

LICENSING COMMITTEE (NON LICENSING ACT 2003 FUNCTIONS)

Agenda Item 18

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Hackney Carriage Unmet Demand Survey and Consultation on Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Provision		
Date of Meeting:	17 November 2011		
Report of:	Head of Planning and Public Protection		
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Ward(s) affected:	All		

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 That the Committee be aware that a Hackney Carriage "Unmet Demand Survey" will be undertaken during 2012 to determine any unmet demand for Hackney Carriages.
- 1.2 That the survey will look at current policies and provision of hackney carriage vehicles in the context of other similar authorities in England.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That members confirm their support for a restricted numbers policy for hackney carriage vehicles with managed growth of five additional WAV plates issued annually to wheelchair accessible vehicles. This policy to be reviewed following the consultants report.
- 2.2 That any report should compare current policies and provision with other similar authorities in England to provide evidence in relation to the perceived or actual problem of availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles and consultation with local stakeholders.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 The council licences hackney carriage vehicles and private hire vehicles. Hackney Carriages (taxis) can ply for hire in the streets, at taxi ranks and accept prior bookings whereas Private Hire vehicles can only accept work where a prior booking has been made through a private hire operator. There is no limit on the number of private hire vehicle licences.
- 3.2 The Transport Act, 1985 s16 allows the council to limit the number providing it is satisfied that there is no significant demand for hackney carriages, which is unmet. The only acceptable method of determining demand is by an independent survey. (Estimated to be in the region of £20K dependant on scope of the survey and result of a tendering process).

- 3.3 A local licensing authority in the event of a challenge to a decision to refuse a licence would have to establish to the courts that it had, reasonably, been satisfied that there was no significant unmet demand. An interval of three years is commonly regarded as the maximum reasonable period between surveys.
- 3.4 Most local licensing authorities do not impose quantity restrictions and the Department for Transport regards that as best practice. Where restrictions are imposed, the Department for Transport urges that the matter should be regularly reconsidered and further urges that the issue to be addressed first is whether the restrictions should continue at all.
- 3.5 In most cases where quantity restrictions are imposed, vehicle licence plates command a premium, often of tens of thousands of pounds. This indicates that there are people who want to enter the taxi market and provide a service to the public, but who are being prevented from doing so by the quantity restrictions.
- 3.6 An unmet demand survey was carried out in 2009 following which committee agreed to continue with a policy of managed growth, currently 5 new licences a year issued in May. This policy was again confirmed by committee in September 2010 following the Equalities Review of Taxis licensing.
- 3.7 Currently in Brighton & Hove there are 540 Hackney Carriage vehicles licensed of which 143 wheelchair accessible and 457 Private Hire Vehicles of which only 33 are wheelchair accessible. There are 1157 Hackney Carriage Licensed Drivers and 586 Private Hire Licensed Drivers.
- 3.8 The report would compare Brighton and Hove provision and policy to other similar authorities to obtain the following information:
- Number of PH and HC in fleet
 - Number of wheelchair accessible PH and HC in fleet.
 - Entry control policy
 - Provision in terms of population per HC
 - Provision population per vehicle (HC and PH)
 - Census data on social make up: to include age profiles, proportion registered disabled etc.
 - This would help show if there are any notable differences in provision to either support current policy or provide a case for some change in particular with regard to wheelchair accessible vehicles.
- 3.9 The consultation would include mystery shopper assessment to determine differences in waiting times for wheelchair accessible vehicles and to establish if the situation has changed since the last survey and if the differentials in waiting times have reduced or increased as new vehicles have been introduced. It would also include face to face consultation with stakeholders.
- 3.10 The Department for Transport has published guidelines for best practice with regard to quantity restrictions and the conduct of surveys. The Current advice from The Department of Transport is given in Appendix 1.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

- 4.1 This matter has been discussed at the council's hackney carriage and private hire consultation forum where all members of that forum are free to express their opinions. Forum members are supportive of an unmet demand survey.

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 Financial Implications:

[Revenue:

The fee rates for Hackney Carriages are set at a level that it is reasonably assumed will meet the costs of providing the service. Therefore, this will include the cost of the Unmet Demand Survey.

If the number of Hackney Carriages is allowed to increase this will not necessarily result in an increase in overall income, as it may be offset by a reduction in private hire vehicles.

If the decision is taken to continue with a limitation policy, then there is the possibility of a legal challenge to the decision in court. Any costs associated with this would need to be met from within existing budgets, funded by fee income.

Finance Officer Consulted: Name Karen Brookshaw Date: 30/09/11

5.1 Legal Implications:

Before a local authority can refuse an application for a hackney carriage vehicle licence in order to limit the number of licensed taxis, it must be satisfied that there is no significant demand for the services of taxis within its area which is unmet. If the local authority is so satisfied, a discretion to refuse the licence arises. Any applicant whose application for a licence is refused has a right of appeal to the Crown Court.

Section 70 (1) (c) of the Local Government (Miscellaneous) Provisions Act 1976 provides that a licensing authority may charge such fees for the grant of vehicle licences as may be sufficient in the aggregate to cover in whole or in part any reasonable administrative or other costs in connection with the control and supervision of hackney carriages. The costs of the survey may therefore properly be recovered through hackney carriage vehicle licence fees.

Lawyer Consulted: Name Liz Woodley Date: 27/09/11

5.2 Equalities Implications:

The survey will provide information from various categories of society in Brighton & Hove, which the council will use to ensure that taxis in the city are licensed to best serve the needs of all. The results will assist the Council in planning for the future ensuring that no group of persons will be disadvantaged through using taxis.

5.3 Sustainability Implications:

The role of the taxi trade is included in the Local Transport Plan, which identifies it as a key element in providing sustainable transport choices. It creates important links in the transport network to other forms of sustainable transport providing a seamless connection. It will contribute to three of the government's four shared transport priorities – reducing congestion, improving air quality and accessibility. Use of taxis for school transport, licensed vehicles using bus lanes, locating ranks at railway stations and the city coach station, approved use of liquid petroleum gas all contribute to reducing congestion and moving passengers quickly.

5.4 Crime & Disorder Implications:

Sufficient late night transport to reduce public place violent crime is recognised in the community safety, crime reduction and drugs strategy.

5.5 Risk and Opportunity Management Implications:

None.

5.6 Public Health Implications:

None.

5.7 Corporate / Citywide Implications:

Tourism needs to provide a warm welcome to visitors and the tourism strategy depends upon effective partnership with transport operators particularly to achieve safe late night dispersal for the nighttime economy.

6. **EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):**

Not undertaking a hackney carriage unmet demand survey would preclude the council maintaining a restricted numbers policy for hackney carriages.

7. **REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

To ask members to support a hackney carriage unmet demand survey to show if there is any significant unmet demand for hackney carriages and determine if there are any notable differences in provision with regard to wheelchair accessible vehicles.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. The Department for Transport has published guidelines for best practice with regard to quantity restrictions and the conduct of surveys.

Documents in Members' Rooms

None.

Background Documents

None.

