

LICENSING AND REGULATION COMMITTEE

13 June 2013

FINAL REPORT OF THE PUBLIC TRANSPORT INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP –  
RECOMMENDATIONSREPORT OF HEAD OF LICENSING

Contact Officer: John Myall, 01962 848 443, [jmyall@winchester.gov.uk](mailto:jmyall@winchester.gov.uk)

RECENT REFERENCES:

OS66 – Public Transport Informal Scrutiny Group – Final Report, 18 March 2013

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

At its meeting held on 18 March 2013, The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the recommendations of the Public Transport Informal Scrutiny Group (Report OS66 refers). The Committee agreed to refer the recommendations to Cabinet and to the Licensing and Regulation Committee (recommendation 2 h only) for implementation. Recommendation 2h is as set out below.

Report OS66 is attached as Appendix 2 to this report as background to the consideration of the recommendations of the Group.

An extract of the minutes of the meeting of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 March 2013 at which the Committee supported the recommendations of the ISG, is set out in Appendix 1.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Licensing and Regulation Committee implement the following recommendation of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

**2. That the Licensing and Regulation Committee be requested to review:**

- h. Winchester's taxi fare structure and charges, as these are claimed to be the amongst the most expensive in the country, and the impact and effects this has on residents who live in rural areas who may have to make longer journeys by taxis.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1. An Informal Scrutiny Group has been considering the issue of Public Transport, and its findings were reported to The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 March 2013 (Report OS66 refers). The Committee agreed to refer the recommendations to Cabinet and to the Licensing and Regulation Committee (recommendation 2 h only) for implementation.
- 1.2. This report sets out background information to allow the Licensing and Regulation Committee to review Winchester's taxi structure and charges in line with the request of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## 2. Taxi Structure

- 2.1. Members will be aware from previous training of the structure of taxis, which includes both hackney carriages and private hire vehicles, in Winchester. The law provides for a two tier system, albeit that both tiers must be licensed (in terms of vehicles and drivers and, in the case of private hire only, operators).
- 2.2. In common with most other authorities, Winchester has not sought to set an upper limit on the number of hackney carriage vehicle licences which may be issued. Under the current legislation, a limit can only be imposed if it can be demonstrated that there is no unmet demand for hackney carriage services. As this would require a costly survey, Members have instead sought to ensure that standards of vehicles and drivers are at a high level, so as to deliver a service which meets public expectations. In recent years, hackney carriage vehicle numbers have remained relatively static [136 in 2007/08, 137 in 2010/11, and currently 129].
- 2.3. Although the legislation remains in place to allow a cap on hackney carriage vehicle licence numbers, Government policy has been to discourage such limits, and allow the market to decide what level of licences is appropriate, and indications are now that future legislation will remove the power to cap licence numbers altogether.
- 2.4. For private hire vehicles, there is no power to limit the number of licences issued. For private hire applications (and, in the absence of a local cap on numbers, hackney carriage applications), the Council must issue a licence following an application provided the vehicle or applicant (as the case may be) meets the Council's standards and any other legal requirements.
- 2.5. The Council cannot therefore control the proportions of private hire versus hackney carriages, or the areas where they operate. It could encourage applications in one sector or the other, but could not otherwise influence the numbers.
- 2.6. Therefore, the structure of "taxis" (i.e. hackney carriages and private hire vehicles) in Winchester is essentially something which only applicants, operators, and vehicle owners can determine.

### 3. Charges

- 3.1. The ISG and The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were concerned about the scale of fares charged, and the impact and effects this had on residents in rural areas.
- 3.2. As Members will be aware, the Council can only control hackney carriage fares, not those charged for private hire vehicles. In addition, the control of hackney carriage fares extends only to setting a *maximum* fare – drivers are at liberty to charge less than the maximum if they wish.
- 3.3. Private hire vehicles can charge what they like, as long as the fare is agreed in advance. Some private hire operators install meters in their vehicles and charge by a meter rate (which is usually set at the same rate as the maximum permitted for hackney carriages), although typically, private hire drivers charge less than the hackney tariff.
- 3.4. It is understood that the findings of the ISG arose from a “league table” published in Private Hire and Taxi Monthly. This table collates *hackney carriage* fares from across the country, and compares these on the basis of 2 miles. On this data, Winchester is 64th in the table out of 362.
- 3.5. The fare for a two mile journey in Winchester is £6.20. This is the same as Basingstoke and Deane, Hart, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Chelmsford, York and others (23 authorities in total). The national average for a two mile fare is £5.51, with London being £7.20 (highest), and Bolsover (£2.80) lowest.
- 3.6. Locally, a two mile fare in Eastleigh is £6.10, New Forest £6.10, East Hants £6.00, Southampton £5.90, Rushmoor £5.84, Isle of Wight £5.70, Gosport £5.60, Portsmouth £5.60, Fareham £5.40, and Havant £5.40.
- 3.7. Taxi fares in Winchester have not increased since July 2011, despite increased costs. Although the trade has not requested an increase since then, it is unlikely to welcome a reduction in maximum fares.
- 3.8. In terms of use of taxis in rural areas, it should be noted that outside of Winchester Town, there are relatively few hackney carriages operating. Most services in rural areas are provided by private hire operators, and as has been pointed out above, the Council cannot control these charges, and it is down to the hirer and the operator to agree the basis of a fare in these circumstances.
- 3.9. Officers intend to consult the trade shortly on the issue of hackney carriage fares, which could include a proposal to reduce the maximum fares permitted if Members feel that is necessary and appropriate.

## OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

### 4. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CHANGE PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

- 4.1. The suggested recommendations will help to achieve the Community Strategy objectives depending upon how thoroughly and how soon they can be implemented.

### 5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1. Setting maximum fares can be contained within existing budgets. If Members were to seek to limit hackney carriage numbers, a survey would need to be carried out. In the past estimates for this have been in the region of £15,000 (for which there is no budget)

### 6. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

- 6.1. None.

## BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None.

## APPENDICES:

**Appendix 1** - Relevant extract of the minutes of the meeting of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 18 March 2013

**Appendix 2** - *is attached for Committee Members, with a copy available in the Members' Library and on-line via the following link: [OS66 – Public Transport Informal Scrutiny Group – Final Report, 18 March 2013](#)*

**Extract of the minutes of the meeting of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 23 January 2012**

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP**

(Report OS66 refers)

As Chairman of the ISG, Councillor Read introduced the Report and together with the Head of Access and Infrastructure, responded to the Committee's discussion. The Head of Access and Infrastructure advised that the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport had been unable to attend the meeting; however, she was broadly supportive of the ISG's recommendations subject to further detailed examination of their resourcing.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr Phil Gagg (Winchester Action against Climate Change, Transport Forum) spoke in support of the ISG's recommendations.

In summary, Mr Gagg was appreciative that the Council's direct influence on public transport issues in the District was limited, although he encouraged it to campaign for improvement to this area. Mr Gagg especially endorsed recommendation 2 to develop a public transport strategy for the District to help the Council influence action and to draw in resources.

With regard to paragraph 3.15 on page 8 of the Report, potential improvements to the Park and Ride service could be considered as part of a wider parking strategy. Any proposals to increase peak time stops in locations such as Kings School would need to be evidenced with regard to the numbers of customers likely to benefit.

The Chairman suggested that consideration be given to one Park and Ride bus per hour serving the Winnall area industrial estates. Currently, some employees here were utilising on-street parking in nearby residential streets. The Head of Access and Infrastructure agreed to investigate this proposal as part of a wider parking strategy. A Member suggested that taxi drivers could be utilised to serve customers of the park and ride service during off-peak times as it had been noticed that buses were often nearly empty.

During further, discussion it was explained that Hampshire County Council was investigating the potential to draw in funds as part of local sustainable transport bidding via the South Downs National Park. It was envisaged that the City Council could be involved in this work for which a public transport strategy would assist.

The Chief Executive explained that a public transport strategy could also act as an evidence base in developing the Community Infrastructure Levy. This could potentially help inform the charging schedule with regard to developer contributions towards new public transport.

At the conclusion of discussion, the Committee thanked the Head of Access and Infrastructure and the members of the ISG for undertaking the scrutiny investigation. The Committee particularly endorsed the ISG's recommendation for the Council to produce a transport strategy, noting that Members should lobby Hampshire County Council Councillors directly with regard to improving the District's public transport network. As Chairman of the ISG, Councillor Read agreed to monitor Cabinet and the Portfolio Holder's formal response to the ISG's recommendations.

**RESOLVED:**

That Cabinet implement the following recommendations of The Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- a. The potential to work with the Community Groups and the County Council in developing and promoting community and public transport schemes and information provision. New mechanisms would need to be set up if improvements in this area are to be achieved. It has been suggested that transport workshops could be held in different parts of the District to improve such communications and involvement.
- b. The merit in developing a public transport strategy for the District, as advocated by WinACC. A Cycling strategy recently adopted by the City Council provides a good framework for how this could be done. It would require sufficient resources in order to develop a sound strategy that could gain the support of the County Council, as Transport Authority, and other key stakeholders. As part of this process, Members and officers will need to consider if a step change in the City Council's approach to parking management as suggested by the Friends of the Earth would be the right approach for Winchester.
- c. Maximising uptake of the opportunities provided by the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, which has provided valuable funding to support initiatives in the District to support public transport including both promotional activities and new infrastructure. Making the greatest possible use of this funding, and exploring new future funding opportunities, should be a key focus for the City Council. The new inter-operator and smart ticketing arrangements being developed in South Hampshire may provide benefits for the Winchester District and initiatives should be taken to ensure that such opportunities are used to the fullest extent possible.
- d. Ensuring the Park and Ride service is used to high capacity, with additional stops in locations such as Kings School, and Olivers Battery for services into and out of Winchester including rail commuters. Consideration could also be given to coming to an arrangement with Bluestar for park and ride tickets to be valid on their services after 21.00hrs which would benefit P & R passengers and help maintain Bluestar evening services. Such changes would need to be carefully assessed to determine their impact on the peak hour express services in and out of the town centre. This could be undertaken as part of a wider review of the Park and Ride, which will be necessary to determine how prospective new car park sites at Pitt Manor and Barton Farm could be incorporated to into the services.
- e. That the County Council's scheme to focus public transport on areas of social need and accessibility to key services be cross checked with the City Council's own social deprivation information and networks.
- f. Giving greater focus to providing information to community groups on grants available for promoting services and on how to set up new community transport schemes. The Winchester Passenger Transport Forum provides a good platform from which to learn about such opportunities.
- g. Holding discussions with Winchester Area Community Action to ensure that all opportunities to join-up services are kept under review (for example between Age UK and Dial-a-Ride).

That the Licensing and Regulation Committee be requested to review:

- h. Winchester's taxi fare structure and charges, as these are claimed to be the amongst the most expensive in the country, and the impact and effects this has on residents who live in rural areas who may have to make longer journeys by taxis.

That Cabinet and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport work with the County Council to ensure:

- i. That, as part of the review of central Winchester's traffic system, consideration is given to how best to take full advantage of systems that bring benefits to buses (such as transponders triggering traffic signals) be considered.
- j. That the County Council be asked if the proposed integrated ticketing service (the Solent Travel Card) could be extended to serve the Winchester District.
- k. That, in light of the recent successful Local Sustainable Transport funding bid for the South Downs, discussions be held with HCC and the Parks Authority to see if the City Council can work jointly on transport schemes which could be of benefit to the Winchester District and the South Downs National Park.

That Cabinet and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport work with the public transport providers to:

- l. Ensure that Winchester is marketed as a destination in their promotional materials and on their web sites.
- m. Investigate the possible role for Parish Councils, working closely with bus companies and the County Council, in helping update bus timetable information and in promoting the availability of bus and community services.
- n. Request that the bus companies be invited to re-examine their fare structures, particularly with regard to short journeys, such as Stanmore to Winchester town centre, which appear disproportionately expensive compared to other fare structures in other neighbouring areas.
- o. Address the need for better real-time passenger information provision across the whole of Winchester Town. Clarification is needed from the County Council as to when this will be happening and what areas and services that it will cover

-----