

## **Report to Licensing Committee**

**Date of meeting: 15 April 2009**

**Subject: Consultation undertaken with regards to Taxis in the District**

**Officer contact for further information: Kim Tuckey**

**Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry**



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### **Recommendation:**

- 1. Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Vehicles Drivers are not required to undertake a knowledge test.**
- 2. That the drivers are not required to undertake a competency test.**
- 3. To look to ways to advertise the availability of taxis that have been specially adapted for use by disabled people and to review whether this has been of assistance after one year.**
- 4. To take no action with regards to imposing conditions on vehicles relating to green issues.**

### **Report:**

1. The Licensing Committee instructed officers to carry out a consultation regarding:
  - The imposition of a 'knowledge' test for hackney carriage drivers and private hire vehicle drivers
  - Whether drivers should undertake a competency test
  - Access for disabled people to taxis, and
  - Incentives for Green Vehicles.
2. The results of the consultation are attached as an appendix and this report considers the results of the consultation.

### **Knowledge Test**

3. Members will note that the result of the consultation was in favour of requiring new drivers to undertake a test of the driver's knowledge of the area although some respondents pointed out that most drivers now had a Sat. Nav. system. Most thought that it would only be necessary for a driver to be tested when they received their first licence.
4. Officers have made enquiries as to the resources that would be required to introduce a knowledge test. It is possible to ask a driver to answer questions either by means of a paper test or computer. If a computerized test was used the Council would have to purchase a package at a cost of approximately £3,500.

5. Each test would add up to forty-five minutes to the time currently spent with the driver and further time would be taken in setting the tests, reviewing and up dating them and marking the tests.

6. There will be an estimated two hundred and forty new drivers this year. The current members of staff would not be able to incorporate this additional workload into their work.

7. It is considered that if the Council introduced the tests it would be necessary to employ a new member of staff to supervise these tests for seven hours a week. There is no money in the budget for a computer package or to allow for the employment of another member of staff. If Members wished to introduce a knowledge test then additional resources would have to be put into the budget. There are restrictions on recruitment at present.

8. Government Guidance does recommend that a topographical test is introduced for taxi drivers but considers that as private hire vehicles are hired in advance this is not required in the same detail.

9. Government guidance asks that local authorities consider carefully the cost and any likely benefit of any competency test. It is possible to take a test through the Driving Standards Agency. The cost of this test is £69.00 and the test is a higher a higher standard to that of the driving test. The test includes some safety questions. The nearest test centres are at Barnet, Enfield, Bishops Stortford and Goodmayes.

10. The survey results were mixed but mainly they replies were against asking the drivers to undertake a test.

11. Members may wish to consider whether this would be desirable, as it would add to the cost for the driver of obtaining a licence.

### **Accessibility for Disabled Persons**

12. Disabled persons should be able to have ready access not only to vehicles that they have pre-booked but also those they may wish to hire on the street. The Council should therefore keep the availability of such taxis under review.

13. The cost of a wheelchair accessible taxi can be between £20,000 and £30,000. The cost of a second-hand saloon car is between £6,000 to £8,000. This is based on government figures and it is estimated that most vehicles of this type used as taxis are between three and seven years old.

14. The annual cost of running a wheelchair accessible taxi is £1,000 per year more than a typical saloon car.

15. The result of the survey showed that the majority of people were in favour of more taxis that are specially adapted for disabled people being made available. However, this was not a large majority.

16. The comments made by some taxi drivers who have taxis that are adapted for disabled people that there is no demand. However, feedback from disabled groups indicates an unmet demand. It would appear that there needs to be some mechanism for advertising the disabled taxis so that users know where to find them.

17. Rather than impose extra expenditure on taxi owners at this time it is suggested that the Council look to ways to publicize the disabled taxis without endorsing them. The provision of this service will be kept under review.

## **Environmental Considerations**

18. If the Council sought to impose conditions on vehicles used as taxis then this could adversely affect the numbers and availability of vehicles.

19. At present all taxis under five years old are tested at Langston Road twice a year and those over five years must undergo testing three times a year. These tests include one on emissions.

20. The survey asked about incentives for providing more taxis. The replies mostly ask for a reduction in the licence fee.

21. As well as hybrid cars some of the newer cars can be very fuel-efficient. However, the cost of imposing a requirement that only these newer more efficient cars could be used would outweigh the reduction in the licence fee and may affect the number of licensed vehicles in the District.

22. The vehicles are being inspected regularly and it is not recommended that any further action be taken.