

ENHANCING THE CITY CENTRE NIGHT TIME OFFER

1. PURPOSE

1.1 The purpose of this report is to:

- (i) Report details of the six month pilot of the Taxi Marshalling Service.
- (ii) Advise Councillors of the current position of Taxi Marshalling provision in the City Centre and the continuation of the pilot.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Due to several events of national significance, some with direct local implications, the infrastructure of the City Centre's night time economy was expected to come under intense pressure during the summer of 2012.

2.2 These events included, but were not limited to, the following:

- 2012 London Olympic Games
- Olympic Torch Relay
- 2012 Cultural Olympiad
- UEFA European Championships
- Queen's Diamond Jubilee Celebrations

2.3 Each of these generated visitors to the City Centre. Either directly, as was the case with the Olympic Torch Relay event, which passed through Wolverhampton in June. Alternatively some of these events have indirectly attracted visitors, as was the case with the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, where the Government announced an additional Bank Holiday and granted special exemptions to licensing laws.

2.4 In addition to this several new licensed premises have opened during the summer. These new premises have added to the night time economy offer and together with the events detailed above have attracted a broader range of visitors to the City Centre's night time economy.

3. CAPACITY AND PROVISION OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES IN THE NIGHT TIME ECONOMY

3.1 The City Centre has experienced various issues associated with a lack of capacity and access to safe late night transport for several years, these issues include;

- crime and disorder occurring in the vicinity of taxi ranks
- long disorganised queues for Hackney Carriage services
- poor facilities to pre-book private hire services
- high levels of illegal plying for hire

3.2 Since removing the numerical limit on Hackney Carriage licences on 19 October 2005 the Council has seen some limited growth in the City's Hackney Carriage fleet, however at peak times there are still insufficient vehicles to immediately cater for demand. This contributes to the problems outlined above as people wait at busy ranks for limited services; this often leads to disputes amongst those in the queues.

3.3 The Council continues to work with partners and the trade to develop late night transportation services appropriate for the needs of the City. However, this is a medium

term endeavour and the policy changes required will take several years to become fully established.

- 3.4 As such it was agreed by the Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and Prosperity that in order to ensure that visitors to the City Centre for the various events listed above do not encounter difficulties when acquiring late night transportation, that the Taxi Marshalling Service be reintroduced, on an initial six month basis, from 1 April 2012.

4.0 TAXI MARSHALLING SERVICE

- 4.1 Between October 2006 and March 2008 the Council delivered a Taxi Marshalling Service. The service operated at two locations, on two nights, covering both the early and late night economies and catered for both the Hackney Carriage and private hire trades.
- 4.2 Due to the high costs of delivering such a comprehensive scheme funding could not be located for 2008/09 to continue the service. As such regular Taxi Marshalling was withdrawn on 31 March 2008.
- 4.3 Since 1 April 2008 Taxi Marshalling services have been provided on an ad hoc basis to cater for particular circumstances. For example the service was delivered as part of the 2009, 2010 and 2011 Keep it Safe campaigns.
- 4.4 It was agreed that to assist with alleviating the strains expected to be placed on the City Centre's night time infrastructure, that the service is reintroduced on a regular basis, initially on a six month pilot, from 1 April 2012.
- 4.5 The service has operated from 0030 – 0430 hrs on both Saturday and Sunday mornings. This has involved three marshals operating from the Market Street taxi rank, providing assistance to visitors seeking either Hackney Carriage or private hire services.
- 4.6 The operation, activities and objectives of the marshals have been consistent with those previously agreed in 2006.
- 4.7 The Taxi Marshalling Service has between 1 April 2012 and 26 August 2012 assisted 20,671 passengers to access Hackney Carriage services.
- 4.8 Feedback from the Police has stated that the scheme is a valuable resource in tackling night time violence. Figures for Market Street are attached at Appendix A to this report.
- 4.9 Feedback from the service has shown that passenger waiting times at peak times are averaging around 30 minutes, usage of the rank has also steadily increased month on month. This has shown that there remains a need and a demand for the Taxi Marshalling Service from visitors to the night time economy.
- 4.10 Based on the success of the initial six month period, it is proposed to continue the pilot to the end of March 2013 and explore opportunities to deliver the service on a permanent basis through developments to other licensing functions.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are direct financial implications arising from this report. The cost of delivering the Taxi Marshalling Service as detailed above at Section 4 would be £8,700 for the duration of the six months. This is to be funded from the Southside Intervention Plan budget of £1.900M approved by Cabinet 25 May 2011; this budget is to be used to finance activities that promote regeneration in the City Centre. (JJ/03/09/2012/P)

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The taxi marshalling scheme will not undermine provisions within the Town and Police Clauses Act 1847, the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 or any associated legislation. (RM/03092012/Z)

7. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 An equalities impact assessment is currently in place for the Taxi Marshalling Service, this identifies no negative equalities implications associated with the service.

8. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no direct environmental implications arising from this report.

9. SCHEDULE OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Trial Taxi Marshalling Scheme, Licensing Committee, 27 September 2006
Pilot Taxi Marshalling Scheme, Licensing Committee, 26 September 2007
Evaluation of Taxi Marshalling Service, Licensing Committee, 11 June 2008
Enhancing the City Centre Night Time Offer, Licensing Committee, 4 April 2012