

Update on taxi vehicle testing

Summary

1. This report is for information only. It outlines the City of York Council's vehicle testing arrangements for hackney carriage and private hire (collectively referred to as taxis in this report), the results of recent tests and plans for further improvement including consultation on improving the vehicle licensing conditions.

Recommendations

2. That Members note the contents of the report

Reason: To inform Members of the vehicle testing arrangements, the results of recent tests as well as plans for further service improvement.

Background

3. The City of York Council's Taxi Licensing Policy states:

[Annual Vehicle Safety Inspection]

16.1 'The Council needs to be satisfied that licensed vehicles operating within its area are safe to do so. All vehicles are required to undergo an inspection conducted by an approved mechanic at the Council's workshop at the Eco Depot, Hazel Court, York, prior to being licensed and annually thereafter.

[Vehicles over 5 years old – additional safety inspection/MOT]

16.2 Vehicles exceeding five years old on the day the vehicle licence is issued (calculated from the date of first registration with the DVLA), will be subject to two vehicle inspections in any 12 month period. One inspection shall be the initial grant or annual inspection conducted by

the Council, the second inspection will take place approximately 6 months from the date of the initial grant of the vehicle licence or annual inspection at a date determined by the Council and can be completed by:

a) presenting the vehicle for inspection by the Council's vehicle examiner within a time scale determined by the Council or

b) successfully completing a MOT test within a time scale determined by the council.

[The two aspects of the inspection i.e. mechanical check and licence conditions check]

16.3 The vehicle inspection carried out by the Council will consist of two parts which will comprise a mechanical examination and an inspection of the condition and fittings of the vehicle, to ensure that the vehicle conforms with the standard conditions attached to the taxi and private hire vehicle licences [these can be found in the Annexes of the policy].

16.4 The purpose of the mechanical examination is to ensure that the vehicle is in a road worthy condition, this will be in the form of an MOT standard examination conducted in accordance with the requirements of DVSA. The remainder of the inspection carried out by the taxi licensing vehicle inspector will be to ensure that the vehicle is both safe and comfortable and suitable for transporting members of the public. Any vehicle failing the test will be required to have a retest. If appropriate the licence will be suspended.

16.5 It will be the proprietor's responsibility to ensure that their licensed vehicle is roadworthy, maintained to the Council's standards and fit for purposes of hire and reward at all times.

[Taxi meters]

17.1 It is a legal requirement that taximeters must be fitted within hackney carriage vehicles, but optional for private hire vehicles.

17.2 Taximeters must be approved by the Council. Vehicles equipped with a taximeter must submit the meter for a test. Meters are tested over the measured distance located on Fulford Road by the taxi licensing vehicle inspector.

[Departure from the policy]

1.5 Notwithstanding the existence of this policy, each application or enforcement measure will be considered on its own merits. Where it is necessary for the Council to depart from the policy, clear and compelling reasons will be given for doing so.

4. The vehicle checks are undertaken by a qualified MOT tester in Fleet Services. In practice they only carry out the annual inspection as, at the 6 month point (for vehicles over 5 years old), it is common practice for taxi drivers to use an MOT as evidence of the vehicle's continued roadworthiness (rather than submit the vehicle for a 6 monthly check by our examiners). The annual inspection is therefore an important safety check. Furthermore, Council officers from Fleet Services and Licensing also undertake 'enforcement inspections' in partnership with officers from the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA), North Yorkshire Police and other Local Licensing Authorities whereby vehicles are randomly brought in for examination. These enforcement inspections will typically take place two to three times a year.
5. With regards to testing, prior to January this year, Fleet Services undertook the mechanical aspects of the test i.e. ensured the vehicle met the standards of an MOT. A specialist Taxi Licensing Officer (a former Police Vehicle Examiner, employed on a casual basis through Work with York) undertook the checks to ensure the vehicle complied with the licence conditions in respect of the licensing conditions including matters of passenger comfort and vehicle signage. Vehicles were examined in 'blocks' throughout the year and new vehicles/repaired vehicles were 'by appointment' (usually within a few days subject the specialist taxi licensing officers availability). In January, Fleet Services took on the entire process with a view to making service improvements. As a result, we have been able to spread appointments throughout the day and ensure that 're-tests' and slots for new vehicles/accident damaged vehicles are much more readily available.
6. The number of tests undertaken and the pass rates since Fleet Services took over the entire process are shown in the following tables (data is not available from before this time).

FIRST TEST - PASS / FAIL (JAN TO JUN)

OUTCOME	HACKNEY	PRIVATE HIRE	ALL
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PASS	53	183	240
FAIL	33	85	118
TOTAL	86	268	358
% PASS	62%	68%	67%
% FAIL	38%	32%	33%

7. It can be seen that two thirds of vehicles are passing first time.
8. When a vehicle 'fails', it must undergo a re-test. However, officers have historically used their discretion when to apply the fee which is currently £35.25. Following feedback from the trade, and to introduce consistency in the use of this discretion, officers apply the re-test fee if the vehicle is required to be put on the ramp for the re-check e.g. brakes, suspension, steering failures. New tyres, lights, signage etc. which do not require a vehicle to be put on a ramp do not attract a re-test fee (although it still takes a 're-test slot').
9. The following table shows the number of vehicles being charged/not charged for a re-test.

RE-TESTS BY MONTH

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	ALL
CHARGED	5	3	11	7	9	15	50
NOT CHARGED	18	14	7	2	11	9	61
TOTAL	23	17	18	9	20	24	111
% CHARGED	22%	18%	61%	78%	45%	63%	45%
% NOT CHARGED	78%	82%	39%	22%	55%	38%	55%

10. The table shows that just over half the taxi drivers are charged for a re-test. This however means that many drivers are failing the inspection on things that ought to be readily identifiable prior to the test such as lights, signage and tyre wear. For the avoidance of doubt, there is no financial incentive to the council in 'failing drivers'. The charges are set on a cost recovery basis.. Any excess recovery/under recovery goes to the dedicated taxi account.

Further Service Improvements

11. Although the mechanical requirements and conditions are stated in the taxi licensing policy, to help reduce the number of re-tests we are arranging to display a copy of the test sheet (used by the mechanics) on the council website. This should make it even easier for drivers to prepare their vehicle for the test.
12. The mechanics will be taking photographs of any faults found on the vehicle to share with the driver after the test. New technology is being implemented in Fleet Services which may enable the faults to be recorded by video.
13. Fleet services are exploring a dedicated taxi waiting area (rather than the reception area currently used) with a monitor showing 'live coverage' of the inspection taking place.
14. As an approved MOT testing station, Fleet Services are in a position offer an MOT in addition to the taxi test at a discounted rate (around £20) as part of the taxi test. However, this is only likely to benefit those drivers with taxis between 3 and 5 years old as only vehicles over three years old require an MOT, and after 5 years most drivers use their own MOT station as the 6 month check – although taxi drivers could of course use Fleet Services for this MOT. It should however be noted that Fleet Services do not provide repairs in the event of a test failure, and therefore the vehicle will need to be taken elsewhere for repairs/brought back for re-test.
15. As highlighted in an earlier report to this committee, we intend to consult the trade and wider public in the near future about increasing the minimum mechanical standards for vehicles above the current MOT (which is the very minimum standard for roadworthiness).
16. And finally, as is the practice elsewhere, we are exploring the potential for the agents who calibrate the meters after fare changes to 'seal the meters', and provide a signed certificate of accuracy to the driver to submit as part of the test. This will avoid the need for an officer to accompany drivers over the measured mile and thereafter 'seal the meter'. This will save drivers a considerable amount of time on the test. Instead, officers will carry out a random selection of meter tests at random points throughout the year to ensure they are recording the fare accurately.

Consultation

17. There is no consultation associated with this report as it is simply updating Members on the position in relation to vehicle testing. There is however consultation planned in the coming months in respect of increasing the standards.

Options and analysis

18. There are no options or analysis as this report is, for information only and not seeking a decision.

Council Priorities

23. The taxi licensing functions undertaken by the Council are statutory, supporting the new and existing trade, as well as local residents and visitors. Through these functions, the policy supports the Council's Plan of a good quality of life for everyone.

Implications

24. The direct implications arising from this report are:
 - (a) **Financial** – There are no financial implications associated with this report. As described in the report, the cost of vehicle testing is met from the dedicated taxi account.
 - (b) **Human Resources (HR)** - There are no HR implications.
 - (c) **Equalities** – Taxis are a key mode of transport for people with a disability. The inspections are an important check for compliance with the many conditions that are in place for the benefit of such customers such as ensuring they are clean and tidy and there is room for a folded wheelchair by way of examples.
 - (d) **Legal** – There are no legal implications.
 - (e) **Crime and Disorder** – There are no legal implications.
 - (f) **Information Technology (IT)** - There are no IT implications.
 - (g) **Property** - There are no property implications.
 - (h) **Other** - There are no other implications.

Risk Management

25. There are no changes in risk associated with this report.

Contact Details

Author:	Chief Officer Responsible for the report:		
Matt Boxall Head of Public Protection 01904 551515	James Gilchrist Director Environment, Transport and Planning		
	Report Approved	√	Date 30.07.2021
Specialist Implications Officer(s) Sandra Branigan – Senior Solicitor, Legal Services			
Wards Affected:	All	√	
For further information please contact the author of the report			

Background papers

<https://www.york.gov.uk/downloads/file/137/taxi-licensing-policy>

Annexes - None