Welcome to our latest Taxi Licensing newsletter. I wanted to take this opportunity to revisit some of the procedures we changed last year and also report on a number of developments over the last months relating to the Taxi Licensing service provided by Stockport Council.

**TAXI SURGERY**

You will be aware that we changed to an online surgery booking service in October 2015, accessible through the Council’s website at [www.stockport.gov.uk/taxilicensing](http://www.stockport.gov.uk/taxilicensing). The new system will provide a number of benefits including eliminating surgery waiting times and has also enabled our business support staff to more efficiently process applications and renewals.

The last months have inevitably been something of a transition period as we have all become acquainted with the new system. I accept that some people have been unfamiliar with the new arrangements and we have therefore operated with a great deal of flexibility, primarily to minimise the amount of time that driver’s spend “off the road”.

Recently we have been experiencing a high demand for surgery appointments which has led to a steadily growing “waiting list” for appointments and we have therefore taken the opportunity to review the operation of the taxi surgery, during which a number of things have become clear:-

- There are sufficient scheduled appointments within the system to deal with all driver and vehicle renewals.
- There are many appointments wasted when people do not attend.
- People often do not attend as they have made needless multiple bookings to suit their own convenience.
- People getting a new (earlier) appointment often do not cancel their old one.
- Some of the appointment times can be reduced to reflect the average times for dealing with certain processes.

In order to address the above issues I want to emphasise a few things and also introduce a number of changes to how we do business:-

- **Do not make multiple bookings when you only require a single appointment.**
  
  This is very wasteful and whilst it may be convenient for an individual it is unfair on the rest of the trade. In future Business Support staff will cancel all appointments they become aware of that been booked in this fashion. We will also consider levying a charge to the person making these bookings when appointments and staff time are wasted in this fashion.

- **Book your appointment when you receive your renewal letter.**
  
  Do not leave it until a few days before your plate / badge expires. Remember it costs you nothing to book an appointment. The earlier you book, the greater flexibility you will have and will also save you having to rush around at the last minute. Appointments for surgery get booked up very quickly and so we recommend that you make your appointment booking as soon as possible to avoid any delays in the processing of your licence. There are no time constraints on the surgery bookings so you are able to book a slot for an appointment well in advance.
• Remember to cancel old appointments if you find an earlier appointment slot.
  If there continue to be a large numbers of wasted appointments, we will consider introducing
  a charge when appointments and staff time are wasted in this fashion.
• Previously we have accommodated people struggling for an appointment on an emergency
  basis, this practice will be discontinued.
  People will be seen strictly by appointment only. We will continue to consider requests where
  very exceptional circumstances apply if they are made in writing.
• Please make sure that we are aware of any changes to your personal details (e.g. addresses,
  telephone numbers, emails, etc).
  Otherwise you may miss reminders and renewal information. In particular, providing us with
  an email address will allow us to get information out to you much more quickly in the future.
• A number of “time slots” for certain types of appointment will be reduced to allow for more
  surgery appointments.
  We have already changed licensing transfer appointments from 15 minutes to 10 minutes.
• The “drop in” part of the surgery (first 30 minutes) is for non-appointment matters only.
  Drop in is designed for people dropping off documents, requiring advice, having documents
  scanned, etc.
• Online vehicle renewals.
  We are constantly looking to make improvements, introducing an online system for vehicle
  renewals remains on our road map and is something we are pursuing through the Council’s
  “Digital by Design” programme.

VEHICLE TESTS

I’m pleased to report that the booking system for vehicle testing is working very well and has been
broadly welcomed by many users. We will however, continue to review its operation and seek to make
further improvements. A few points have come up over the last few months and I thought it would be
useful to provide some clarifications:-

• Vehicles should be properly prepared for test. (The test centre may refuse to test your vehicle
  if it is not prepared correctly).
• Our compliance test is not an MOT, its requirements cover all aspects of an MOT but the
  Council also has additional requirements not covered in an MOT test.
• The conditions for a vehicle licence require that is must be able to pass the compliance test at
  any time.
• Stockport Council has no age limit on its licensed taxis or private hire vehicles as there is an
  expectation that the vehicles will be maintained to a high standard.
• If you cancel your test after 12 noon on the working day before your test you will not receive
  a refund (as the Council must still pay for the test slot).
• We are having to suspend a number of vehicles for failing to attend a 6 monthly vehicle test,
  please ensure that you are aware of the date when your test is due and that you book one in
  time. Please refer to the ‘Guide to vehicle test due dates’ under the related documents section
  of our webpage which will give you the date that your 6 month test is due based on your
  licence date.
VEHICLE TESTING GUIDANCE

We are currently reviewing conditions for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle licences and this will be progressed later this year. In addition, we are publishing guidance which will clarify our existing test criteria. This is to make things more transparent and particularly to make the trade more aware of the criteria being applied by the vehicle test centre. This will be added to the Council’s website for ease of reference.

Appearance of bodywork and Interior

Vehicles will FAIL the test on the following points:

• All areas of rust damage should be repaired within 14 days (If the damage is in excess of 3 cm or the existence of a hole) then the vehicle will fail the test until the repair is completed.
• Once any repair to the bodywork or interior has been commenced it must be completed to a satisfactory standard prior to use.
• Minor dents and scratches to paintwork and body must be repaired within 14 days and if the damage is in excess of 3 cm, then the vehicle will fail the test until the repair has been completed.
• The use of ‘gaffer’ type tape will not be permitted to cover up any signs of rust, damage or to affix panels together.
• Unpainted panels will not be permitted on the vehicle.
• Flat or worn out paintwork will not be permitted.
• Missing body work panels will not be permitted.

Interior Condition

Vehicles will FAIL the test on the following points:

• To be kept clean and free of tears and rips. Any damage over 3 cm will cause the vehicle to fail. Less than 3 cm damage must be repaired within 14 days.
• Dirty and stained interior seats and panels.
• Dirty, stained or torn roof lining.
• Out of date first aid kits (contents).
• Expired fire extinguishers.
• No smoking signs MUST be displayed.

RESPECT

Unfortunately, I have to report that there have been a number of incidents over the last months when staff working for Taxi Licensing or Business Support have been verbally abused and even threatened by members of the taxi trade. I am sure that you will agree with me that this kind of behaviour is completely unacceptable.

If Council staff are not treated with a certain level of respect I will have no alternative but to take appropriate action and licence holders could find themselves explaining their behaviour to the Council’s Licensing Environment & Safety Committee. Ultimately, licensed drivers and operators must demonstrate that they are “fit and proper” persons to hold such a licence and this sort of behaviour does give cause for concern about the fitness of a licence holder.
LICENCE FEES

You may have noticed that Taxi Licensing fees and charges were left untouched by the Council’s budget in April 2016. This was because the fees are currently under review to ascertain that they accurately reflect the actual costs to the Licensing Authority for each licensing activity. This review is now nearing completion and we will be publishing a report for consultation over the next few months.

REVIEW OF CONDITIONS

We will shortly be commencing a review of all our existing licence conditions appertaining to operators, drivers and vehicles. It is a number of years (some of our conditions date back to 1974!) since these were last reviewed and there will be a number of matters that will require some amendment to reflect current practices and technology. We will be consulting extensively as part of the review and later this year will be inviting comments and feedback on the proposals.

STATION TAXI RANK

As many of you will be aware, the station taxi rank forms part of the exciting Stockport Exchange development. Unfortunately the ongoing works have seen a series of temporary ranking arrangements implemented and I would like to thank all of those affected by the works for your patience and flexibility in keeping up “business as usual” during this period.

PERSONNEL CHECKS

Personnel Checks continue as our partners for the purposes of DBS checks and the issuing of timely reminders to drivers regarding their licences, DBS Certificates and Medical Certificates. For any queries about DBS certificates please contact them on 01254 355665.

LICENSING ENVIRONMENT & SAFETY COMMITTEE

Councillor Chris Gordon, who has served as Chair of this Committee for many years has now stepped down from that role. As the new Mayor of Stockport he will no doubt have a busy year! Councillor Chris Murphy is the new Chair of the Committee.

Anyway, that’s it for now. I firmly believe that we have some excellent people working in the taxi trade in Stockport and I look forward to speaking with many of you over the coming months. In the end I think the local taxi trade and licensing authority all want the same thing... a thriving local taxi trade that prides itself on providing a quality, safe service to the travelling public.

Hope you have a great summer!

Peter Cooke
Trading Practices & Licensing Manager