

Report to Licensing Committee

Date of meeting: 30 November 2020

Subject: In- Vehicle CCTV in Taxis

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Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry, 01992 564246



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

Update report for consideration of in- vehicle CCTV in hackney carriage/ private hire vehicles.

Report:

1. A report for consideration of in-vehicle CCTV in taxis was submitted and discussed by the Licensing Committee on 9 March 2020, as a potential means of addressing driver vulnerability and safeguarding of passengers. This also follows high profile reports in other parts of the country connecting the taxi trade with serious concerns regarding child exploitation, human trafficking, criminal exploitation and drug trafficking.
2. A Task and Finish Group commissioned by the Minister of State at the Department of Transport in 2018 recommends the mandatory introduction of cameras in licensed vehicles.
3. However, the Information Commissioners Office CCTV Code of Practice recognises that an important balance must be made between privacy and proportionality and that a mandatory policy around CCTV systems in taxis will require strong justification and should be kept under regular review.
4. Officers reported in March 2020, that initial enquiries were being made with internal and external partners around systems used and learning points. They would obtain intelligence where possible, around the incidents connecting the local taxi trade with any safeguarding and criminality, that may support the case for CCTV in taxis. Officers were already in the process of consulting with taxi drivers and operators by letter/ questionnaire to establish their level of concern around their own personal safety and to obtain their views about in-vehicle CCTV. The Committee also asked that officers report back on the number and nature of any complaints reported directly to the Licensing team that related to safeguarding issues as this may give an indication of the severity of the problem in our District.
5. The Council are members of the National CCTV User Group and our specialist officer is a member of the National Association of Camera managers (NASCAM). Unfortunately, the National CCTV Conference scheduled for May 2020, where the topic of in-vehicle CCTV was to be discussed, was cancelled as a result of the covid pandemic and further detailed work on this has not been possible. However, it is clear that any CCTV in taxis that are a condition of a licence will need to be managed by the Council in terms of compliance, we will also need to update our code of practice to include taxis, carry out a Data Protection Impact Assessment and update our ICO registration to reflect that the Council manage Taxi CCTV in licensed cabs. The Community Resilience Team that control all CCTV in the council have the capability to manage this work, if mandatory licensing was considered appropriate.

6. We have sense checked with other Essex councils and the four that have responded at the time of writing this report have rejected mandatory in-vehicle CCTV on the basis that - crime data does not justify; the council responsibilities as data controller; concerns regarding audio recording; and the expectation that the trade would expect the Council to fund all costs.

7. Police crime data and our own Councils internal data base does not indicate a significant safety concern, although it is recognised that this may not provide a truly accurate picture. Over the last 2-year period, only one safeguarding case was recorded and this involved an allegation of abusive and racist comments by one driver against another driver.

8. There were 27 responses to the consultation that was sent to all 415 taxi drivers and operators across the District, which are summarised as an appendix to this report. This is clearly a poor response (6.5%) and therefore any interpretation of results must be considered with caution. However, of note is that 12 respondents stated that they had been threatened or verbally abused themselves in the last 2 years; 6 had been physically abused and 7 had been a victim of racial abuse in the same period. 8 were in support of a licence condition being imposed that requires in vehicle CCTV and 19 were against.

9. Members are asked to consider officers findings to date and advise on preferred next steps.

Appendix : Summary of results following consultation on taxi driver safety

Questionnaire response to views on in-car CCTV. 27 responses from xx questionnaires sent out			
	yes	No	General comments received
Do you always feel safe whilst working as a licensed driver	14	13	Views vary from a preference for introducing in- house CCTV immediately to compliance within 2 years minimum
Do you feel more vulnerable at night	12	14	Important to ensure the system does not breach invasion of privacy for customers
Have you been threatened or verbally abused in the last 2 years	12	15	A protective screen separating customer and driver is as effective
Have you been physically harmed by a passenger in the last 2 years	6	21	CCTV is a good idea for both passengers and drivers but expensive, and in addition to meter installation
Has a passenger refused to pay a fare in the last 2 years	15	12	3 responses – overall a good idea to protect passenger and driver safety and agree with including as a licence condition
Have you been a victim of racial abuse while driving your vehicle for work	7	20	1 response recommending discretionary introduction
Do you have in vehicle CCTV fitted in your vehicle already	1	26	1 Suggestion for the Council to fund initially to kick start the project
Would you support making CCTV a part of the Council's licensing conditions	16	8	This is very bad timing for the Council to consider imposing further financial commitment on drivers when they are already facing huge financial difficulties
If introduced, do you think a period of time should be allowed for drivers to comply?	21		There will be significant additional cost to drivers in purchasing and installation and moving equipment when changing vehicles
	agreed.		Public should be notified if in house CCTV is introduced
	Range 0		
	to 2		
	years		