



# Licensing Committee

Monday, 27th November,  
2023

## MINUTES

### Present:

Councillor Karen Ashley (Chair), and Councillors Salman Akbar, Joe Baker, Juliet Barker Smith, Sharon Harvey, Chris Holz, Joanna Kane, Emma Marshall and Jane Spilsbury

### Also Present:

Councillor Imran Altaf

### Officers:

Vanessa Brown, Mamta Patel and Dave Etheridge

### Democratic Services Officers:

Gavin Day

## 19. HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE COMPLIANCE TESTING - CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS AND ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

With agreement of the Chair, Minute item 19 (Item 8 on the agenda) was heard first by Members to address the points raised by the public speakers.

The Principal Licensing Officer, Worcester Regulatory Services (WRS), presented the report to Members. The purpose of the report was to inform Members of the vehicle safety testing arrangements and outline possible alternative options.

The Principal Licensing Officer detailed that there were 420 Taxi Licence holders with Redditch Borough Council, It was further detailed that each licenced vehicle needed 2 Safety Compliance Tests a year. There were 7 timeslots each day which amounted to 35 tests a week and when accounting for shutdown weeks gave 1600-1700 available slots a year to accommodate approximately 820 Vehicle Safety Inspections. Therefore, Officers expressed the

Chair

opinion that there was sufficient capacity within the current testing arrangements. It was reported that a driver was generally able to get an appointment on short notice if they were fully flexible or within 2 or 3 weeks should they required a specific timeslot.

The additional activities which the engineers at Crossgates participated in was detailed. This included late night enforcement exercises and spot checks, which allowed Officers to direct a driver to the garage for a vehicle examination if a quick visual inspection raised concerns. It was further highlighted that an equivalent service, the engineers' knowledge, experience and good working relationship may not be replicated with an alternative arrangement.

Officers detailed concerns that should an alternative arrangement be sought, an equivalent standard of work may not be replicated, it was due to concerns regarding work standards and public safety which prompted the migration to in house testing in 2010. Likewise, it was highlighted that the Taxi Vehicle Safety inspection went beyond a standard MOT and examined the internal and external state of the vehicle and compliance with vehicle licencing policy, therefore, it would be unlikely for a garage to agree to undertake the work for the same price as an MOT.

The Principal Licensing Officer outlined the possible options available for the vehicle safety inspection.

1. **Maintain the current arrangement**, which was the recommendation of Officers.
2. **Outsource the Safety Vehicle Inspection to approved providers**. The number of which would be decided during a procurement process. It was unknown how many, if any, garages would be prepared to undertake the work and for what cost. Regular auditing would have to be undertaken to ensure an appropriate quality of work was maintained.
3. **Allow any valid recent MOT undertaken at any DVSA approved garage combined with a brief visual inspection**. Officers advised against this option and did not consider it suitable.

Officers further detailed that of the 6 Worcestershire Authorities that WRS covered, Redditch, Bromsgrove and Wyre Forest had their own garages. Malvern Hills and Worcester City had approved garages. Wychavon currently accepted a recent MOT; however,

Wychavon were currently undertaking a procurement process to secure a number of garages to carry out their safety inspections.

The following was clarified after questions from Members.

- That although the fee free retesting period was 24 hours, if the work was a minor in nature such as a bulb or tyre replacement, an engineer was able to check that the work was completed without having to book in another appointment.
- That it was considered best practice to perform the inspections in house should an authority have the capacity to do so and although outsourcing was not dangerous if it was managed effectively, it was a deviation from best practice and therefore not recommended.
- Drivers could book appointments 12 months in advance and the current 2-week period was for drivers to get their preferred timeslot and not for the earliest available appointment, however, there were some longer lead in periods of up to a 4 week wait, at certain times of the year.
- That 4.1 on page 175 of the Public Reports Pack detailed that Monitoring and Auditing may be required, however, details on the cost implication would not be known without an in-depth examination during the procurement process.
- As the licensed activities should be cost neutral, any additional costs incurred needed to be covered, a possible solution could mean an increase in licencing fees.
- Crossgates had a number of bays, one of which was exclusively used for Taxi Safety Checks.

Members were happy with the report but expressed a desire to obtain more information on the subject and the exploring interest from local garages before making a decision.

Councillor Joe Baker proposed an alternative recommendation that Officers be directed to look into the viability of allowing drivers to use DVSA testing stations to undertake vehicle safety checks, the alternative recommendation was seconded by Councillor Sharon Harvey.

Following further debate, it was clarified to Members that should they wish to alter the 24-hour fee free testing period, there needed to be a recommendation to the Executive Committee then the

decision regarding any Fees or Charges would be made during Full Council.

Members further commented that should the 24-hour fee free testing period be extended a vehicle should have a valid MOT certificate to cover the duration to maintain public safety standards.

Councillor Joe Baker proposed an additional alternative recommendation that it be recommended to Executive that the period during which a taxi or private hire vehicle can be retested at Crossgates Depot without charge be extended from 24 hours to 10 working days, so long as the vehicle has a valid MOT certificate to cover that period of time, The additional alternative recommendation was seconded by Councillor Salmon Akbar.

Members debated the timeslots and the availability of Taxi drivers in general throughout the day, it was commented that considering multiple bays existed at the Crossgates Depot, it should be examined whether it was possible to use two bays for taxi inspections during more favourable periods, to allow for less disruption to school contracts and religious activities.

Councillor Emma Marshall proposed an additional alternative recommendation that Officers be directed to liaise with the relevant officers at Crossgates Depot to investigate how to make more efficient use of the testing bays at the Crossgates Depot taking into account school runs and other relevant aspects, The alternative recommendation was seconded by Councillor Juliet Barker Smith.

On being put to a vote it was

### **RECOMMENDED to Executive Committee that**

- **the period during which a taxi or private hire vehicle can be retested at Crossgates Depot without charge be extended from 24 hours to 10 working days, so long as the vehicle has a valid MOT certificate to cover that period of time.**

**RESOLVED** that

- **Officers be directed to look into the viability of allowing drivers to use DVSA testing stations to undertake vehicle safety checks.**
- **Officers be directed to liaise with the relevant officers at Crossgates Depot to investigate how to make more efficient use of the testing bays at the Crossgates Depot taking into account school runs and other relevant aspects.**

The Meeting commenced at 7.00 pm  
and closed at 9.14 pm