



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
LICENSING AND PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

Held: MONDAY, 5 MARCH 2018 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Thomas (Chair)
Councillor Hunter (Co-Vice Chair)
Councillor Singh Johal (Co-vice Chair)

Councillor Byrne

Councillor Cank

Councillor Unsworth

In Attendance
Councillor Singh Clair

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21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Dr. Barton, Fonseca and Shelton.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Thomas declared an Other Disclosable Interest in Agenda Item 7, Differential Charging of Wheelchair-Dependent Passengers, and his wife was disabled and a wheelchair user. When she has a hospital appointment she has to use a hackney carriage.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct the interest was not considered so significant that it was likely to prejudice Councillor Thomas' judgement of the public interest. Councillor Thomas was not therefore required to withdraw from the meeting during consideration and discussion on the item.

Councillor Singh Clair was present as an observer, as he was interested in Agenda Item 6, Consideration of the LEVC TX Ultra-Low Emission Vehicle for Licensing as a Hackney Carriage, as he wanted to see how the low emission vehicle was fit for purpose as a future Hackney Carriage.

23. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED:

that the minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2017 be approved as a correct record.

24. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been submitted in accordance with the Council's procedures.

25. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS, STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations and statements of case had been submitted in accordance with the Council's procedures.

26. CONSIDERATION OF THE LEVC TX ULTRA-LOW EMISSION VEHICLE FOR LICENSING AS A HACKNEY CARRIAGE

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services submitted a report seeking approval of the LEVC TX to be licensed as a hackney carriage.

The Committee was recommended to approve the LEVC TX, which was not fully compliant with the conditions of fitness to be licensed as a hackney carriage, provided that they accepted that the benefits of licensing the vehicle outweighed the disadvantages outlined in paragraph 5 of the report.

The Licensing Team Manager presented the report. Members were asked to note the age policy on the licensing of Hackney Carriages was temporarily relaxed from September 2016 and had been extended to 30th June 2018, after which anybody with an overage vehicle could only extend a licence if they could prove they had ordered a ULEV vehicle. Members were informed that other vehicles would be brought before the Committee in the future, and the 30th June date would be reviewed nearer to the time.

The Licensing Team Manager drew attention to the two areas where the vehicle was not fully compliant with the existing conditions of fitness. These were:

- a) The overall width of the vehicle was 1874mm, which exceeded the maximum width of 1845mm specified in Appendix 1 by 29mm.
- b) The seat spacing was 0.448 m with adequate foot room. The minimum width specified in Appendix 1 was 0.48 m, although it may be reduced to 0.435 m provided adequate foot room was maintained at floor level.
- c) The manufacturers had been asked to address those deviations from the conditions of fitness and their response would be reported verbally at the meeting.

In addition a certificate of European Whole Vehicle type approval had been provided for the vehicle.

It was reported the vehicle was checked by Licensing Enforcement Officers prior to the meeting on 5 March 2018. It was noted that there was a third area of non-compliance in that the sliding window between compartments was wider than the condition of fitness at 17cm, although the window was curved.

At 5.51pm the Chair adjourned the meeting to enable Members to inspect the vehicle, which was parked outside of City Hall. At this point a RMT Union representative joined members.

Members inspected the vehicle and observed the operation of the wheelchair ramp and forward facing anchorage points for wheelchairs, the panoramic roof, wi-fi capabilities and charging sockets. Members also received information on the fitted radar and auto-braking system and information on the Volvo engine, battery operation and CO₂ emissions.

At 6.25pm the meeting was reconvened with all Members present who were present when the meeting was adjourned.

Following the inspection of the vehicle, the Chair then invited Alistair Fairgreave, representative of LEVC (formerly known as the London Taxi Company), to provide information on the vehicle, and answer questions from Members and the RMT Union Representative:

- A driver could choose different options, for example, heated seat, extra storage, reversing camera;
- Card payment systems – regulations differed in every city, and LEVC were not involved with the installations of such systems. There were, however, brackets to support card payment machines hidden behind the trim, and did not interfere with air bags;
- The vehicle was launched the second week of January 2018;
- The vehicle had been approved in London, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Paisley, Liverpool and Manchester. Approval was still pending in Nottingham and Birmingham as a vehicle charging infrastructure needed to be put in place;
- There was a 14-week lead time for delivery (3½ months);
- The aperture in the dividing panel had been made smaller to prevent people putting their arm through;
- The styling of the vehicle made it look more imposing than current hackney carriages, and although the body was wider the overall width including the mirrors was the same as the previous non-ULEV model;
- There was an extra seat in the back (six instead of five), with no seat in the front;
- All materials in the vehicle had passed stringent testing, the flooring was stain resistant, and there was a vinyl option for the seat and floor;
- The cost of £55k was a big factor to consider for drivers, but could save £100 a week with the low running costs. The manufacturers had to build a vehicle that met all the requirements (low fuel usages, wheelchair friendly),

and LEVC's approach was to make a really good taxi that justified the prices charged by a taxi. The organisation could have made a cheaper vehicle but it would have been difficult to meet requirements;

- The vehicle had a five-year battery warranty, 3-year vehicle warranty and roadside assistance. Ball joints as a taxi were included in the warranty for semi-wear parts. Services were included for three years, with the first service undertaken at 25,000 miles;
- All parts were stocked for maintenance and repair. LEVC were in discussions with a dealer in Leicester to cover repairs under warranty. The deal had not yet been confirmed, but the dealer had been asked to meet new standards to come on board. Currently the nearest point for drivers was in Coventry, but the list of dealers was growing all the time.

Members discussed the merits of the application and,

RESOLVED:

that the application for the LEVC TX to be approved for licensing as a hackney carriage vehicle be approved, with the proviso that the company get some form of servicing for them locally.

The reasons for the Members making their decision were that the three areas where the vehicle was not compliant with the Council's Conditions for Fitness for a Hackney Carriage were considered to be minimal differences, and the benefits of licensing outweighed these areas of non-compliance. The vehicle met the needs of passengers and drivers and had some extra features which were beneficial.

It was noted there would be other opportunities to view competitors' vehicles in the future to provide further choice for drivers.

27. DIFFERENTIAL CHARGING OF WHEELCHAIR-DEPENDENT PASSENGERS

The Director of Neighbourhood and Environmental Services submitted a report which advised Members of action taken by the Licensing Enforcement Team to ensure that wheelchair dependent passengers using Private Hire Vehicles were not discriminated against through the imposition of additional charges.

The Committee was recommended to note the action taken to address the discriminatory issues described.

The Licensing Enforcement Officer presented the report, and drew Members' attention to recent licensing enforcement intervention, and steps taken to inform operators of their obligations and importance in complying with legislation.

Members were informed that Licensing Enforcement had completed test purchases on two operators who had been the subject of recent complaints, using different names and venues, and there had been no issues.

It was hoped the initial letter and advice had had an effect, and no further complaints had been received since. It was further noted however, that compared to cities like Nottingham and Birmingham, Leicester had not received the same amount of complaints, and had acted on the issue immediately.

Members discussed the issue and stated rates should be on display. They also suggested the driver's licence number should be on prominent display, and the code of conduct should reflect the instruction to do so. It was noted there was a condition in the code regarding overcharging.

Members were informed that there was legislation which related to wheelchair accessible vehicles. Once a list of those vehicles was compiled, drivers would have a number of obligations in relation to wheelchair passengers, and a further report would be brought to the Committee.

The Chair thanked the officer for the report.

RESOLVED:

that the report be noted.

28. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7:05pm.