

Report to the Licensing Committee



Date of meeting: 15 October 2008

**Epping Forest
District Council**

Subject: Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Consultation Exercise.

Responsible Officer: Alison Mitchell (01992–564017).

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992–564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) To authorise a consultation exercise with a view to the introduction of:**
 - (a) a knowledge test prior to the issue of a hackney carriage / private drivers licence;**
 - (b) incentives for the use of 'green' vehicles; and**
 - (c) incentives for the use of vehicles for use by disabled people.**

Report:

1. The Senior Licensing Officer has reviewed the licensing of taxis in the district and compared the conditions imposed on the grant of taxi licences in neighbouring districts. Members have also asked that the Council should look at the introduction of incentives for 'green' vehicles and those adapted for use by the disabled. She would consider that it would be useful to carry out a consultation exercise with a view to the introduction of changes in the Council's policies. The result of the consultation would be reported back to the next meeting of this committee.

A Knowledge Test

2. Other neighbouring authorities require new applicants to undertake a knowledge test. If members considered that a test should be introduced in this area it is proposed that the test should consist of a list of questions that the officer processing the application would ask.

3. It is considered that this test would lead to an improvement in the service offered to members of the public using the taxi. This should be at no extra cost to the Council or the applicant. The effectiveness would be kept under review.

Incentives for 'Green' Vehicles

4. The Council may wish to consider granting incentives to the owners of green vehicles. Green vehicles are usually hybrid vehicles part battery powered and part fuel. There are concerns that when looking at these vehicles and how environmentally friendly account may not be taken of the carbon use to produce the battery and they may not be more economical than a good diesel vehicle. It is also possible to encourage the use of cars with low emissions. This could be looked into as part of the consultation.

5. It is open to the Council to give an incentive to any operator of a green taxi. This would reduce the income from taxi licensing. The Council could not recover its loss by increasing the fee in respect of other vehicles as by statute it is only entitled to charge an amount that covers the cost of issue.

6. However, encouraging the greater use of green taxis would meet one of the objectives in the Council's Plan to protect the environment in the district.

Incentives for Vehicles adapted for Disabled Passengers

7. The Council could consider the introduction of a reduced licence fee for vehicles. Again this would have the effect of reducing income. The Council could include a list of taxi operators who have such vehicles on its website which may act as an incentive.

A Driver's Test

8. Some authorities insist on training for licence holders including customer care courses and driving skills updates. These courses are expensive and it is considered that the existing driving test is adequate.

Liveried Vehicles

9. If the Council introduced a requirement for liveried hackney carriages this would likely to be resisted by local firms and drivers, as this has not been a requirement in the past. It would impose an additional expense on owners.

Fixed Fares

10. Epping Forest is one of the few authorities in this area that does not insist on meters being installed in vehicles and this has led to numerous complaints from the public, especially disabled passengers, that drivers set high fares. They express the belief that this would not happen if the Council set the fares.

11. Research has been carried out as to the costs of installing and monitoring the use of meters. The cost of the initial installation of a meter is £650. A further charge is incurred if the meter were moved to another vehicle.

12. It would be necessary for inspections to be carried out if meters were to be installed. Enquiries made of two similar sized authorities suggest that an officer would have to be appointed for two days a week to carry out the necessary regular checks on vehicles which involve monitoring over a set route. It is not recommended that set fees be introduced.

Limiting the number of Taxi Drivers licensed

13. This is another area that has been of concern to existing licensed drivers. There have been complaints that the Council is issuing too many licences which adversely affects the income of the drivers.

14. The Council has the power to limit the number of licences granted 'if, but only if, the local licensing authority is satisfied that there is no significant demand for the services of hackney carriages (within the area to which the licence would apply) which is unmet'. Anyone refused a licence could challenge that refusal on those grounds.

15. The guidance from the Department for Transport states that it regards it as best practice

not to impose such limits. It suggests that Council's would have to undertake periodic surveys to ensure that demand is being met and that there is no latent demand (people not attempting to use taxis because of delays etc). This type of research would be time consuming and difficult to prove that the demands have not been met. It is not proposed that limits should be imposed on the numbers of drivers.

Resource Implications:

Consultation will be carried out using existing budgets.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.
The Town Police Clauses Act 1847.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

None.

Consultation Undertaken:

None.

Background Papers:

None.

Impact Assessments:

Not undertaken.