



Gambling, Licensing & Regulatory Committee 16 September 2013

Report from the Assistant Director – Housing and Community Safety

Taxi Licensing Consultation

Summary

1. This report asks Members to consider responses to a recent consultation carried out regarding a taxi licensing policy.

Background

2. A report was brought to the Gambling, Licensing and Regulatory Committee on the 13 July 2011 following a review of the Taxi Licensing Policy. The policy review was carried out by a Task Group set up by the Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
3. Following the decision of the Committee on 13 July 2011 a further report was brought to Committee on 25 April 2012, asking members to approve an amended Taxi Licensing Policy. At this meeting members asked officers to consult on a taxi licensing policy.
4. This consultation asked peoples view on:
 - Numbers of hackney carriage vehicles;
 - Wheelchair accessible hackney carriage vehicles; and
 - Low emission hackney carriage and private hire vehicles.
5. At the time of the consultation City of York Council licensed 183 taxis (hackney carriage vehicles), 45 of these vehicles are wheelchair accessible and 576 private hire vehicles.
6. A copy of the consultation questions can be found at annex 1.

Unmet Demand Survey

7. As the City of York Council regulates the number of hackney carriage vehicle licenses issued it is 'best practice' to carry out an unmet demand survey once every 3 years. The last survey was carried out by Halcrow in 2011. This survey identified that there is no evidence of significant unmet demand for hackney carriages in York.

Consultation

6. A formal consultation took place between 8 April and 20 May 2013. A number of businesses/agencies/people were consulted these include all Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Associations, Ward Councillors, groups that represent the disabled, older people, all hospitals, large hotels, theatres, cinemas, museums, large pubs/bars/nightclubs, York Racecourse, universities, colleges, and it was included in the council Buzz newsletter. The main points asked in the consultation related to people's views on policies regarding to numbers of taxis, wheelchair accessible vehicles and low emission vehicles. The responses to the consultation can be found at annex 2.

Options

7. Option 1 – Ask officers to produce a new policy regarding hackney carriage vehicle numbers, wheelchair accessible hackney carriage vehicles and low emission vehicles.
8. Option 2 – To retain the existing policy and reconsider the decision made by committee on 25th April 2012 to suspend the granting of two new hackney carriage vehicle licenses on a 6 monthly basis to new wheelchair accessible vehicles and ask to undertake a further unmet demand survey in 2014.

Analysis

9. In total 54 people responded as to the consultation. When considering this low return rate, whilst it clearly disappointing that more people have not responded it does provide us with an updated picture of what stakeholders feel about the policy. However, this could be viewed that those who didn't respond believed that the current system operators fine and there is no

need to respond. Details of responses to questions relating to vehicles numbers, wheelchair accessible vehicles and low emission vehicles are as follows:

a. Question 1 - Do you think York has enough licensed taxis operating in the city?

68.5% of respondents believe that York has enough taxis operating in the city, 26% believe that there are not enough taxis and 5.5% didn't know.

One respondent has suggested that when the unmet demand survey is carried out prior notice should not be given to the trade as many taxis are double or triple driven.

b. Question 4 - Do you think that we have enough wheelchair accessible taxis?

43% of respondents believe that York has enough wheelchair accessible taxis, 11% believe that there are not enough wheelchair accessible taxis and 46% didn't know.

One respondent states that as a wheelchair accessible private hire vehicles driver they do between 20 – 40 jobs a week, and that Station Taxis will not take bookings for wheelchair accessible vehicles. Another respondent has stated that they rarely see a wheelchair accessible vehicle.

c. Question 7 – We currently have a policy that new taxis licences will only be issued to wheelchair accessible vehicles. Should this policy remain as it is, or should the policy be updated to also include low emission vehicles as well?

13% of respondents believe that York should keep their current policy of only issuing licences to wheelchair accessible vehicles. 39% believe the policy should be updated to also include low emission vehicles. 16.5% believe the policy should only include low emission wheelchair accessible vehicles. 31.5% believe that a vehicle type policy should not be in place.

d. Question 8 – Do you believe that we should introduce a policy that new private hire vehicle licences will only be issued to low emission vehicles?

55.5% of respondents believe that York should introduce a policy that new private hire vehicles licences will only be issued to low emission vehicles. 42.5% believe that a policy should not be introduced. 2% didn't know.

- e. Question 9 – Do you believe that we should introduce a policy that all replacement vehicles for both taxis and private hire should be low emission vehicles?

48% of respondents believe that York should introduce a policy that all replacement vehicles for both taxis and private hire should be low emission vehicles. 46% believe that a policy should not be introduced. 6% didn't know.

- f. A number of other comments were received which did not relate directly to the questions:

- All private hire vehicles should be converted to hackney carriage, there is no point in keeping the private hire classification.
- There are far too many wheelchair friendly taxis already. They are uncomfortable to travel in and also difficult to climb into in the first place. My husband and I plus numerous other people we see hover around until a saloon/normal taxi becomes available. Elderly people including my parents cannot use them either. They have become an obsession and the ranks are full of them although virtually nobody, including the wheelchair users I know don't want them. They tell me that they want to get out of the wheelchair and travel like anybody else in a car seat instead of being labelled as 'different'.
- I have been concerned for a long time that licenses are bought up in batches by middlemen and then sold or leased on in some way on an individual basis so that the middlemen are making a considerable profit. I don't believe the Council should permit middlemen to do this and would like to see a restriction on the number of licenses any individual can hold. If anyone is to make a profit out of the actual licences it should be the Council itself, with savings to Council tax payers in consequence.

- Low emission vehicles are more fuel efficient and cheaper to tax. It seems if taxi drivers could afford one they would. This policy seems to create hassle for lower-income prospective taxi drivers, for what is in essence a very trivial impact on pollution, when compared with i.e. many high emission 4x4s on the road. But putting in measures against 4x4s would only affect the rich.
 - Taxi ranks late at night are usually well served.
 - There should be no discrimination against the type of vehicle.
10. Option 2 – the policy currently in place regarding hackney carriage vehicles would remain. The current policy being that 2 new hackney carriage vehicle licences will be granted every 6 months to wheelchair accessible vehicles until the next unmet demand survey is carried out. This decision was suspended by members at the committee on 25 April 2012. At this time members instructed officers to suspend the granting of new hackney carriage vehicle licences until the consultation had taken place.
 11. Members must consider if they wish to continue with the policy of issuing 2 new hackney carriage vehicle licences every 6 months until the unmet demand survey is carried out, or continue to suspend this decision until 2014.
 12. The findings from the next unmet demand survey will be brought to this committee to determine the future issue of new hackney carriage vehicle licences.
 13. The introduction of a new policy relating to hackney carriage vehicles numbers and types, and the introduction of a policy relating to low emission hackney carriage and private hire vehicles could be legally challenged by the hackney carriage and/or private hire trades.
 14. As members are aware in 2012 a consultation was undertaken by the Law Commission in relation to reforming the law on taxi and private hire services. At this time licensing authorities are awaiting a draft bill that should be published by the end of 2013. This bill

could include major changes to the way hackney carriage and private hire vehicles are licensed.

Council Priorities

15. The provision of hackney carriage licensing supports the council's priority of 'Get York Moving', providing a 24 hour a day, 7 day a week door to door service for the city.

Implications

16. The issues arising from this report are:
- (a) **Financial** - There are no financial implications.
 - (b) **Human Resources (HR)** - There are no HR implications.
 - (c) **Equalities** - Wheelchair accessible vehicles assist those dependant on a wheelchair for mobility.
 - (d) **Legal** - The introduction of a new Taxi Licensing Policy could be legally challenged by the taxi and/or private hire trade.
 - (e) **Crime and Disorder** - There are no crime and disorder 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

17. There are no known risks associated with this report.

Recommendations

18. That Members:
- Approve Option 2, to retain the existing policy and reconsider the decision made by committee on 25th April 2012 to

suspend the granting of two new hackney carriage vehicle licenses on a 6 monthly basis to new wheelchair accessible vehicles and ask to undertake a further unmet demand survey in 2014.

Reason: The unmet demand survey carried out in 2011 indicated that there was no evidence of significant unmet demand for hackney carriages in York. The results of the consultation do not significantly challenge the evidence of the unmet demand survey. The draft bill regarding reforming the law on taxi and private hire licensing may introduce major changes to legislation and the way taxi and private hire licensing is carried out by authorities.

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Wards Affected:		All	√
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Annexes

- Annex 1 – Consultation questions
- Annex 2 – Consultation responses