

PART A

Report to: Licensing Committee
Date of meeting: 29th February 2016
Report of: Head of Community and Customer Services
Title: Findings and recommendations of Working Party convened to determine Hackney Carriage/Private Hire services for disabled and vulnerable passengers

1.0 SUMMARY

1.1 Watford Borough Council is responsible for licensing hackney carriages (taxis) and private hire vehicles and has a general duty to promote equalities. Similarly, providers of taxi and private hire vehicle services are under a specific duty to assist passengers with disabilities.

1.2 At licensing committee on 14 September 2015 it was determined that a working party should be formed to provide recommendations for improvements to services. These recommendations to be brought before the committee in February 2016.

1.3 Recommendations of the working party fall in to six distinct categories:

- Income and fares
- Vehicles
- Ranks
- Parking
- Enforcement
- Training

The full report of Kris Beuret of Social Research Associates Limited (SRA Ltd) is attached at appendix 1

1.4 This report seeks Members approval to progress the recommendations. Some of these are relatively simple and can be actioned over the coming weeks without further research. Others are more technical and will require investigation and possible policy changes. Progress is proposed to be reported back to Committee by September 2016.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the licensing committee consider all recommendations from the working party and in the report by SRA Ltd at Appendix 1 of this report.

2.2 That Members approve Officers to implement the recommendations. An action plan will be developed within two weeks of this approval, and this will be

monitored monthly by the Chair of the Licensing Committee. A formal update on progress will be reported back to committee by September 2016.

Contact Officer:

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Report approved by: Alan Gough, Head of Community and Customer Services

3.0 Detailed proposal

- 3.1 This report is a follow up to the report to committee on 14th September 2015 entitled "Hackney carriage/private hire services for disabled and vulnerable". It reports back on the findings of the working group set up at Members request to consider the best way to improve the standards of service provided to customers with disabilities wanting to use licensed vehicles.
- 3.2 The full report from the working group is at Appendix 1 and provides detailed context and explanation behind each of the working party's recommendations. This Officer report doesn't duplicate that information. The recommendations are wide ranging but reassuringly some are already in progress. Officers consider that some of the recommendations, if approved by Members, are relatively simple to introduce or action without the need for further consideration. Other recommendations are more complex to implement and, if approved, officers will need to undertake research to find technical and legal solutions. Some of these will require policy changes that will need separate approval by committee.
- 3.3 The proposal is that an action plan will be developed following this meeting and monthly reporting undertaken. A formal update report will be brought back to Licensing Committee no later than September 2016. It is envisaged the proposals for implementation of the more complex recommendations will be developed by this stage and the simpler recommendations will be fully implemented and ongoing.
- 3.4 For ease the recommendations from the working party are listed below. These have been split into two categories by officers: Immediate actions: those which are already being done, are simple to introduce and can be implemented with minimal delay; and, Secondary actions: those which require further research and consultation to determine how to practically deliver them.

Note that the numbering below adjacent to the individual recommendations relates to the numbering from the Working Party report at Appendix 1.

3.5 **Immediate actions**

3.6 Income and fares

1.1 Include a business unit which would emphasise that better customer service leads to increased business

1.4 At the annual fare review in June 2016, explore the fare structure – this is heavily front loaded compared to the average in other local authority areas - resulting in disadvantage to disabled people who are more likely to make short journeys.

Ranks

3.1 The council to request that Midland Trains carry out an Equalities Impact Assessment of the station including the forecourt and station interchange and to explore the legal options if they fail to do so adequately.

3.2 Work with the NHS and other stakeholders including licensed vehicle representatives to ensure that the plans for redevelopment at the hospital reflect the needs of disabled users.

3.3 Work with Watford General Hospital to check that companies providing licensed vehicles via the courtesy line have fleets with sufficient (estimated at 50%) accessible vehicles and to ensure that reception staff understand how to advise on alternatives when disabled people are waiting for longer than others.

3.4 Consider the positioning and location of other ranks in the town in the light of existing, recent and future developments. This should include a 'walk around' audit with planners, disabled people, licensed vehicle drivers and the Town Centre Manager (BID Chief Executive). In addition, new developments should add hackney rank and PHV needs to the list of requirements.

Parking

4.1 WBC to include hackney and PHV customers' needs as part of the current parking review. This should include parking services and planning to engage on joint working with licensing to determine new working protocols taking consideration of agreed locations known to be important for elderly and disabled passengers.

4.2 WBC to continue dialogue between parking enforcement and hackney and PHV parking requirements for picking up and dropping off. In particular there should be agreement to build in the new 10 minute 'grace period' especially at agreed locations known to be important for elderly and disabled passengers.

4.3 Planning and highways officers to attend quarterly driver drop in sessions and to actively seek new parking and rank opportunities in new developments

Enforcement

- 5.4 Engage with community leaders to help promote equalities especially in relation to discriminatory interpretation of religion.
- 5.5 Carry out another mystery shopping survey following actions taken as a result of this consultation.
- 5.6 Conduct a programme of regular plying for hire/disability awareness testing using trained investigators to allow for formal enforcement where appropriate.
- 5.7 Offer free training and advice to customer groups to help them to enforce their rights where the council cannot take legal action on their behalf.

Training

- 6.1 Review the current New Driver Training Day and Professional Driver Update course and amend as necessary. Explore the opportunity of certificating both courses to support a new CPC style qualification for drivers nationally. This to include staged progress with some face-to-face learning and also available electronically to enable drivers to study at ranks or in their spare time. A similar scheme has been piloted and Government are being asked to adopt such a qualification.
- 6.3 Refresh disability and equality awareness training for operators and make attendance a compulsory requirement prior to licence or re-licence.
- 6.4 Prepare guidance for customers including disabled people about how to make best use of taxis including what to expect and what cannot be provided.

3.7 **Secondary actions for technical development.**

3.8 Income and fares

- 1.2 WBC to work with the trade to publicise and support contract applications
- 1.3 Work with Hertfordshire CC to simplify and make the contract process more applicant friendly

Vehicles

- 2.1 Retain a mixed fleet but work towards a far larger proportion of purpose built hackney and private hire vehicles with an aspirational target and a clear timescale of at least 50% in the hackney fleet within three years. As part of this policy WBC should carry out an audit of current wheelchair accessible vehicle provision and update progress.
- 2.2 Publicise the advantages of such vehicles including swivel seats, grab handles, kneeling step as well as ramp features.

- 2.3 Up the specification for saloon hackneys and PHVs to include lower sill heights, swivel seats and minimum space in rear seats and boots.
- 2.4 Another cheap improvement which would support disabled users is Braille overlays inside the car to go over the driver's plate.
- 2.5 For both hackneys and PHVs stipulate improved security systems both at ranks and to include CCTV in vehicles. Work with the trade to identify ways in which drivers may be able to bulk buy equipment and installation to significantly reduce costs.
- 2.6 Revisit the vehicle licence conditions to consider the introduction of more prominent licensed vehicle identification such as larger door signs or a specified colour (white or silver) and removable signs to enable resale on an economic basis. A larger number plate in a more prominent position would also aide recognition. The options should include technological solutions such as a Quick Response (QR) code system which would enable instant verification via mobile phones and App based checking.
- 2.7 Investigate the cost and requirement for the use of interface technology which plugs into the meter for introduction by the tariff review of June 2017.

Enforcement

- 5.1 Set up a whistleblowing scheme for both drivers and disabled people – this would be distinct from the formal complaints system which people are reluctant to use.
- 5.2 Revisit the formal complaints system to understand how to make it more user-friendly and provide feedback even when complaints are not formally progressed.
- 5.3 Use the information from the whistleblowing scheme to identify problems and patterns and use the analysis to introduce incognito testing exercises and action against those found to be discrimination.

Training

- 6.2 Explore introduction of annual 'Gold Driver' awards nominated by passengers.

4.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 **Financial**

- 4.1.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report or any of the immediate actions. Any budget requirements for new schemes or initiatives will be met within existing budgets or considered as a separate growth proposal.

4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

4.2.1 The Legal and Democracy Section Head comments that there are no legal implications immediately arising from this report. In the event that there are policy changes as a result of the recommendations, legal implications will be considered as appropriate at that time.

4.3 **Equalities**

4.3.1 The purpose of this report is to improve the services for customers with disabilities in the context of our duties under the Equalities Act 2010. The report and appendix outline the consultation and analysis undertaken.

4.4 **Potential Risks**

4.4.1

Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
No improvement in standards of service.	2	4	8
Lack of engagement and co-operation from other services/organisations	4	3	12
Reputational impact from limited improvements in levels of service	2	3	6
Failure to deliver against recommendations in agreed timescales	2	5	10

Appendices

Improving Hackney Carriage and Private Hire services in Watford for disabled people.

Background Papers

None used