

Minute extract from Licensing & Regulation Committee held 15 September 2020

1. **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Four members of the public spoke regarding report LR535 and responded to questions from Committee Members, as summarised briefly below.

John Fairey

Opposed the “end of life” provisions for vehicles stating it would make his business unviable and also opposed the proposal for permanent signage on vehicles as his vehicles were used for other purposes at times.

John Boardman

Concern regarding the provision allowing vehicles to accommodate only one wheelchair user and one other passenger as believed this could result in larger groups having to use two vehicles, increasing the cost. Believed the training for drivers on accommodating wheelchair users was inadequate at times. Did not consider there was a requirement for a colour scheme and expressed concern that permanent signage could increase the risk for criminal damage to vehicles when not in use.

Barry Hussey

Concurred with previous comments regarding the risks caused by permanent signs, including permanent damage to vehicles when removed for vehicle on-sale. Believed magnetic signs would be preferable. Agreed with concerns raised by Mr Boardman about the implications of licensing smaller vehicles which could accommodate one wheelchair user and only one other passenger. Had no objection to the proposal for a colour scheme for vehicles provided it was a readily available colour.

Jaleel Iqbal

Opposed the use of rear loading vehicles as there was inadequate space on taxi ranks to allow this and believed the policy should allow for side-loading only with either three or five passengers (in addition to a wheelchair user). Believed the requirement for additional signage should apply to private hire vehicles only as hackney carriages already had permanent roof signs.

The Chairperson thanked everyone for their contributions which would be taken into account by the Committee in consideration of report LR535.

2. **REVIEW OF HACKNEY CARRIAGE & PRIVATE HIRE POLICY PHASE 2 (LR535)**

The Licensing Officer introduced the report and outlined the main proposed changes to the policy, as shown in Appendix 1 to the report. This included the proposal that all new drivers must complete and pass disability awareness

training, with the same requirement on existing drivers by 31 August 2021. She emphasised that the Council's first consideration must always be public safety. The Committee noted that the Department of Transport introduced new statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards in July 2020 and these would be reviewed in line with the policy later in the year.

At the invitation of the Chairperson, Councillor Porter addressed the Committee in support of the proposed policy, highlighting that the working party set up to oversee the policy review had been mindful of the financial challenges facing the taxi trade, particularly during the Covid pandemic. However, the primary consideration was the safety of the public.

Some Members expressed concern that the working party only included two members, with no representation from the opposition party. These concerns were noted, although it was highlighted that the principle of membership had been established under a previous administration.

The Licensing Officer, Service Lead: Public Protection and Councillor Porter responded to a number of detailed questions from Committee Members on the policy as proposed. This included explaining the rationale behind proposing a single colour (rather than "wrapping" a vehicle, as for example in London), the reason why permanent signage was proposed rather than magnetic removable signage and the proposed "end of life" maximum age for vehicles. The rationale had considered the financial implications for the drivers but balanced against the public safety priority. It had also had regard to the results of the public consultation, included at appendix 2 to the report and it was confirmed that in addition to the general public, taxi drivers had been given the opportunity to participate in the consultation.

The Service Lead: Public Protection emphasised that if the policy was agreed, there was a lead in period before drivers would be required to adhere to the new requirements.

With regard to safeguarding, the Service Lead and Licensing Officer confirmed that the frequency of the training was a matter for future consideration. It was noted that new Department of Transport standards required that every driver undertake a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) renewal check every six months.

With regard to some queries expressed during public participation about the wording of paragraph 5.2 of the policy, the Committee considered the proposed amendment was clear in allowing disabled access vehicles to be *either* side *or* rear loading.

**RECOMMENDED (TO CABINET):**

**That the draft Policy as amended (and set out in Appendix 1 to the report) be approved for adoption.**