

EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE – 24TH JANUARY 2001

SURVEY OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN SCOTLAND ON THE USE OF IDENTIFICATION PLATES ON PRIVATE HIRE CARS

Report by the Director of Community Services

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To advise the Sub-Committee of the outcome of a survey carried out by Midlothian Council.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council is empowered to licence certain vehicles as taxis and private hire vehicles.

Taxis can be hailed in public places or approached at ranks approved by the Council. Charges for journeys taken are metered and at a rate approved by the Licensing Sub-Committee.

Private hire vehicles can only carry passengers on the basis of a pre-booked arrangement which should ideally make provision for the charge to be made. It is illegal for private hire vehicles to stop when hailed by members of the public or entertain requests for transport when approached in public places.

- 2.2 The East Ayrshire Taxi Trade Council has advised Council staff of a small number of Private Hire Operators who are plying for hire and picking up passengers off the street. As the practice is difficult to both identify and control, consideration has been given to marking Private Hire Vehicles in some manner which alerts the public to the fact that the vehicle is not a taxi.
- 2.3 As the problem is not confined to East Ayrshire, Midlothian Council recently undertook a survey of Local Authorities in Scotland on the use of identification plates on Private Hire Cars. A copy of the responses from 22 Unitary Authorities is attached as an appendix to this report.

3. DISCUSSION

- 3.1 The results of the survey indicate that there are mixed views within both Local Authorities and the Taxi Trade throughout Scotland. The general public are largely unaware of the significant differences between the operation of taxis and Private Hire Vehicles and in any event during periods when demand for taxis is higher, it seems likely that the hiring procedure for Private Hire Vehicles will be abused.
- 3.2 While some authorities have tried to highlight the fact that some vehicles are for Private Hire use only (hopefully to deter the public from

using these as taxis) other Councils are of the view that as trips in a Private Hire Vehicle are pre-booked, there is little need to identify the vehicle to any great extent. The latter approach however then can create a secondary problem of unlicensed vehicles plying for hire as Private Hire Vehicles.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Any decision to amend current Council Policy on the identification of Private Hire Vehicles will have no financial implication for the Council as any additional costs have to be recovered through adjustments to licence application fees.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The Council is empowered to formulate Policy on the operation of taxis and Private Hire Vehicles in East Ayrshire.

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 Following difficulties resulting from the public's failure to differentiate between taxis and Private Hire Vehicles, Midlothian Council undertook a survey of Local Authorities in Scotland on the use of identification plates and Private Hire Cars.
- 7.2 The results of the survey indicate that problems being experienced in East Ayrshire are not exclusive to this Authority and are found in many parts of Scotland.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 The Sub-Committee is invited to note the report.

William Stafford
Director of Community Services

8th January 2001

WS/JFC/RRS

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Letter from Midlothian Council dated 29th November 2000.

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AGENDA