

# General Licensing Committee

**MEMBERS:** Councillor THOMPSON (Chairman) Councillor SHUTTLEWORTH (Deputy Chairman), Councillors Mrs COLES, COOKE, Mrs HEARN, LIDDIARD, MURRAY, TAYLOR, UNGAR, WARNER and Mrs WEST.

(Apologies for absence were reported from Councillors Mrs Heaps and Murdoch).

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## **5 Minutes.**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 October 2011 were submitted and approved and the Chairman was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

## **6 Declaration of Interests.**

None were received.

## **7 Future Form and Content of Vehicle Livery Signage in Respect of all Council Licensed Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicles.**

The Committee considered the report of the Licensing Manager regarding the future form and content of vehicle livery signage in respect of all council licensed hackney carriage and private hire vehicles.

Currently all licensed hackney carriage and the vast majority of private hire vehicles must display door signs as part of their vehicle license conditions, unless they have applied for and been granted a Council exemption. Currently either magnetic or permanent door signs are permitted. It was noted that the primary purpose of the licensing regime was to provide a safe, accessible, identifiable service for the travelling public.

In December 1997, the Health and Public Protection Committee had agreed to adopt new corporate livery. Details in respect of the size, colour, content or font of the door signs had not been stipulated which had led to wide variations particularly amongst the hackney carriage trade. Examples of the variations in the form and content of door signs currently displayed by members of the Trade were appended to the report. It was also highlighted that there were many similarities between the signs displayed by the private hire and hackney carriage trade, which could cause legal difficulties and be confusing for the travelling public.

The adoption of new interior and exterior plates in 2006 had helped to highlight vehicle plate details and differentiate between hackney carriages, which display a blue identity plate, and private hire vehicles, which display a yellow identity plate.

It was important that vehicle livery maintained a professional and easily identifiable Eastbourne specific image to allow members of the public to differentiate between hackney carriage taxis and private hire vehicles. Currently the multitude of current designs made it difficult for members of the public to differentiate between the two. It also made identification and enforcement challenging.

The Committee was advised that the Licensing Team received positive and negative feedback about specific vehicles and drivers, however frequently no further action could be taken as often the passenger was only able to identify the company name and telephone number as opposed to the vehicle licence number. It was essential that a clear distinction could be made between hackney carriages and private hire vehicles as the current situation was arguably contrary to legislation and not in the interests of the public.

The requirement for clear and distinctive door signs and plates sourced from the Council or their recognised supplier would ensure conformity and a consistent standard. The signage would also clearly identify a licensed taxi from a private hire vehicle making it more difficult for non-taxis to illegally ply for hire.

Members were asked to decide a future course of action in relation to signage, namely to make no change to vehicle livery, a new single door sign or two separate door signs. Members also considered whether or not to require signage to be permanent or magnetic, compulsory or optional.

Options for a single door sign would be that such included Council corporate requirements and business specific advertising. If two separate door signs were agreed, one sign would include corporate Council information only, and the second, business specific advertising. Pictures of each proposal were presented to the Committee for consideration, and consideration given as to whether signs should be permanent or magnetic, compulsory or optional.

Inspector Tullett from Sussex Police addressed the Committee in favour of the option of two door signs. He stated that any business information used for marketing should be kept entirely separate from the Council corporate branded sign as this made identification and enforcement easier. A separate, simplified corporate door sign would be of significant benefit in identifying vehicles/and or drivers in the event of a crime or complaint. He also expressed a preference that a single sign detailing Council specific corporate information should be permanent to minimise the risk of it being stolen/coming off and so that the vehicle was identifiable at all times.

Councillor Coles addressed the Committee on behalf on the Disability Involvement Group (DIG.) The Group favoured the option of two door signs and were supportive of separate corporate, Council specific information in as large typeface as possible. This made the information easier to understand and identification straightforward. The DIG believed that the corporate signage should be placed on the rear door so that it could be easily identified as many favoured seating in the rear. No comment from the Group had been made about whether the signs should be magnetic or permanent.

Consultation with the Trade had consisted of a questionnaire, which had been circulated to all 421 hackney carriage proprietors and those holding private hire vehicle licenses. The Licensing Manager reported that 82 people had responded which represented 19.5% of the Trade. Responses had also been received from Peter Smith, Hackney Carriage Proprietor and Private Hire Operators, Call A Cab, Sussex Cars and Eastbourne and Country.

Mr Barry Morris, Eastbourne and Country addressed the Committee in favour of the option of two signs and preferred the signage to be magnetic. He mentioned that many drivers were facing financial hardship in the current climate and concerns were raised regarding the financial cost of the two signs. The Licensing Manager advised that the cost of the first pair of permanent Council specific corporate signs would be paid for by the Council and would cover all existing members of the Trade.

Mr Peter Smith, Hackney Carriage Trade Representative, addressed the Committee in favour of the option of two separate signs to differentiate clearly between hackney carriage and private hire. He stated the importance of signage being displayed at all times and favoured the corporate signage being placed on the front door.

Mr Chris Islip, Sussex Cars addressed the Committee in objection to any proposed changes to the current livery and signage. He stated that members of the public could already differentiate between hackney carriage and private hire due to the requirement for all hackney carriages to be white and private hire vehicles any colour other than white.

Mr Martin Reeves, Independent Hackney Carriage Proprietor, addressed the Committee in favour of the two signage option as this would bring a more professional image to the Trade. He also favoured the use of permanent signs. He expressed a view that magnetic signs presented a health and safety risk should they be stolen or fall off the vehicle.

Mr Clive Cornell, Eastbourne and Country addressed the Committee in favour of the option for two signs but raised objections to the use of permanent signage as damage could be caused to the paintwork of vehicles if removed.

Mr Julian Ledger, Call-A-Cab addressed the Committee objecting to permanent signage and stated that all current door signs should remain unchanged in principle.

The Committee agreed that in the interests of the travelling public and to aid enforcement, a clear distinction to differentiate between hackney carriage and private hire vehicles was required. To make all licensed vehicles identifiable as such, the proposal for two individual door signs was preferred. It was agreed that it was important for the presentation of the Council corporate image to be consistent amongst all vehicles, with signage for hackney carriages being blue in colour, and including the wording "HACKNEY CARRIAGE" and yellow for private hire vehicles with the wording "PRIOR BOOKING ONLY" to instate an Eastbourne identity across the town.

The Committee favoured the position of the Council corporate signage on the front nearside and offside door of the vehicle. This would look more professional and should the driver not wish to include a second business sign then the business specific sign would not be compulsory. The Council corporate signage would be easy to spot for members of the public to identify irrespective of which door they chose to use. Some of the Committee favoured permanent signage for the Council corporate sign while others favoured a more flexible approach by giving the option of displaying permanent or magnetic.

The Licensing Manager informed the Committee that there had been examples of individuals within the Trade who had not displayed their magnetic signage. Furthermore a serious incident had taken place where an individual had stolen a magnetic sign and placed it on another car and offered transport to members of the public.

Concerns had been raised by Mr Cornell over the damage that permanent signage could cause on vehicles, specifically executive vehicles. The Licensing Manager advised that damage could also be caused by magnetic signage and that proprietors of private hire vehicles could apply for an exemption from displaying a licence plate and other vehicle livery if undertaking executive work, and that each case would be judged on its own merits individually where such an exemption was sought by the Operator.

The Committee also identified that in order to aid the public wishing to give feedback, an additional internal vehicle identification plate, the same format as the existing internal plate currently within the front of all vehicles should be placed in the rear of the vehicle in a place where it could be clearly seen by the travelling public.

**RESOLVED:** That new vehicle livery for hackney carriage and private hire vehicles be approved to permit two separate door signs as follows:

**(1) (i) (By 6 votes to 3)** A permanent Council corporate sign, to incorporate the Council Corporate branding requirements, to include the Council crest and logo, the colour differential of blue for hackney carriages and yellow for private hire vehicles, and wording as detailed in Appendix 10 of the report, to be located on the front nearside and offside door of the vehicle.

(NB: An amendment to permit the use of permanent or magnetic Council corporate door signage was lost by 6 votes to 4).

**(ii)** In order to prevent forgeries and any variations in content, the Council corporate sign shall only be sourced and supplied by the Council's Licensing Department or their nominated supplier.

**(2) (i)** A second optional magnetic or permanent door sign to include business specific advertising, to only include the information as detailed in Appendix 10 of the report, with an amendment to permit the use of a website address, to be located on the back nearside and offside door of the vehicle.

**(ii)** That written consent must be obtained from the Licensing Manager to approve the content of the optional advertising sign prior to display.

**(3)** That the size of both door signs shall each be 22cm by 58cm.

**(4)** That the hackney carriage and private hire vehicle licence conditions be amended to reflect the approved vehicle door livery with revisions as a result of the decision at Appendix 11 .

**(5)** That the hackney carriage and private hire vehicle licence conditions be amended to require the display of 2 internal identification plates in the approved form at the front and rear of the vehicle in a prominent location to be visible at all times to passengers.

**(6)** That compliance with the new vehicle livery for existing hackney carriage and private hire vehicles shall be by no later 1 April 2013.

The meeting closed at 8.13 p.m.

**M Thompson  
(Chairman)**