during the Spring Fair (10/05 to 14/05) whilst the holding area on Grand Parade is out of use.

A member asked if there was any decision on a Park and Ride site on the East side of Bath.

BG confirmed that the Council is still committed to finding a site.

A member asked if an A46/A36 link road was still a possibility?

BG said there may be possible funding from West of England Combined Authority (WoECA) to do this

BG thanked everyone for attending the meeting and if they wanted to be a part of the working group to fill their details in on sheet and we would contact them in the near future.

A member thanked the team for holding the meeting at the Odd Down Sports Centre as it is accessible and there is lots of parking.

The meeting finished at approximately 12 midday.

Next meeting: October 2018 (tbc)