

LICENSING AND SAFETY COMMITTEE
1 JULY 2010

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM UNMET DEMAND SURVEY
Chief Officer: Environment and Public Protection

1 PURPOSE OF DECISION

- 1.1 In October last year and following due consideration of an independent review and the comments of the trade the Committee agreed an interim freeze on any new hackney carriage licences. The limit was introduced so that the trade and officers could progress a number of matters raised in the TPI unmet demand survey and further consider the impact of such a limitation. This report apprises the Committee of progress and recommends a way forward.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Committee agree to the withdrawal of the limit on the number of hackney carriage licences issued as local conditions within Bracknell Forest do not demonstrate a strong justification that removal of numerical restrictions would lead to a significant consumer detriment**

3 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 3.1 The relevant legal provisions are contained within the main body of the report

Borough Treasurer

- 3.2 There are no significant financial implications arising from the recommendation in this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 3.3 Recommendations from the TPI report may have an impact on equalities and present policy. At this time exploratory work is being carried out and therefore no equalities impact has been identified.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 3.4 No strategic risks have been identified at this time.

4 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

4.1 At its meeting in October 2009, the Committee received a detailed report and presentation from specialist consultants employed to consider whether or not the introduction of a limit on the number of licenses that are issued can be justified. The Committee resolved *“to introduce an immediate interim freeze on any new hackney carriage licenses to allow the trade and officers to work further together around the issues raised in relation to the trade; and that a further report be brought to the next meeting of this committee. This proposal was considered to be in the best interests of the trade and the public.”*

4.2 In the period since officers have been working to address a number of recommendations and the following are those that have yet to be fully resolved;

Recommendation 4:

To address service accessibility, service quality and standards of customer care issues identified, consideration should be given to:

in the short term:

- 4(i) **Encouraging drivers to seek training in understanding the market opportunities offered by disabled people, passenger handling, disability awareness, customer care, knowledge and where appropriate language skills.**
- 4(ii) **providing information on the difference between Hackneys and PHVs and promoting the use of legitimate vehicles.**
- 4(iii) **ongoing monitoring of the outcomes of the above through customer surveys and random use of mystery passengers.**

in the longer term:

- 4(iv) **consideration of a more comprehensive quality taxi partnership (QTP) approach to increase liaison between licensing authority, police, other stakeholders and operators, provide a framework for bringing about mutually beneficial improvements across the taxi sector and a quality mark to participating operators, as has been found to be effective in other authorities.**
- 4(v) **the framework provided by a QTP could also be useful for facilitating discussion on how best to optimise supply to address peaks in demand, delays, congestion issues at ranks, environmental issues, markets available and the formation of standard frameworks for taxi commissioning, etc.**

Comment

- 4(i) Officers have consulted with the BLTF in respect of training needs and options. Officers favour a training programme that covers both disability awareness and the physical elements of safe transportation, whilst the BLTF are of the view that only training in the physical loading and unloading of passengers is required to improve driver confidence and passenger satisfaction.

- 4(ii) The draft text for information cards has been drawn up and sent to the Graphic Design unit for proofs to be created. These cards will be distributed to users of taxis and private hire vehicles. There will also be a consultation with private hire operators and vehicle owners in respect of placing notices on the doors of private hire vehicles stating something to the effect "No booking = No ride".
- 4(iii) TPI have been unable to provide full results from the mystery shopper exercise and therefore this process will be re-started to ensure validity of the data to be collected. Officers attended the Access Advisory Panel on the 9 June to advise them on progress of the introduction of accessible taxis and to seek their assistance in a mystery shopper programme. We will use this exercise to measure standards of performance within the taxi trade when providing a service for those with disabilities.

Recommendation 6

The licensing authority should seek to collate information in which operators and drivers operate wheelchair accessible vehicle/s, using drivers trained in the care of disabled people and are responsive to their needs and publish this as part of a guide to accessible taxis.

Comment

Letters were sent to all private hire operators and hackney carriage vehicle owners in early February 2010, seeking a response from all those interested in being included in the guide. At the date of the last meeting only 5 returns had been received. In the period since 22 returns in total have been received and these are included within the guide to accessible taxis.

Recommendation 8:

The licensing authority should consider the request of Hackney operators and drivers for access to bus gates, especially the Great Hollands bus gate.

Comment

Members requested a report from officers within Planning and Transportation to bring a report to this meeting on the possible issues impacting upon a decision to open bus only routes. A report is on the agenda.

- 4.3 Mindful of the passage of time progress is slower than perhaps was envisaged by Committee. The original recommendation to the Committee was that there was insufficient evidence to conclude that the introduction of a limiting Policy would be in the best interests of the consumer. The officer view was that the report confirmed that the trade needed to be helped and the officers committed to work with the trade to that end. That view has not changed.
- 4.4 In the meantime Government guidance and comment remains that "Numerical restrictions should only be imposed where those restrictions deliver clear benefits to the consumer" and "Restrictions should only remain if there is a strong justification that removal would lead to significant consumer detriment as a result of local conditions". The continued imposition of the restriction cannot be justified having regard to this advice no matter how well intentioned the Committee have been.

- 4.5 There is no evidence presented within the TPI report or which has subsequently become evident that removal of a restriction would lead to “significant consumer detriment as a result of local conditions”. Within Bracknell Forest we have a fleet which is modern and generally in very good condition. We have sufficient numbers to meet normal demand with opportunities for additional demand to be met at peak times, night times and through better engagement with the disabled community.
- 4.6 It is an interesting fact that since the temporary ban was introduced we have been operating under the limit. The decline in demand for licences has not halted and the ban has done nothing to help ensure the provision and maintenance of a quality fleet if that was the Committees expectation. Whilst no one wants to see a decline in the fleet, market forces are considered the best way to ensure that the needs of the customers come first. It is the needs of the consumer that the Council must have regard to when making such decisions.

Background Papers

Taxi and Private Vehicle Licensing – Best Practice Guide DOT March 2010
TPI Unmet Demand Taxi Survey August 2009
Licensing and Safety Committee - 1 October 2009
Minutes of meetings with Bracknell Licensed Taxi Forum

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