

## PART A

**Report to:** Licensing Committee  
**Date of meeting:** 15<sup>th</sup> March 2016  
**Report of:** Head of Community and Customer Services  
**Title:** Discussion on use of magnetic door signs for hackney carriages

### 1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 Watford Borough Council is responsible for licensing hackney carriages (taxis). This includes setting the specific standards or conditions under which such vehicles may be licensed.
- 1.2 There is a requirement for all hackney carriages to have door signs of a design approved by the council.
- 1.3 Door signs may be magnetic providing drivers display them at all times whilst working.
- 1.4 Representations have been made by representatives of the taxi trade to officers and the chair of the committee that the requirement for door signs be removed. The chair has asked that members of the committee be given the opportunity to hear from both a representative from the trade and also from Disability Watford who have also made representations that the signs should remain.
- 1.5 This report seeks to raise Members' awareness of this issue and the views of stakeholders.

### 2.0 Recommendation

That the views of both the Taxi Trade and Disability Watford be noted and officers be requested to come back to a future committee having undertaken further consultation with stakeholders and an equality impact analysis with recommendations on whether or not the Vehicle conditions should be altered.

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

**3.0 Background Detail**

- 3.1 Until July 2010 hackney carriages licensed by Watford Borough Council were required to display a livery of white vehicle with black bonnet and black boot.
- 3.2 In July 2010 the requirement for a hackney carriage vehicle livery was removed. There were a number of reasons for this and the report to committee of July is attached at Appendix 1
- 3.3 In light of the removal of the livery, it was agreed that drivers should continue to use permanently affixed door signs in order to allow for some level of identification other than roof light and rear identification plate. An example of these door signs is shown at appendix 2.
- 3.4 In 2014 the requirement for permanently affixed door signs was relaxed in favour of magnetic door signs. This decision was dependent upon drivers ensuring that whilst a vehicle was working the door signs would be attached. An addendum to licensing conditions was approved at committee on 14 July 2014. See Appendix 3.
- 3.5 Requests have been received from trade members to remove the requirement for door signs altogether. The Chair of the Hackney Carriage Association has reported an increase in crimes where vehicles are targeted due to identification as a taxi.
- 3.6 In November 2016 the licensing department received a request from local police for assistance in setting up a 'decoy car' as a result of three 'theft from vehicle' crimes involving taxis. These took place in North Watford within a few nights of one another.

3.7 Total crimes recorded against drivers are as follows:

**Table showing offence category + crime count**

<b>Offence Category</b>	<b>13/14</b>	<b>14/15</b>	<b>15/16</b>	<b>Total</b>
TFMV	13	9	33	<b>55</b>
Criminal Damage	19	17	13	<b>49</b>
Assault/ABH	13	15	13	<b>41</b>
Theft make off w/o payment	10	12	18	<b>40</b>
Public Order/Racial	5	2	4	<b>11</b>
Interfere with MV			3	<b>3</b>
Racist Incident	2	1		<b>3</b>
Theft not otherwise coded			2	<b>2</b>
Robbery	1			<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>205</b>

There is not a complete figure for 2016/2017 as of the date of this report as figures will not be compiled until after year end, 31st March 2017.

TFMV is Theft from Motor Vehicle and is the crime specific to this discussion paper.

- 3.8 There are substantial verbal reports of breach of condition by drivers who do not use door signs when required to do so. Most notably, drivers are frequently seen parked on taxi ranks not displaying door signs. Often when spoken to a driver will explain that the signs have been lost, regularly either on the motorway or in a car wash, or that they are in the boot of the vehicle. It is not clear why drivers who are working would fail to display the door signs.
- 3.9 There are three main implications to removing door signs: general public safety, disability access and crime (identification).
- 3.10 The primary purpose of the licensing regime is to ensure public safety. Members of the public who take taxis may be tired, intoxicated or distracted and an ability to clearly identify a vehicle is essential to prevent harm. London taxis are often mentioned as being 'iconic' and therefore unlikely to be mistaken for any other type of vehicle. This is a good example of why a particular design or livery may be chosen.
- 3.11 Disability Watford state that some members may struggle to identify taxis on ranks and when vehicles stop to pick up if such signage is not displayed. Given that the primary purpose of licensing is the protection of the public and that,

unlike a private hire vehicle, a taxi can attend a rank unsolicited or pick up a passenger without any pre-booking, it is important that all customers can easily and quickly identify a genuine licensed vehicle. A representative from Disability Watford will be at the meeting.

3.12 On some occasions door signs enable police to identify Watford licensed vehicles from CCTV. This is usually not where a driver has committed an offence but where a driver may be an important witness to events. Most recently this happened in Watford over Christmas where drivers were sought as witnesses to a serious sexual assault.

3.13 It is not clear how removing the requirement for the use of magnetic door signs, which can be removed from the vehicle after work, would help to further protect the identity of a licensed vehicle parked in a residential area.

3.14 In order for a vehicle to be unidentifiable, the rear plate would need to be removable. This is not currently allowed under conditions imposed by Watford Borough Council, nor is it within the scope of this report. It is included here as background information.

3.15 It may be considered that the trade may benefit from being more visible given the intense competition for business that now exists.

3.16 Next Steps:

Following the discussion officers intend to undertake further consultation with all stakeholders and produce a report for a future meeting with recommendation.

## 4.0 **IMPLICATIONS**

### 4.1 **Financial**

4.1.1 No direct financial implications for the Council's income however, any changes in requirements for livery and identification on taxi's will have a financial impact on the taxi trade themselves.

### 4.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

4.2.1 The Council may attach such conditions to the grant of a Hackney carriage licence as it considers to be reasonable, necessary and proportionate. Any person aggrieved by a licence condition has a right to appeal against that condition to the magistrates

court within 21 days.

### 4.3 Equalities

- 4.3.1 An equality impact analysis has not been undertaken yet to assess the full implications of changing the vehicle conditions as requested by the trade. The discussion generated by this report will be included in the analysis.

### 4.4 Potential Risks

4.4.1	Potential Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Overall score
	Customer gets in to unlicensed vehicle	2	4	8
	Customer is unable to identify vehicle as being licensed by Watford following incident	2	3	6
	Reputational impact from reduced accessibility	4	3	12
	Increased enforcement necessary due to continued breach of condition	4	2	8
	Continued targeting of vehicles by criminals due to door signs	1	4	4

### Appendices

Appendix 1 - Report of committee 2008

Appendix 2 - Example door sign

Appendix 3 – Amendment to door sign requirement

### Background Papers

None used