

**Taunton Deane Disability Discussion Group**  
**Tues 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009 - Compass Disability Meetings Room**

**Those Present**

**Olivia Walton – Licensing Officer, Taunton Deane Borough Council**

**Kali Martin – Assistant Highways Service Manager, Highways Department - Somerset County Council.**

**Kate Morgan – Engineering Technician, Highways Department, Somerset County Council.**

**Taxis and The Disability Discrimination Act**

Olivia gave an update on the recent updates that had been made to the **Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Drivers, Vehicles and Operators Handbook.**

In 1998 the Council removed the restriction on the number of Hackney Carriages that could be licensed in the Borough, this allowed an increase from the 63 vehicles that were allowed at this time. At the same time and in response to Government Policy in relation to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 a resolution was made that all new licensed Hackney Carriages would need to be Wheelchair accessible. Additionally a period of protection until 2005 was granted for the existing saloon fleet. This decision was based on the Governments then timetable for the introduction of all wheelchair accessible vehicles. A revision of the Governments timetable to 2012 for Taunton Deane resulted in an extension of this period by the Council. Recently the Department for Transport has further revised this timetable and at present there is no clarity or clear Direction on a timetable for Government requirements and specification for accessibility in relation to Hackney Carriages, leaving local authorities to continue to set policy locally.

There are currently 162 Hackney Carriages in Taunton Deane of which 103 (63%) are wheelchair accessible; the national level of wheelchair accessible vehicles is (47%). It has therefore been agreed that until there is clear direction from Government, and to ensure the number of Wheelchair accessible vehicles do not significantly decrease in the Borough, the number of saloon vehicles will be set at a maximum of 70. The remaining fleet will consist of Wheelchair accessible vehicles which will be unlimited in number. Seventy plates will be specifically allocated as saloon plates, the term Saloon vehicles includes estates and hatchbacks. However those proprietors currently allocated a saloon plate may use this plate flexibly for a Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle if required.

Under section 37 of the Disability Discrimination Act drivers have a duty to carry assistance dogs. Those who cannot carry assistance dogs have to have a medical reason and therefore a certificate for this.

In 2006 new regulations came into force reference availability of information in other formats such as Braille cards. Vehicles also have to accept wheelchairs if they have a wheelchair accessible vehicle.

Olivia explained that people can contact her if there is an issue regarding licensing. If an individual has experienced a problem with a particular taxi company they need to contact the company directly to complain. The council cannot insist that a company takes an individual.

The issue of travel coupons was raised and the fact there was a company on the list provided that would not take the vouchers. Another member explained the fact that the £30 vouchers that are issued each year, do not go very far with increased fuel costs. Olivia explained that Somerset County Council deal with the travel vouchers and Mandy agreed to contact them about this. Following the meeting Somerset County Council advised that they only administrate the distribution of the Travel Vouchers on behalf of Taunton Deane. The voucher scheme its self is not under their control. We contacted John Lewis at Taunton Deane Borough Council who advised that the value given hasn't changed recently. He agreed to raise this with local councillors however in view of the budgetary cuts that the council are faced with considered it unlikely that they would be changed in the near future.

The option to have taxi travel vouchers is available instead of a bus pass, this option is detailed on the application form. It was suggested that people checked before they use a taxi that the firm accepts them, but if people do have instances where a company doesn't accept them and they are believed to be registered for the service then John Lewis suggested contacting him on 01823 356 356.

The tariffs taxi drivers use for charging was discussed and that it is based on the time and distance of a journey. Current charges have been in place since 2008.

Concerning Taxis on the rank, you are entitled to go the next taxi on the rank if the first is not suitable for your needs. One member quoted an instance where a step was broken on a vehicle and there wasn't a handle. Olivia said to contact her with the plate details, badge numbers and the registration details with instances like this. On member raised an issue about the font used for displaying text in vehicles, as Arial 12 and above is best for visually impaired people. Olivia suggested writing to the council about this.

One member not able to attend the meeting raised an issue they recently had when trying to attend their local bridge club in the evening. They were unable to obtain a taxi to take their electric wheelchair. Olivia advised that Taunton Deane do not have a list of taxi companies that take electric wheelchairs, but believe Tone Way Taxis might have a vehicle that may be large enough to take

one. Unfortunately it might be a case of phoning different companies and asking them, and that Taunton Deane have not licensed too many larger vehicles, Slinky Bus or community transport bus may also be able to help? We contacted Transporting Somerset who are responsible for the Slinky Bus. They confirmed that The Taunton & Wellington Slinky service operates a bus between 6am & 10pm Mon to Saturday. They also run another from 9am for 3pm and a third from 11am through until 19.15 Mon to Friday covering some local villages that haven't a public bus service. This is a very popular service. There is one Slinky Bus in Taunton.

**Contact details for Olivia are;**

Olivia Walton  
Licensing Officer  
Taunton Deane Borough Council  
The Deane House, Belvedere Road, Taunton, TA1 1HE  
Tel: 01823 356343.  
e mail: [o.walton@tauntondeane.gov.uk](mailto:o.walton@tauntondeane.gov.uk)

**Somerset County Council – Highways**

Before this section began, one of the members of the group (Harvey Godber) updated everyone on the recent work he had done with Jeremy Browne MP to highlight issues people face with Mobility Scooters, this event included representatives from the Police and other agencies. Issues surrounding lack of insurance and visibility of people on mobility scooters were discussed. A Highway Code booklet is in place specifically for scooters which many are not aware of. This is published by the Think Road Safety campaign.

Kali update the group on the fact that a budget used to be available for minor highway improvements, this has now changed and they no longer have an extra pot of finance available. Instead any requests for improvements from members of the public are added to a list to do if funds become available. If other maintenance work takes place following an inspection, Highways will try and programme in other work in the area at the same time.

It may also be worth contacting your local councillor to see if there are any budgets available to them for works.

The issue of a footpath over the Obridge Viaduct was raised and letters a member had written on the subject. Kali advised that individuals should receive a response within 10 working days. The Viaduct will be closed for 6 days in August (10<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup>) to allow the construction of footway on either side of the A358. Kali discussed the fact that any scheme like this requires lots of planning to ensure disruption is minimised.

The closure will also provide the opportunity to carry out other maintenance work which has not been possible for some years, including; Bridge maintenance, Street Lighting Maintenance and Highway Maintenance.

Other areas raised by the group included;  
North Street outside the old Zavvi premises where a section of grating is missing. Highways are aware of this issue, the responsibility for this rests with the landowners (currently Zavvi) as it comes from the down pipe from the building.

Kali advised the group that walked inspections take place throughout the town centre to assess defects once a month.

Tactile crossing points are uncomfortable for people with spinal injuries – guidelines do not permit any alterations to this. Also cobbles by Castle Hotel present problems for wheelchair users etc. Taunton Deane Borough Council own this section of pathway.

Ridges between cycle pathways cause shaking when using a mobility scooter.

Chipp Lane – blind corners present a hazard for visually impaired people when bikes travel at speed along the lane. The member has raised the issue with the Post Office. It is understood there are plans in place to put a cycle path along the lane.

Where pot holes are identified, they are marked by highway inspectors and are programmed for repair in accordance with the size of the defect and location. Kali advised that defects have increased significantly this year due to the bad winter we experienced.

Contact details for reporting highways issues are Somerset Direct (Roads & Transport) on 0845 345 9155.

### **Other Issues Raised**

It would be useful if the new Town Centre Manager could attend a future meeting of the group to address access issues around the town centre.

One member who could not attend forwarded the following comment “Please tell me where in Taunton there is Extra Care Housing for people between 18 and 60? I haven't found any and I think people who need this type of care are being discriminated against.” Taunton Deane Borough Council have suggested contacting Adult Social Care at Somerset County Council for an answer on this which we will follow up.

