

**LICENSING
COMMITTEE**

5th March 2018

**UPDATE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS
FROM THE IMPROVING DISABLED PEOPLE'S ACCESS TO REDDITCH
TAXI FLEET TASK GROUP**

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Joe Baker
Portfolio Holder Consulted	Yes
Relevant Head of Service	Simon Wilkes – Head of Worcestershire Regulatory Services
Wards Affected	All Wards
Ward Councillor Consulted	N/A
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

In July 2016 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Improving Disabled People's Access to Redditch Taxi Fleet Task Group presented a report to the Licensing Committee. The report contained a number of recommendations that the Licensing Committee resolved to approve these recommendations. This report provides an update on the progress made to date with regards to the implementation of these recommendations.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the contents of the report.

3. KEY ISSUES

Financial Implications

3.1 None.

Legal Implications

3.2 As this is an update report and Members are only being asked to note the contents of the report, there are no legal implications at this time.

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Service / Operational Implications

- 3.3 In July 2016 a report was presented to the Licensing Committee by the Overview and Scrutiny Board, Improving Disabled People's Access to Redditch Taxi Fleet Task Group. The report contained a number of recommendations aimed at improving access for disabled people in Redditch to licensed Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles.
- 3.4 The Licensing Committee resolved to approve the recommendations of the Task Group, subject to the carrying out of suitable consultation on those recommendations that required the Council to amend its Hackney Carriage and Private Hire licensing policies in order to implement.
- 3.5 The recommendations contained in the Task Group's report were:
- 1) The Hackney Carriage Vehicle Licensing Policy and the Private Hire Vehicle Licensing Policy should be amended:
 - (a) to allow applications for new hackney carriages to be made for vehicles that are less than six years old, meet European M1 safety standards and have facilities for carrying a disabled person in a wheelchair within the vehicle. (*This relates to the Hackney Carriage Vehicle Licensing Policy only*); and
 - (b) to require drivers to display stickers in their vehicles that provide information about how to report complaints;
 - 2) The Driver Licence Policy – Application for a Hackney Carriage and / or Private Hire Vehicle Driver's Licence – should be amended to require that refresher training should be provided on driving standards and disability awareness to taxi drivers every three years;
 - 3) There should be a media campaign to guide disabled people and taxi drivers when travelling by taxi about their rights and responsibilities;
 - 4) WRS should publish a list of drivers who currently operate licensed wheelchair accessible vehicles on the WRS and Redditch Borough Council websites in a similar format to Brighton and Hove City Council and Eden District Council;
 - 5) WRS should undertake a review of the conditions attached to taxi operators' licences; and

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6) The Licensing Committee should review the effectiveness of the disability awareness training provided to taxi drivers.

3.6 This report provides updates on the progress made to date with regards to the implementation of these recommendations.

Recommendation 1(a)

3.7 Following a lengthy consultation process, the Licensing Committee resolved to approve an amended Hackney Carriage Vehicle Licensing Policy which allows applications for new hackney carriages to be made for vehicles that are less than six years old, meet European M1 safety standards and have facilities for carrying a disabled person in a wheelchair within the vehicle. The amended policy took effect on 1st December 2017.

3.8 At the time of preparing this report two additional wheelchair accessible Hackney Carriage Vehicles have become licensed since the amended policy took effect on 1st December 2017.

Recommendation 1(b)

3.9 The Licensing Committee resolved to make an amendment to this recommendation so that the stickers displayed in vehicles provided information on how to report compliments as well as complaints.

3.10 Following research into the procurement of suitable stickers and following discussion with the licensed trade, it has been decided that the information could be displayed on the small internal licence plate that is displayed on all licensed vehicles. This removes the need to display additional signage or stickers inside the vehicles.

3.11 Discussions have taken place with the company that supplies the materials used to make the vehicle licence plates and an amended design has been agreed. The new style internal licence plates will start to be phased in shortly once stocks of the existing internal licence plate templates have been used up.

Recommendation 2

3.12 Following a lengthy consultation process, the Licensing Committee resolved to approve an amended Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Driver Licensing Policy that included this requirement. The amended policy took effect on 1st December 2017.

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- 3.13 Since the amended policy took effect some Members have been contacted by licensed drivers concerned by the new requirements in relation to driver training. Furthermore, at a Taxi and Private Hire Liaison Forum held on 31st January 2018, over 100 licensed drivers attended and strongly expressed similar concerns.
- 3.14 In light of the strength of feeling that was clear to those elected Members present at the Taxi and Private Hire Liaison Forum, the Chairman of the Licensing Committee agreed that Members would give the matter further consideration at the next Licensing Committee.

Recommendation 3

- 3.15 The content and strategy for a media campaign were initially discussed with the Communications Team. However the Government's announcement about the implementation of sections 165 – 167 of the Equality Act 2010 meant that some of the key messages that needed to be delivered by the media campaign had to be revisited and the launch of the media campaign was postponed.
- 3.16 In the meantime, all licensed drivers have been made aware of the implementation of sections 165 – 167 of the Equality Act 2010 and reminded of their responsibilities towards all passengers with disabilities. This information was included in one of the regular newsletters sent to licence holders during 2017.
- 3.17 It is hoped that a media campaign to raise awareness amongst the public can be undertaken this Spring. The campaign would include reference to the implications of sections 165 – 167 of the Equality Act 2010 as well as highlighting how any issues can be reported.

Recommendation 4

- 3.18 Since the Task Group presented its report, the Government has implemented sections 165 – 167 of the Equality Act 2010.
- 3.19 As a result of this change to the law, drivers of designated wheelchair accessible taxi and private hire vehicles are now obliged to:
- transport wheelchair users in their wheelchair
 - provide passengers in wheelchairs with appropriate assistance
 - charge wheelchair users the same as non-wheelchair users

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- 3.20 The new powers only apply in those areas where the licensing authority has decided to maintain a list of designated vehicles under section 167 of the Equality Act 2010, and where the driver is driving a vehicle included on the list of designated vehicles maintained by the licensing authority.
- 3.21 Redditch Borough Council has decided to maintain such a list and this was published with effect from 1st December 2017. The list is part of the Council's publically accessible register of licensed vehicles that is hosted on the WRS website and can also be accessed via the Redditch Borough Council website.
- 3.22 The list shows all the vehicles licensed by the Council and identifies those that have been designated as meeting the Council's accessibility requirements for wheelchair users. The holders of the vehicle licences are also named on the list.

Recommendation 5

- 3.23 Licensing officers have internally reviewed the conditions attached to private hire operator licences and have compared them to the conditions attached by other Council's across Worcestershire. The conditions attached by the Council were found to be broadly consistent with those attached to licences elsewhere in the County.
- 3.24 Worcestershire Regulatory Services are currently participating in a project with colleagues from Councils across the West Midlands region to try and harmonise the conditions attached to Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicle, driver and operator licences in order to create some regional standards and improve consistency. This is in part a response to the increase in Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles that are working "cross-border" in different Councils' areas.
- 3.25 Once this project has progressed further, the Licensing Committee may be asked to approve amended conditions for all Hackney Carriage and Private Hire licences, including those issued to operators.

Recommendation 6

- 3.26 Officers have examined the content of the disability awareness training and consider it to be fit for purpose and appropriate.

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- 3.27 It is difficult to monitor how effective the training is as, in common with all training delivered, there are no guarantees that the person who has been trained will choose to put their learning into practice.
- 3.28 One indication of the effectiveness or otherwise of the training would be the number of complaints received about the service offered by licensed drivers to passengers with disabilities.
- 3.29 The number of complaints from disabled passengers about the service they have received from licensed drivers remains low, which may suggest that the disability awareness training is effective in most cases.
- 3.30 However the clearer information on how to make a complaint about a licensed vehicle or its driver is not yet being displayed inside licensed vehicles (see 3.11 above) and so the situation does need to be kept under review to see if there is an increase in complaints once the new style internal licence plates are phased in.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 None

5. APPENDICES

None

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