

## **Redditch Taxi Association**

65 Oakly Road

Redditch

B974EF

Dear Dave,

The RTA over the past few months have been speaking to the members regarding the consultation on Improving Disabled Peoples Access to Redditch Taxi Fleets. The response has been overwhelming from both Hackney and Private Hire Drivers.

The attached letter details on how the drivers feel about this consultation. Many drivers have not received the consultation letter therefore we have included a list of the drivers who have raised their concerns.

Regards

Redditch Taxi Association

In response to the report that was issued by the Task Group on improving disabled people's access to Redditch taxi fleets, the Redditch Taxi Association (RTA) and its members have agreed that changes are required but many taxi drivers have raised concerns on some of the recommendations made in this report.

The following letter will highlight what the concerns are, and are willing to put some recommendations forward to make sure that both the drivers and the disabled customer needs are met in an amicable manner.

The drivers have asked for an independent and more in-depth inquiry into what is being proposed and would be very grateful if this is carried out before any decision is made.

Many taxi drivers in the borough have been working with the public for over three decades, many of those drivers believe the demand for wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVS) is already being met by private operators. Those customers whom require a WAV generally pre-book their taxi for a return journey at agreed times and price with their provider. Those that would come on to the taxi rank usually have foldable wheelchairs and can easily sit in the car with reasonable assistance from the driver.

Hackney members feel that this consultation is only targeted towards them. Redditch Borough Council (RBC) Licensing has made the private hire licence a free for all. The drivers believe that many of the issues and problems the customer faces are a result of licensing not following their own guidelines in recruitment of drivers. One of the recommendations that operators improve driver standards. From the offset when a driver is being issued a licence, the licensing team should follow the requirements tick list. Rather than passing on the book to operators and drivers the licensing team, employed to do this need to make sure standards are met.

The recommendation made by the Task Group to increase the number of licensed WAVS operating in the borough by relaxing its policy of vehicles as hackney carriages has many implications on the trade as a whole. From the research carried out we have found there are already too many hackney carriages for what the Taxi Ranks can cater for, which has already resulted in over parking. Cross-border working due to legal loopholes.

The ranks are not equipped for certain types of WAVS which will mean that the Ranks will have to be made more user friendly. One problem we have found with the Bus station rank is that if a WAV is parked in the middle of the rank and a customer requires this particular vehicle, there is no way of getting around unless all vehicles are made to leave the rank.

The rank configurations would come at a cost which should be considered especially when the current feeder rank situation is still being questioned and has not been sorted.

The report has not considered that by relaxing or changing the policy on the age may open a gateway for drivers to obtain a hackney carriage licence in the borough and then use a legal loophole to go and work cross- borders. There is no legislation to restrict this practice to make sure all hackney carriage licensed vehicles remain in the borough.

Members have suggested that a change in policy for any new private hire licences should have a compulsory requirement of WAV.

Changing the policy from allowing a brand new WAV to one that can be up to six years of age. This in the report states that considerable savings can be made to the driver. These vehicles usually tend to be high mileage thus requiring more maintenance for wear and tear, giving far less fuel economy and some are adapted only to carry a single occupant alongside the wheelchair user. The side loading black cab style vehicle even at six years of age is an expensive option as these tend to be ex taxis in other counties and also come with high mileage and usually are coming to the end of their life span.

The current WAV operators in the borough have a modern and adequate fleet of vehicles, who cater for all types of wheelchairs. The supply for WAVS surpasses the demand for the borough, as many operators have to rely on regular contracts to make these vehicles financially viable.

The report states that "a disabled customer was unable to get home after their shopping trip" which prompted this short and fast review. A question drivers are asking is how did this customer get there?, why is it when a taxi is required it is expected there and then and if you book a taxi operated and funded by the council you have to wait upto a week?

When the customer did require a WAV they were told one was not available for a period of time due to prior commitments. Yet Dial a Ride which was praised in the report, a service funded by the council will make customers book in advance for the journey required. A service that only operates limited hours and days. Some members have suggested that the dial a ride contract be given to a local operator, at a subsidised cost which may lead to a more regular and cost effective service.

Redditch Borough Councils consideration of requiring hackney carriage drivers to undertake refresher training in driving standards and disability awareness every three years has unanimously been rejected by the drivers. The amount of private hire licences being issued has seen a decrease in driver earnings over the last few years. Who will cover the cost of such training and courses? Our proposal would be, any new drivers joining the taxi trade Hackney Carriage or Private Hire must undertake a DSA test as well as a disability awareness test before their license is issued. Majority of Redditch drivers have been working in the trade helping people from all groups without any problems or major concerns.

The consideration of stickers in taxis for passengers to make complaints and compliments is a good idea. Our recommendation would be to have this information on the plates inside and outside of the car, this will save on the cost of having the stickers made. Drivers are also concerned whether there will be a specialist department with more employees? And if so how will these costs be covered?

When a complaint is made, there must be sufficient and reasonable evidence of any complaints made before the driver has been summoned to the committee.

Drivers are in agreement that a disabled passenger must be charged the same as all customers. Changes to policy are required so that this can be achieved and be fair to all. The drivers have made it clear that any licensed driver, who refuses to carry a passenger with a disability without reasonable exemptions, should be given penalties or even a ban.

The recommendation of advertising WAVS through the internet is a good idea and would make it easier for the user to access this service. It will also save on costs when upgrades are needed, compared to other types of media.

In conclusion the drivers believe some changes are required. An independent inquiry must be carried out before a decision is made. Changes to private hire policy must be looked into, which may include the fairness in price for disabled passengers. The improvements that can be made in initial recruitment of drivers by the licensing team.

We would be very grateful that the council or committee do not issue any WAV a licence on what is being suggested in the report during the consultation period or until a final decision is made regarding this matter.

Any issues in this letter you may want to discuss with the RTA please do not hesitate in contacting us.

Regards

Redditch Taxi Association