

**North Devon District Council – Annual Report
Taxi Trade Consultation Meeting – 1st November 2006**

<p>Taxi Driver Bodies</p>	<p>Firstly, I would like to mention the establishment of the NDPHTA and the formation of TGWU local Membership.</p> <p>Whilst the bodies do not represent all of the licensed drivers, the Local Authority welcomes the initiative taken by the individuals concerned to establish recognisable bodies to represent their best interests. This is seen as a valuable step forward, from which it is hoped that the relationship between the Licensing Authority and the Taxi drivers can only improve.</p> <p>Whilst there are differences in views and opinions, some of which remain quite considerable, it is still early days. Both organisations are relatively new to each other and I think it is probably fair to say that we are still getting use to each other.</p> <p>However, we take encouragement from their establishment; and that with time, sensible and constructive debate; improved communication and co-operation, it can only be a positive step forward for everyone and we shall make progress.</p> <p>I would like to extend my thanks to those drivers who have shown the commitment to pull things together and trust that they will continue to attract membership in a positive way.</p>
<p>Taxi Licensing Policy</p>	<p>In regard to our Licensing Policy, the first anniversary of our first substantive review in several years is almost upon us and it has already evolved yet further following constructive engagement with Taxi drivers and those that represent them. Particular thanks and recognition should be given to Mr Eric Payne of the TGWU whose personal review of our Licensing Policy prompted two meetings in March & April, which lead to a revised policy being adopted a little later in this year.</p> <p>During this time we have also been flattered by contacts from other Local Authorities wanting to use our policy for their own purposes. We have received both local and national contacts from, for example, Restormel BC in Cornwall and as far away as Fylde DC near Blackpool. Again, this gives us encouragement as it tends to suggest that whilst our policy may not be perfect we are perhaps on the right track.</p>

**North Devon District Council – Annual Report
Taxi Trade Consultation Meeting – 1st November 2006**

	<p>We have established a schedule for an annual review of our Taxi Licensing Policy on an ongoing basis, so that each November there will be a formal consideration of any changes prompted by contributions from drivers throughout the year. Matters raised at this annual meeting, which has been deliberately planned to coincide with the Licensing Committee timetable at this time of year, will now be routinely captured along with changes in Government Guidance and Law. This approach, it is hoped will make it possible for drivers and others to influence change and keep our policy evolving and current. This shall be in addition to the established best practice of having a wholesale review every 3 years.</p>
<p>Fare Tariff</p>	<p>Similarly, we have established a timetable for the ongoing annual review of the Taxi Fare Tariff. This will occur every March and it shall mean that every March (unless prompted at a different time due to an exceptional circumstance) the Licensing Committee shall formally review the Taxi Fare Tariff, irrespective of whether representation has been made by Taxi drivers, members of the public or others.</p>
<p>Enforcement Action</p>	<p>This year the Council has successfully prosecuted two drivers for carrying out unlicensed activity and two drivers for refusing to take fares.</p> <p>Other initiatives both overt and covert have been taking place and are being planned for the future, some of which will of course result in further action and our partnerships with other agencies, especially the Police, continue to strengthen.</p> <p>As many visits as possible have been made to Taxi Ranks and other locations throughout the year. Not as many as we would have liked due to other commitments, but because our efforts have been targeted this has still made a noticeable reduction in the number of complaints we have received. This is particularly true about the number of complaints received from Taxi drivers about their peers.</p> <p>We remain one of the fortunate authorities to have any Licensing Enforcement Officers in the area and I would like to extend my thanks to Nick and Phil for their continued hard work in this area.</p>

**North Devon District Council – Annual Report
Taxi Trade Consultation Meeting – 1st November 2006**

<p>DfT – Taxi & Private Hire Vehicle Licensing: Best Practice Guidance – Published October 2006</p>	<p>In regard to timely news, the Department for Transport has published it's long-awaited Best Practice Guide for Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing, in the last few days.</p> <p>The Local Authority undertakes to consider the guidance in detail and review its Licensing Policy in light of any findings.</p> <p>A cursory glance has proved reassuring, in that much of the suggested best practice is already adopted and what remains, is considered either relatively minor or already planned for consideration.</p>
<p>Vehicle Numbers</p>	<p>Since March this year we have been monitoring the total number of Hackney & Private Hire vehicles licensed by the Authority.</p> <p>In March there were 156 Hackneys and this has now increased by 14 to 170. The number of drivers has increased by a similar figure.</p> <p>In March there were 11 Private Hire vehicles and this figure remains unchanged.</p> <p>The Authority undertakes to continue to review the number of licences it issues. This is despite a significant point of note that the recently published DfT guidance mentioned earlier, confirms the Governments view that to 'not impose quantity restrictions' represents best practice and that it urges those Authorities that do impose restrictions to regularly reconsider their position.</p>
<p>Taxi Ranks & Bus Lane Access</p>	<p>It was at a meeting of the Licensing Consultation Panel, which is the Council's meeting of the Alcohol Licensed Trade, their representatives and Responsible Authorities, this time last year, that the subject of the location and number of Taxi Ranks in Barnstaple and discussions about the Night-Time Economy coincided with Devon County Council discussions about the likely road network changes in the town. This prompted the suggestion that a working party of interested parties meet to discuss possibilities for improving Taxi Rank provision.</p> <p>We organised a meeting that met on the 15th November</p>

**North Devon District Council – Annual Report
Taxi Trade Consultation Meeting – 1st November 2006**

	<p>2005, which began the successful lobbying process between us and Devon County Council for improving Rank provision. After a considerable and patient wait, DCC have finally confirmed the traffic orders for the new parking and movement of vehicles around Barnstaple. This is in light of the building of the downstream bridge and the proposed development of the Strand.</p> <p>Once these are confirmed, optimistically at the end of November, but possibly about the 12th – 13th December, it will represent good news for drivers as we will be able to progress the establishment of Ranks in Cross Street, Butchers Row and further up Boutport Street, outside the Panniers and Barclays Bank. Also, DCC have confirmed that once the Strand development is complete (optimistically another 18 months – 2 years away) a Taxi Rank will be possible along the whole length of the Strand.</p> <p>Additional Rank provision is also planned for Woolacombe along the Esplanade, although the newly established Rank in Barton Road will have to become time-restricted to the evenings and early hours.</p> <p>Perhaps more importantly however and assuming the traffic orders are confirmed as proposed, DCC have confirmed that Taxi vehicles shall be able to access all Bus Lanes (except Rose Lane & Railway Station up to Sticklepath). Drivers may not be aware, but it is proposed that Taw Vale will be accessible to Buses and Taxis only. Also, it is proposed that Taxi drivers will be able to turn left at the top of Butchers Row and have access at Mermaid Cross.</p>
BTEC Qualifications	<p>We welcome the commitments being made by those drivers that have signed up to do the BTEC qualification and the interest they have shown in obtaining a professional qualification in recognition of their important community role. Our congratulations to all those that have already taken and passed the examination. Your appearance in the local media has been noted.</p>
VFM / Benchmarking	<p>I am spearheading a project, which is researching the question of fees by comparison to the rest of Devon and ultimately other authorities beyond our County</p>

**North Devon District Council – Annual Report
Taxi Trade Consultation Meeting – 1st November 2006**

	<p>boundary. However, it is not simply a question of what people pay, it is also a question of what you get for your money and looks at performance and quality of service information in addition to costs. Whilst it is early days the exercise has already proven interesting in that it shows there are hugely varying fees and hugely varying performances. For example, driver licence renewal time frames, number & types of services provided, number of staff employed and in particular the existence of any enforcement officers.</p>
<p>Disability Discrimination Act</p>	<p>Again prompted by helpful contribution from Eric Payne, the Authority has looked at the DDA and its implications for drivers. North Devon DC is a 'first phase' authority, meaning that unless things change, as of 2010 all new vehicles granted vehicle licences by us shall have to be DDA compliant. More significantly however drivers will be subject to the requirements of the DDA towards the end of the year. As a consequence, we have invested in a DVD produced by GoSkills, on driver responsibilities under the DDA, which is played and viewed by all new drivers at their interviews. We shall continue this practice and will invite existing drivers to come in at a convenient time to also view the film.</p>
<p>IoL / NALEO Membership</p>	<p>The Local Authority is already a Corporate Member of the Institute of Licensing and I have recently signed up as a Member NALEO, which is the National Association of Licensing Enforcement Officers. Meaning that in addition from receiving the normal updates from the Government, LACORS (Local Authority Co-ordinators of Regulatory Services) and our regular review of the trade publications, we are more confident than ever of our ability to keep track of information and developments in Taxi Licensing as it happens.</p>
<p>I could go on, but instead I will close by saying there is much more to do and much more to offer. In my view communication will be the key to progress.</p>	<p>Regular email updates are now being made about changes, inquiries and developments with key representatives of the local Taxi trade.</p> <p>Whilst we do not plan to have a rigid publishing timetable, Taxi Newsletters were circulated in March and August this year. Further publications shall be made as and when there is sufficient information, of interest and importance to drivers.</p>