

APPENDIX B

Meeting with Senior Licensing Officers and the Trade 02/11/2023

Susan Lindsey welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that the changes to the Policy that are currently out for consultation are proposals and it is important for everyone to respond to the consultation with their views and comments. This is the only way for the Licensing Committee to hear your views and for them to make an informed decision.

Susan said that if anyone feels they would struggle to write in to the consultation, they can call her and she can type up what they want to say. She would then email it to them to check and they could email it back to be included in the consultation responses.

Robert Clarke explained the reason for the meeting was that the trade had concerns regarding the proposed policy changes. Concerns were mainly, Signal problems for card readers, Loss of earnings for the percentage card readers would take, Inability to make bank transfers and Penalty Points for not replacing a card machine within 2 working days.

A member of the trade thanked Susan for the offer to write for them. They explained that they have been a driver for many years and know that Ide Hill, Hever and some other places have very bad or no signal.

They explained that sometimes teenagers, late at night, usually at the weekend have cards and try to pay but there is no money on the card. They call parents who don't answer and the drivers have to let the fare go. It can be very time consuming.

Some of the drivers say it sounds bad if they ask for payment in advance of the journey when the customer does have money on the card to pay.

It was asked if just on the rank at the station, couldn't it have a sign to say 'Cash only' because of the issues with signal and people who do runners etc. Pre booked is fine as they can pay in advance or be invoiced.

It was said that if the machine breaks, it can take a while to be fixed and sometimes the cash machines stop working. Why would we issue points if it is out of their control.

Susan explained that if the driver communicates with the team, they would not issue penalty points. If the driver tells the licensing officers that they need 5 days for the machine to be fixed or a new one to be delivered, no points would be issued as long as they communicate, and the team know about it. If the Licensing Officers carry out a vehicle inspection at the rank or anywhere and there is no card machine and the team haven't been told why, that's when points would be issued. It is the vehicle proprietor who is responsible for making sure their vehicle has a card machine in it.

Susan replied to some comments that some customers only have google pay or apple pay on their mobile phones. They do not have a card to take money out at a cash machine. It is a public safety issue that customers, sometimes vulnerable/young are being left on the rank. The Licensing Officers have received lots of complaints.

The proposal is to have card machines in addition to taking cash. The proposal; is not to get rid of cash.

It was said that if the driver knows they are going to a 'no signal' area, like Ide Hill, the drivers will know how much it would usually cost so they can explain to the customer that ythey would need to take the money in advance. If they have over paid, the driver can refund or organise a credit and if they have under paid, take the customers number to call and take any additional fare.

One driver explained that they took a customer to an area where they had no signal and had to drive a long way back to a cash point. This looses them time, fuel and money.

Susan explained that it is an offence if a customer does not have the funds for the fare but on these occasions it seems that they do have the funds for the fare, the drivers may not have the facility to take it.

There are machines on the market that work offline. They keep the card details then process the payment when you get back into an area with signal. One of the companies that do these is called 'Square'. Drivers could tell the customers that they are having to take the payment offline as there is no signal so could they provide a contact number should the transaction fail.

The Licensing team have received lots of complaints and even ice cream vans take card payments for much smaller amounts of money. Customers will end up calling for a Private Hire vehicle to come and collect them instead.

It was explained that drivers cannot charge more than the fare chart and cannot have a minimum charge on card machines.

A member of the trade explained that some customers get very rude and say 'no signal is your problem, not mine.

Susan said that you must never get angry with customers, just explain that you need to take their contact details etc.

It was also said that it may be a good idea to have CCTV in vehicles for the drivers protection.

If customers run off or get violent, Police must be called. They may follow up or it may be classed as a civil matter.

One driver explained that they called Police because a customer punched them in the face and ran off without paying. The Police told him to just carry on with the next job.

It was asked if the complaints were from Sevenoaks customers and how many.

Susan read out a number of the complaints. They are emails so she would not know where they are from, other than they were mainly at Sevenoaks train station.

Susan explained that she does understand both sides but there is a whole income stream that drivers are not tapping into if they do not take card payments.

A member of the trade explained that drivers rely on tips as well as fares and card payments stop tips. If a fare is £9.50, customers usually give £10. etc. Also the card machine companies might start taking a higher percentage in the future.

It was discussed that some card machines have optional tip buttons that could be pre set and used. Drivers cannot charge more than the fare charts but if a customer wants to pay more, they can. It would be a tip. Also, card machine companies are in competition with each other, if they put their prices up too much, drivers would go to someone else for a card machine.

Susan summarised that it seems to be the 'no signal areas' that is the main problem so drivers should look into the machines that work offline.

A member of the trade said that since the pandemic, 60% of drivers have card machines but many have stopped using them. When you have no signal, the machine has a time limit and if you don't get into an area with signal in time, it loses the information or you get into an area with signal and the payment declines.

Customers won't give their details, card numbers, ID or wifi passwords to drivers.

Since the pandemic there are far less customers. Used to be every 30 minutes, now you wait sometimes 3 to 4 hours.

Companies like British Gas want direct debit payments or they charge £5 more if you don't set this up. Why can't drivers choose how they take payment?

Susan explained again how important it is for everyone to respond to the consultation. Make suggestions if you have any. If you feel 2 working days to get a machine fixed isn't long enough, tell them that and suggest 5 working days or 10 working days. It is really important to respond or the Committee won't know your thoughts.

A member of the trade said that the proposal doesn't appear to take into consideration the increasing costs to the drivers. Also the fact that some drivers that do not have Sevenoaks station permits from Apcoa, do not have the means to earn on the rank.

The proposal to increase the cost to drivers should be in line with increasing the tariff.

Susan explained that the trade can request to increase the tariff at any time but out of 350 areas in the UK, Sevenoaks is 13th highest already and much more expensive than all of its neighbouring authorities. Susan listed these and their position on the league table.

The majority of drivers in attendance said that they will respond to Robert Clarke and he will feed it back to Susan.