

**LICENSING
COMMITTEE**

13th June 2016

**RESULTS OF ADDITIONAL CONSULTATION ON WHEELCHAIR
ACCESSIBLE HACKNEY CARRIAGES**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Rod Laight
Portfolio Holder Consulted	No
Relevant Head of Service	Simon Wilkes - Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services
Wards Affected	All Wards
Ward Councillor Consulted	N/A
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

During the course of 2015 consultation was carried out in relation to a number of proposed amendments to the Council's policies and procedures relating to hackney carriage and private hire licensing.

The results of this consultation were considered by the Licensing Committee on 9 November 2015. At that meeting Members requested that further consultations be carried out in relation to the provision of wheelchair accessible vehicles with relevant agencies / organisations and licence holders.

The results of these additional consultations are now being reported back to the Licensing Committee.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to consider the results of the additional consultation exercise and RESOLVE whether they feel there is sufficient evidence to justify making any amendments to the Council's policies in relation to WAVs or if there are other options they wish to explore to increase the number of WAVs licensed as hackney carriages in the Bromsgrove district.

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

- 3.1 The costs involved in carrying out the additional consultations were met from existing budgets held by Worcestershire Regulatory Services.

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Legal Implications

- 3.2 The Council's policy in relation to the operation of Private Hire Licences and Hackney Carriage Licences are set out in the Taxi Handbook and associated guidance issued by the Council. Any amendments made to Policy by the Licensing Committee, following consultation, will be incorporated into the Policy and notified to the taxi trade.

Service / Operational Implications

- 3.3 During the course of 2015 consultation was carried out in relation to a number of proposed amendments to the Council's policies and procedures relating to hackney carriage and private hire licensing.
- 3.4 One of the proposals consulted upon was:
- "The Council is considering introducing a requirement that, from a specified future date, all new vehicles being licensed at Hackney Carriage Vehicles must be a wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV). WAV means a vehicle capable of carrying a wheelchair user whilst they remain seated in their wheelchair"**
- 3.5 The effect of this policy change would be to see the gradual phasing out of "saloon" type vehicles so that ten years after the Policy comes into effect all vehicles licensed by the Council to be used as Hackney Carriages should be WAVs.
- 3.6 This proposal was met with considerable opposition from those in the hackney carriage and private hire trade who responded during the consultation exercise. Many cited fears over the costs involved in purchasing and maintaining WAVs and stated that there was no significant demand for such vehicles in the Bromsgrove District.
- 3.7 However Members remained concerned about the low number of WAVs that the Council currently licenses to be used as hackney carriages and felt that further consultation work was required in order to ascertain if there was currently an unmet demand for WAVs as Hackney Carriages within the district or if this was the perception.
- 3.8 Members also discussed the possibility of introducing incentives to encourage drivers to purchase and operate WAVs. The Senior Licensing Practitioner agreed that licensing officers could carry out an additional consultation with the taxi trade and look at possible ways to incentivise them to purchase and operate WAVs.

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- 3.9 Following the Licensing Committee meeting in November, additional consultation work has been carried out. Licence holders were all sent a copy of the questionnaire at **Appendix 1** with a newsletter that was posted to all licence holders in late November.
- 3.10 Additionally the consultation questionnaire at **Appendix 2** was sent to all members of the Bromsgrove Engagement and Equalities Forum, all members of Bromsgrove and Redditch Network (BARN), the Worcestershire and Warwickshire Royal Voluntary Service and the Life After Stroke Centre.
- 3.11 The consultation questionnaire at **Appendix 2** was also placed on the Council's website and a press release was used to draw attention to the consultation being undertaken and social media channels were also utilised for this purpose.
- 3.12 Just two responses were returned from licence holders. These can be viewed at **Appendix 3**. Neither of the respondents currently own a hackney carriage capable of carrying a passenger who remains seated in their wheelchair. Neither applicant identified any factors that would encourage them to purchase such a vehicle.
- 3.13 Seven surveys were received to the consultation survey sent out via the other relevant organisations referred to in paragraph 3.10 and placed on the Council's website. A table showing the responses to each question is at **Appendix 4**.
- 3.14 The majority (71%) of respondents strongly agree that there are not enough wheelchair accessible taxis in Bromsgrove. Only one respondent agreed that they found wheelchair accessible vehicles difficult to access and preferred saloon style vehicles.
- 3.15 6 out of the 7 respondents either use a wheelchair or care for a person who does. Of these the vast majority of respondents said that they or the person they care for prefers to travel in a taxi whilst remaining seated in their wheelchair. All of the respondents also agreed that they currently book taxis in advance that meets their needs. The majority of respondents were put off from trying to obtain a taxi at a rank as they are unlikely to find a vehicle that meets their needs.

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- 3.16 Members are asked to consider the responses received during these additional consultations and decide whether they feel there is sufficient evidence to make any further amendment to the Council's policies in relation to WAVs or if there are other options they wish to explore to increase the number of WAVs licensed as hackney carriages in the Bromsgrove district.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 The carrying out of consultation on the proposals under consideration was intended to mitigate any risks associated with changing the Council's policies without sufficient evidence to justify such changes.

5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Consultation Document (Licence Holders)
Appendix 2 – Consultation Document (General)
Appendix 3 – Responses from licence holders
Appendix 4 – Summary of the responses from the public

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