



Update on the Taxi Licensing Policy

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Purpose of the Report

To request that the Committee agree that all future requests for non-wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) (less than 5 years old) can be approved by officers without the need to refer to committee, unless the percentage of hackney carriage vehicles that are wheelchair accessible falls to 30%. If and when the percentage reduces to 30% any requests will be referred to the Licensing Committee for a decision.

Public Interest

There is a requirement in the current Taxi Policy for 20% of licensed hackney carriage vehicles to be wheelchair accessible. Currently there are 117 licensed hackney carriages and 47 of these are wheelchair accessible meaning that approximately 40% of vehicles are wheelchair accessible. This significantly exceeds the required percentage. Applicants wishing to request a licence for a non-WAV, have to date been referred to the Licensing Committee for a decision. This report is requesting that whilst the percentage of WAVs remains higher than required by our policy that officers can process the licence application without the need for referral to the committee. If this request is approved it will mean that taxi operators are able to get vehicles on the road quicker and it will save Officer and Committee time.

Recommendation

That the Licensing Committee agree that officers can process and grant applications for non-WAVs without the need for referral to committee unless the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles falls back to 30%.

Background

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. Section 6.30 of the policy contains the relevant provisions and 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.

Also in section 6.32 the policy required that once the percentage reached or exceeded 20% the policy would be reviewed. This review is underway but has been delayed due to covid work demands.

For applications of WAVs, officers will process these and issue licences accordingly. Whilst the percentage of WAVs was lower than 20% any requests for non-WAVs had to be referred to committee as it was a departure from our agreed policy.

This situation has now changed. There are currently 117 licensed Hackney Carriage Vehicles; 47 of these are WAV which means that the percentage of the licensed Hackney Carriage Vehicles that are wheelchair accessible is around 40%, significantly above the required percentage (data analysed 19/11/2020).

Twenty-seven requests to licence non-WAVs have been considered by the Committee and all were approved.

Approval of non-wheelchair accessible vehicles

If the recommendation is approved it would be possible to grant licences (subject to the usual application process and vehicle test) for non WAVs (less than 5 years old) hackney carriages without the need to submit a request and wait for the outcome at the Committee meeting.

The current policy is under review and the percentage of fleet split may change in future or be removed altogether. At the last committee it was agreed that our policy be aligned with other Somerset authorities. This work is ongoing and was awaiting the outcome of a consultation process by Sedgemoor DC. This is now concluded with minimal comment and work to align our policy will now continue.

Officers would draw the committees' attention to a report by Disabled Persons Advisory Committee (DPTAC) which was published recently in August 2020. This report highlights that whilst there is a need for WAVs, these in themselves can pose difficulties for other disability groups who do not use a wheel chair. The report therefore recommends a mixed fleet of wheelchair accessible and conventional cars to meet the needs of all passengers. The contents of the report will be considered during the review of the policy.

Financial Implications

- Officer time to review Policy.
- The above costs associated costs can be met from existing budgets.
- Reduction in time spent on writing reports for individual requests and time spent considering the reports by the Committee.



Council Plan Implications

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

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implications

There are no carbon emission implications of this report.

Equality and Diversity Implications

- There are no direct equality implications arising from this report.
- 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

No change to processing of personal data.

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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