

COMMITTEE: CENTRAL LICENSING COMMITTEE
DATE: 23 NOVEMBER 2009
TITLE: CABS SAFE
PURPOSE: FOR INFORMATION AND AFFIRMATION
AUTHOR: HEAD OF REGULATORY SERVICES

HISTORY

It is fair to say that, in general, the taxi and private hire service is of an adequate standard with conscientious individuals working within it. However, there is evidence that some illegal vehicles are working during busy hours, and even though we as a service attempt to pursue them, it is neither a simple nor an easy task.

THE 'CABS SAFE' SCHEME

In an attempt to offer a better service to the public, noting that our responsibility is 'public protection', we recommend that we trial a scheme which has worked successfully in other countries in Wales, including a rural county such as Gwynedd, namely Carmarthenshire.

In essence, how the system works is that anyone with a mobile phone can call one specific number, 83222 in the case of Carmarthen, and a message will then be sent to that phone with the numbers of the three nearest operators the individual can then contact one of those 3 numbers in the knowledge that the number relates to a company which has been licensed by Gwynedd Council and which has gone through the various hoops for both vehicle and driver. The system selects different numbers randomly, which ensures a fair opportunity for every licenced driver.

It is therefore the intention that those who need to use the hackney/private hire service can store this number in their phone and hopefully we can filter out the illegal trade. We must point out that the illegal operators do not have the requisite insurance to carry passengers and no checks have been carried out to ensure the safety of the vehicle or the appropriateness of the drivers.

OPERATING THE SYSTEM

The system will be run by a specialist independent company, but Council officials will be able to monitor and update the system daily, which ensures that the system is up to date at all times.

The system also notes when and where the system was used, which can provide useful information for any section within the Council which may require the information.

COST

Gwynedd intends to launch this scheme jointly with Anglesey Council, and the cost is £1036 + VAT for a licence from the company. There will also be additional costs to inform the public of the scheme, by placing adverts in the paper; on the radio; posters; beer mats etc informing the public about the scheme and the number they need to contact. We anticipate that this would bring the cost to £2000 per authority, and to

enable us to do this and to seek to ensure a better service with regard to the safety offered to the public, the Gwynedd Community Safety Partnership is prepared to contribute £2000 towards the first year.

We have discussed the scheme with the industry and have received their support, and explained that there will not be any funding to support the scheme in future, and that the cost would need to be borne by the industry.

TIMESCALE

Even though it would be desirable to have such a scheme in place by Christmas, in practice this is not possible and we believe that everything should be in place before any launch. We recommend therefore that we aim for April 1st 2010 as the scheme's starting date.

MONITORING SUCCESS

At the moment we can only report on Carmarthenshire's experience, where there was a good response, with the industry itself supporting the scheme for a second year. We are aware that there are illegal vehicles operating in Gwynedd, and our hope is that this scheme will encourage the public to use licenced vehicles only. These advantages will be highlighted in the advertising.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee supports the activity.