

**Licensing Committee
2025**

6 October

**HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE TESTING AT
CROSSGATES DEPOT REVIEW**

Relevant Portfolio Holder		Councillor Monica Stringfellow
Portfolio Holder Consulted		No
Relevant Assistant Director		Simon Wilkes – Director of Worcestershire Regulatory Services
Report Author	Job Title: Licensing and Support Services Manager Contact email: Kiran.lahel@worcsregservices.gov.uk Contact Tel: 01562 738067	
Wards Affected		All
Ward Councillor(s) consulted		No
Relevant Council Priority		Keep my place safe and looking good
Non-Key Decision		
If you have any questions about this report, please contact the report author in advance of the meeting.		
This report contains exempt information as defined in Paragraph(s) of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, as amended		

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members either:

- I. Note the contents of the report and make no changes to the current policy on vehicle compliance and safety inspections. Inspections will continue to be undertaken by Crossgates Depot as currently provided

or

- II. Consider and approve a six-week consultation period with relevant stakeholders to consider outsourcing compliance and safety inspections for Hackney carriage and private hire vehicles.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In July 2023 a report was brought to this Committee at the request of the Chair of Licensing following concerns by members of the trade about capacity at Crossgate's garage. The report illustrated the number of inspections undertaken at Crossgates, re-tests and missed appointments over a six-month period.

- 2.2 In November 2023 members asked officers to revisit this as part of the work programme and identify if the Crossgates facility were outsourced would there be any interest from garages nearby.
- 2.3 In April 2025 officers arranged with the Chair of Licensing for a series of visits to be arranged for members to see the robust process that is in place at Crossgates Depot and the value that the team add to providing assurance to both the traveling public and members that the vehicles licensed by Redditch Borough Council are to the highest standards.

3. OPERATIONAL ISSUES

- 3.1 The Council is responsible for the issuing of licences to authorise people to use vehicles as hackney carriages or private hire vehicles. Vehicles that are licensed need to be inspected to ensure that they are:
- suitable in type, size and design
 - in a suitable mechanical condition
 - safe
 - comfortable
- 3.2 The Council currently licences around 406 (235 private hire and 171 Hackney carriage) vehicles to be used as either a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle.
- 3.3 Since September 2011, inspections of vehicles licensed by the Council have taken place at the Council's Crossgates Depot, which is a DVSA approved MOT testing station.
- 3.4 Prior to this the inspections had been undertaken by two external approved garages. However, following serious concerns raised after spot checks on licensed vehicles undertaken in 2009, a decision was taken in January 2010 to return the inspections "in-house." This decision was ultimately implemented in September 2011 and has continued to this day.
- 3.5 Under the Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy, vehicle inspections are required to be inspected before a licence to use a vehicle as a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle is granted.
- 3.6 Standard conditions attached to all hackney carriage and private hire vehicle licences go on to say:

Subject to the condition below, the licence holder must present the vehicle for inspection within a four-week period beginning on the date six months after the licence issue date.

Where a decision has been taken by the Council to grant a licence to use a vehicle of an exceptional standard beyond the normal upper age limits set out in its hackney carriage and private hire licensing policy, the licence holder must present the vehicle for inspection within a four week period beginning on the date four months after the licence issue date and again within a four week period beginning on the date eight months after the licence issue date.

- 3.7 A further standard condition states:

The vehicle must be presented for inspection in accordance with any reasonable direction properly made by an authorised officer of the Council.

- 3.8 Vehicle examiners and staff at Crossgates Depot assist Licensing Officers to undertake ad-hoc enforcement exercises in order to enable spot-checks to be undertaken on vehicles to ensure they are mechanically safe and fit for use.
- 3.9 At the Licensing Committee meeting on 20th March 2023, the Chair of the Licensing Committee made a request that officers present a report to a future meeting of the Committee regarding the process and provision for the testing of licensed hackney carriage and private hire vehicles at the Council's Crossgates Depot.
- 3.10 A report was presented to the Licensing Committee on 27th November 2023 outlining the options available to members. It was agreed further work was required by officers to ascertain the appetite of local garages to undertake safety inspections. Officers obtained a list of garages in the area however due to procurement constraints further questions were not progressed.
- 3.11 In April 2025 the Chair of Licensing asked officers to arrange face to face visits for members to see how the safety inspections take place at Crossgates Depot. Two dates were arranged, and members were given the opportunity to attend and ask questions.
- 3.12 Recent enquiries have been made with staff at Crossgates Depot to obtain accurate information on the appointment slots that are made available each week for hackney carriage and private hire vehicle proprietors to book in their vehicles for inspection.

- 3.13 There are currently 40 appointment slots made available each week with eight total inspection appointments available each day (Monday to Friday) at the following times:

Full Tests: 08:30, 09:45, 11:00, 12:15, 14:00 15:00

Re-tests: 16:15 and 16:45

- 3.13 Staff at Crossgates Depot have indicated that the wait for an appointment can vary at different times of the year but in general, appointments are available within a period of ten working days from the point the vehicle proprietor contacts the Depot to book their vehicle in for an inspection.

- 3.14 There was a request by members in November 2023 to take into consideration drivers that undertake school contracts. Crossgates Depot therefore prioritise the three appointments in the middle of the day for these drivers wherever possible.

- 3.15 Staff at Crossgates Depot have provided information on the number of appointment slots that have been available but were not booked in the past six months:

January:	7
February:	0
March:	8
April:	22
May:	5
June:	28

- 3.16 Staff at Crossgates Depot have also provided information on the number of appointment slots that have been available for re-tests but were not booked in the past six months:

January:	22
February:	20
March:	21
April:	22
May:	20
June:	21

- 3.17 Current fees charged to vehicle proprietors for inspection of their vehicle at Crossgates Depot are as follows:

Safety Check	£54.85
Safety Check with MOT	£54.85
Re-test (within 10 working days)	FREE
Re-test (after 10 working days)	£27.42
Hackney Carriage Meter Test	£12.00

- 3.18 These fees are determined by Redditch Borough Council each year as part of the Council's budget setting process. The income received from the fees paid by vehicle proprietors is received by the Council.

- 3.20 The compliance and safety inspections currently undertaken on licensed vehicles at Crossgates Depot are more in depth and detailed than a standard MOT examination. Matters such as the interior and exterior condition of the vehicle are considered, along with whether the vehicle meets the requirements of the Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy.

- 3.21 As part of the work programme members asked for further information on the alternative options available. In order to look at alternative options officers have asked for the members to consider:

- That no changes are made to the current policy on vehicle compliance and safety inspections. Therefore, inspections will continue to be undertaken by Crossgates Depot as currently provided **or**
- To Consider and approve a six-week consultation period with relevant stakeholders to consider outsourcing compliance and safety inspections for Hackney carriage and private hire vehicles.

- 3.22 Elsewhere across Worcestershire, the following arrangements are in place for compliance and safety inspections on licensed vehicles:

Bromsgrove District Council	Inspections conducted at Council owned / operated MOT testing station

Malvern Hills District Council	Inspections conducted at one of two approved testing stations
Worcester City Council	Inspections conducted at one approved testing station
Wychavon District Council	Applicants / licence holders have to provide a recent MOT issued by any DVSA approved MOT testing station
Wyre Forest District Council	Inspections conducted at Council owned / operated MOT testing station

- 3.23 Malvern Hills District Council, Worcester City Council and Wychavon District Council do not have their own vehicle testing stations available for use to inspect hackney carriage and private hire vehicles.
- 3.24 Wychavon District Council is currently preparing a procurement exercise with a view to appointing one or more “approved testing stations” to carry out compliance and safety inspections on vehicles that are licensed to be used as a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle.
- 3.25 Lessons learnt and feedback provided to officers evidently shows that, where one is available, the use of a Council owned and operated MOT testing station to carry out compliance and safety inspections on licensed vehicles is the best possible option.
- 3.26 As set out to members in November 2023 in respect of Redditch Borough Council specifically, risks must be recognised and officers have some serious concerns about the potential implications of putting in place alternative arrangements for the carrying out of compliance and safety inspections on licensed vehicles.
- 3.27 Excellent working relationships currently exist between Licensing Officers and the vehicle examiners at the Crossgates Depot. This helps enormously in the exchange of information and intelligence about licensed vehicles and how well they are being maintained.

- 3.28 These working relationships also enable Licensing Officers to arrange regular spot-check exercises to ensure that licensed vehicles are being kept in a safe and roadworthy condition between their compliance and safety inspections, which helps to keep the travelling public safe and provides reassurance to those that use taxi and private hire vehicles.
- 3.29 The vehicle examiners at Crossgates Depot have a very good understanding of the Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy. This has been developed over time and enables the vehicle examiners to spot and highlight to Licensing Officers, any vehicles that are presented for inspection but do not comply with the Council's policy requirements. This expertise cannot be taken for granted.
- 3.30 In any decision, Members must be reminded of the fact that the standard of work and attention to detail demonstrated by the vehicle examiners at Crossgates Depot may not be replicated if the compliance and safety inspections were being conducted by external approved testing stations.
- 3.31 Concerns of this nature were the ultimate reason that the compliance and safety inspections of licensed vehicles was brought "in house" to be delivered by Council employed vehicle examiners at Crossgates Depot back in 2010/2011.
- 3.32 The quality and standard of the work undertaken by any approved testing stations would need to be regularly monitored and audited, creating additional burdens for Licensing Officers that would require additional resources to fulfil.

4. Crossgates Depot Visits

- 4.1 Earlier this year the Chair of Licensing felt it was important for members to see the operation at Crossgates for themselves. Officers therefore arranged a series of dates for Members to visit and ask questions.
- 4.2 Officers arranged two sessions at Crossgates Depot on the 16th and 23rd June 2025. Feedback provided was overall positive from Members that visited and were satisfied with the operation and robust processes followed at Crossgates garage.
- 4.3 Officers would like high standards to remain within the Redditch Borough hackney carriage and private hire fleet. Officers therefore believe that the Council should not just rely on a vehicle having a valid

MOT to decide it is fit for use as a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle. As set out above, the current compliance and safety inspections are more in depth and detailed than a standard MOT and are designed to ensure that a vehicle is not only roadworthy, but that the vehicle meets the requirements set by the Council for being used as a hackney carriage or private hire vehicles in terms of it being:

- suitable in type, size and design
- in a suitable mechanical condition
- safe
- comfortable

- 4.3 Notwithstanding the views held by officers and lessons learnt in previous years, it is of course open to the Licensing Committee to direct officers to take steps to explore the implementation of alternative arrangements.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The costs incurred in conducting inspections on licensed vehicles are met by the charging of fees to those whose vehicles are subject to inspections. Under the current vehicle testing arrangements the fees that are payable are determined by Redditch Borough Council as the existing testing station is a Council owned and operated facility.
- 5.2 If the compliance and safety inspections were to be conducted by other testing stations, it is not known whether the fees that licence holders and applicants would have to pay for a compliance and safety inspection would increase or decrease as this would be out of the Council's control.
- 5.3 If Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) are tasked with exploring alternative arrangements for the conducting of compliance and safety inspections on vehicles, this would require additional work by WRS, Procurement, Finance and Legal Services.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Section 50 (1) of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 states that:

Without prejudice to the provisions of section 68 of this Act, the proprietor of any hackney carriage or of any private hire vehicle licensed by a district council shall present such hackney carriage or private hire vehicle for inspection and testing by or on behalf of the council within such period and at such place within the area of the council as they may by notice reasonably require:

Provided that a district council shall not under the provisions of this subsection require a proprietor to present the same hackney carriage or private hire vehicle for inspection and testing on more than three separate occasions during any one period of twelve months.

- 6.1 Section 68 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 states that:

Any authorised officer of the council in question or any constable shall have power at all reasonable times to inspect and test, for the purpose of ascertaining its fitness, any hackney carriage or private hire vehicle licensed by a district council, or any taximeter affixed to such a vehicle, and if he is not satisfied as to the fitness of the hackney carriage or private hire vehicle or as to the accuracy of its taximeter he may by notice in writing require the proprietor of the hackney carriage or private hire vehicle to make it or its taximeter available for further inspection and testing at such reasonable time and place as may be specified in the notice and suspend the vehicle licence until such time as such authorised officer or constable is so satisfied:

Provided that, if the authorised officer or constable is not so satisfied before the expiration of a period of two months, the said licence shall, by virtue of this section, be deemed to have been revoked and subsections (2) and (3) of section 60 of this Act shall apply with any necessary modifications.

7. OTHER - IMPLICATIONS

Local Government Reorganisation

- 7.1 Currently all district councils across Worcestershire carry out vehicle inspections differently. Any procurement exercise would need to take into account Local Government Reorganisation.

Relevant Council Priority

- 7.2 Currently by using Crossgates Depot the Council policies and procedures can be deployed and data protection agreements shared effectively.

Climate Change Implications

- 7.3 Any future Council decisions on climate change can implemented quickly and efficiently if Crossgates Depot is utilised.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 7.4 Any policy or process change will require an initial Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) screening. If required a full EQIA will be carried out to ensure any new process will not give cause to any equality's implications.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 8.1 Outsourcing inspections to a third party will:

- Be a loss of income to Redditch Borough Council as monies will be
- provided to a third party.
- Loss of control of relationships with known taxi engineers.
- A procurement exercise will be undertaken using the Bromsgrove District Council advised procurement process and will be subject to a well written specification.

- 8.2 Officers recommend that taxi testing remains at Crossgates garage to eliminate unnecessary risks to Redditch Borough Council and the licensed Hackney carriage and private hire taxi trade.

9. APPENDICES and BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

**Licensing Committee
2025**

6 October

9. REPORT SIGN OFF

Department	Name and Job Title	Date
Portfolio Holder	Please record the name of the relevant Portfolio Holder who has signed off the report here.	Please give the date they signed off the report here.
Lead Director / Assistant Director	Please record the name of the relevant lead Director / Assistant Director who has signed off the report here.	Please give the date they signed off the report here.
Financial Services	Please record the name of the relevant Officer in Financial Services who has signed off the report here.	Please give the date they signed off the report here.
Legal Services	Please record the name of the relevant Officer in Legal Services who has signed off the report here.	Please give the date they signed off the report here.
Policy Team (if equalities implications apply)	If applicable, please record the name of the relevant Officer in the Policy team who has signed off the report here.	If applicable, please give the date they signed off the report here.
Climate Change Team (if climate change implications apply)	If applicable, please record the name of the relevant Officer in the Climate Change team who has signed off the report here.	If applicable, please give the date they signed off the report here.