

Update on the Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Licensing Policy

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Purpose of the Report

1. The Committee is being provided with an update on the wheelchair accessible vehicle licensing policy. The policy states that at least 20% of licensed Hackney Carriage Vehicles must be wheelchair accessible. When the 20% target has been achieved the Licensing Committee shall be provided with an update and then a review of the Policy should take place to find out if it has achieved the aim of ensuring better access to taxis for disabled passengers.

Public Interest

2. The Council has a policy which says that at least 20% of the licensed Hackney Carriage Vehicles (taxis) must be wheelchair accessible and when this target is met it an update should be provided and the policy reviewed to check if it is ensuring that people who use wheelchairs have better access to taxis

Recommendations

3. That the Licensing Committee:
 - a. Approve investigation to take place to determine if the figure of 20% is ensuring better access to taxis for disabled passengers.
 - b. Approve investigation into the use of the rank for wheelchair accessible vehicles on Old Station Road, Yeovil.

Background

4. Full Council adopted the South Somerset District Council – Taxi Licensing Policy at the meeting of 6th November 2014 and agreed that it was to take effect from 1st April 2015. The policy states at paragraph 6.32 that all new vehicle applications be restricted to purpose built wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV's) until 20% of the total hackney carriage fleet is wheelchair accessible.
5. There are 120 licensed Hackney Carriage Vehicles; 49 of these are wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV) this means that 40.8% of the licensed Hackney Carriage Vehicles are wheelchair accessible (data analysed 13/08/19).
6. The decision that was made at Full Council, on 06 November 2014 is in table 1, below and the relevant sections from the Policy in relation to WAVs are below.

Table 1 Decision made on 06/11/14

<p>Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy</p>	<p>RESOLVED: That the Council:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Approved the introduction an implementation of the South Somerset Taxi Licensing Policy and Guidance with effect from 1st April 2015, subject to recommendation 2 as set out below. 2. Agreed that all those vehicles currently licensed as a Hackney carriage on 1st April 2015 that do not comply with the new policy requirements, be permitted to continue to be licensed as a Hackney Carriage until 31st March 2018. 3. Agreed that all new vehicle applications be restricted to purpose built wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV's) until 20% of the total hackney carriage fleet is wheelchair accessible. A review of this element of the policy will be conducted in a years time or before if this target (20%) is achieved before this date to check whether this policy has achieved the aim of ensuring better access to taxis for disabled passengers. 4. Agreed that Officers report back to the Licensing Committee 12 months after the introduction of the South Somerset Taxi Licensing Policy and Guidance to update Members as to its progress.
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Taxi Licensing Policy 6.30. Accessibility of vehicles

7. 6.31. The licensing authority is aware of developments to review the accessibility requirements of hackney carriage and private hire vehicles through proposed Regulations under the Equality Act 2010 and will, where appropriate, review its accessibility standards in light of any changes to the law.
8. 6.32. In the meantime, and as hackney carriages can be hired on the spot / in the street by customers dealing directly with the driver, the licensing authority believes that anyone should be able to hire a hackney carriage on approach of the driver with the minimum of delay and/or inconvenience. For this purpose, it is the policy of the licensing authority that all hackney carriages should be accessible to disabled people (including – but not only- people who need to travel in a wheelchair). For this reason all new vehicle applications will be restricted to purpose built wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV's). This is subject to review after 12 months or when 20% of the total Hackney carriage fleet is made up of fully wheelchair accessible vehicles. 6.33. As private hire vehicles can only be booked through an operator (i.e. not immediately available for hire), it is the view of the licensing authority that the immediate need for wheelchair accessible vehicles is less essential. For this reason, while private hire operators are encouraged to offer accessible vehicles within their fleet, the licensing authority will not normally require, as a matter of course, private hire vehicles to provide such access.

Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle (WAV) Policy

9. Five requests from licensed Hackney Carriage/Private Hire drivers have been received to request that the Council depart from the Policy and allow non-WAVs to be licensed as Hackney Carriage vehicles. Several other licensed drivers have been in contact to say that they would like to replace their existing licensed vehicle, but would like to licence a non-wheelchair accessible vehicle as they believe that a WAV is not suitable for the type of work they carry out and they have mentioned that some customers who are not in wheelchairs, but have some mobility issues struggle to get into some models of WAV because of the height of the vehicle, some customers prefer travel in a smaller vehicle and will choose those over a WAV when the vehicles are queued up on the rank.

10. Members of the public sometimes make requests for a list of WAVs licensed as Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Vehicles and comments that it is difficult to find a WAV for journeys which take place in the morning and evening have been received. The requests and comments have not been formally recorded.
11. Investigation is required to establish if the policy is meeting demand, exceeding demand or there is a lack of provision for passengers who use wheelchairs as there is not currently enough information to make a proper assessment of this.

WAV Taxi Rank, Old Station Road

12. A Councillor has received comments that the rank on Old Station Road, Yeovil next to the Premier Inn is not being used by taxis. This rank consists of 7 spaces that are only for use by WAVs (pictures in Appendix 1).

Update on the recent Taxi Licensing Consultation

13. The results of the Department of Transport Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing: Protecting Users consultation that the Licensing Committee responded to are still being collated.

Financial Implications

14. None at this stage, however there could be costs involved if the Policy is challenged.

Council Plan Implications

15. To promote a strong and growing economy with thriving urban, rural and land-based businesses
16. To enable health communities which are cohesive, sustainable and enjoy a high quality of life.

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

17. Nothing which affects the report on "greenhouse gas emissions from local authorities own estate and operations".

Equality and Diversity Implications

18. There are no direct equality implications arising from this report which is seeking members' approval to undertake research into whether the current provision of wheelchair accessible taxis is sufficient or whether there is an over or under provision.
19. If members agree to the research being carried out, a further report regarding any proposed changes to the policy as informed by the evidence will be supported by an Equality Impact Assessment.

Privacy Impact Assessment

20. The recommendation is that we investigate the effect of the policy and it is likely that consultation will take place with stakeholders.
21. It will involve processing data we currently hold to inform licensed drivers and operators of the consultation.
22. The information will be used to inform policy.
23. The information gathered would only be kept until any changes to the policy have been made.

24. The data will not be shared or processed externally. Analysis of the data will be published, but personal information will not be shared.

Background Papers

- South Somerset District Council - Taxi Licensing Policy
 - South Somerset District Council decisions taken by South Somerset District Council 6th November 2014
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