MINUTES OF HACKNEY CARRIAGE STANDS TASK GROUP

12 AUGUST 2014

PRESENT:

Councillors Buckley, Butlin, Mrs Garcia, Mistry, Mrs Roodhouse and Sandison
Sean Lawson (Head of Environmental Services), David Burrows (Regulatory Services Manager), Paul Ansell (Scrutiny Officer) and Linn Ashmore (Democratic and Scrutiny Services Officer)

Note – These minutes are a record of the task group’s discussion. Comments recorded do not necessarily represent the views of the task group or of the council.

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED THAT – Councillor Mrs Garcia be appointed Chairman of the Task Group for the 2014/15 municipal year.

2. SETTING THE SCENE

The task group reviewed the one-page strategy and the background detail for the review. During discussion the following points were made:

The intention was for the task group to report to Customer and Partnerships Committee on 14 November 2014. The group agreed it was unlikely its work would be completed by then but it was possible that an interim report could be submitted to enable budgetary deadlines to be met.

The Head of Environmental Services informed the group that provision would need to be made for expenditure on taxi ranks in the 2015/16 budget regardless of the outcomes of the review.

It was noted that any costs incurred in implementing recommendations from the review would not be met from other revenue streams. Also, the council cannot charge taxi licence holders for anything other than the cost of running the licensing service so, for example, if income from on-street parking were lost as a result of creating a new rank, it could not be recouped by increasing the licence fee.

Points for the review to consider included:

- Demand for taxis
- Night time and daytime economy
- Increased demand during the Rugby World Cup in 2015
- Traffic congestion
- Town centre footfall
- Anti-social behaviour at taxi ranks
- Convenience for customers
- The needs of disabled customers
3. **IS THERE A NEED?**

During further discussions the following points were raised:

It was acknowledged that other public service vehicles such as buses use North Street and it is a main route through the town for all vehicles.

The increase in housing developments will have an impact on the future needs for public transport including taxi ranks and bus stops.

It was noted that an ARUP study had identified existing taxi ranks as future sites for bus stops. In time there will be a need to review the mix of future demands which will involve WCC Highways, though this authority will manage the taxi ranks. However, the current provision or location of bus stops was outside the remit of this group.

The review should keep the needs and convenience of the customer uppermost.

There are congestion issues around Rugby station but it was noted the taxi rank is a private rank.

There are too many taxis for the existing ranks and there is a need to consider the impact on local businesses who report that they are losing customers who cannot park nearby because taxis are clogging up the streets.

It was important to accommodate the views of local disability groups.

While reviewing whether additional taxi ranks are required all options should be considered including the use of private land.

The review must be evidence-based and footfall data should be obtained from Rugby First. It was suggested this might show that the majority of people move through the Clock Towers towards Asda.

The task group discussed what evidence they need and agreed they should consult the following:

- Rugby Hackney Owners and Drivers Association (RHODA)
- Rugby First
- The police
- Town centre businesses
- Rugby Disability Forum
- Stagecoach
- The highway authority
- Other local authorities

The officers will draft a questionnaire for consideration at the next meeting. Suggested topics for this included:

- Congestion
- Customers, including how easy it is to get a taxi
- Crime and disorder statistics
- Impact of the businesses of local retailers (a separate form may be required)
Points the review should consider included:

- Should there be more ranks?
- Are the taxi ranks in the right places and should there be ranks outside the town centre?
- Should there be any other way of obtaining a taxi (private hire vehicles must be pre-booked)?
- Should there be alternative ranks available at night time only?

Supporting evidence will also be necessary to highlight the increase in demand that is expected during the Rugby World Cup.

Private hire vehicles often base themselves along the roadside, or travel from booking to booking rather than returning to base. They cannot ply for hire or pick-up and must be pre-booked.

There are two ways of hiring a hackney carriage, either from the taxi rank or by being hailed. Most customers use the taxi rank but customers are not seen hailing them in the street.

It was noted that if the hackney carriage is available for hire (as indicated by having its “for hire” light on) it should stop if hailed and can be reported to the local authority if it fails to do this.

Other local authorities should be looked at to see where they locate their taxi ranks and how they avoid traffic congestion in their town centres. Bedworth was suggested as a suitable comparable town centre. Documentary or photographic evidence would be required.

The taxi rank at the Clock Tower adds to traffic congestion during the day but may be an appropriate location for night time use.

The area around the Asda store would be a convenient location for a taxi rank based on customer convenience and this should be explored. It was noted that Asda has a contract with a private hire company.

There are problems with taxis parking along Lawrence Sheriff Street and North Street at night causing access and traffic congestion issues.

The subject of reintroducing regulation is outside the scope of this review. However, the briefing paper included background information so members have an understanding of the issue.

The Regulatory Services Manager informed the task group there were some minor amendments expected to the Deregulation Bill but it was also possible more wide-ranging reforms would take place during the next session of Parliament. If a limit on the number of licences were to be introduced this would still mean the number of licences issued by this authority would not fall below the current figure of 97.

It was noted that some businesses were facing difficult times.
4. PROGRAMME FOR FUTURE MEETINGS

The task group agreed the programme for future meetings as follows:

Meeting two – agree questionnaire and finalise information-gathering campaign. A discussion with county council officers on the criteria used for assessing hackney carriage stand orders should be deferred to a later stage.

Meeting three – analysis of responses; decide whether additional provision is necessary; if so, preliminary discussion of possible location(s).

Meeting four – identification of location(s).

Meeting five – any outstanding matters; agreement of review report.

The next meeting of the task group should be held in about a month’s time and will be arranged by email.

CHAIRMAN