

# FAREHAM

## BOROUGH COUNCIL

### **Report to Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee**

**Date**                    **26<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

**Report of:**           **Head of Environmental Health**

**Subject:**             **TAXIS AND WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBILITY REPORT**

#### **SUMMARY**

On 19<sup>th</sup> June 2018 the Head of Environmental Health took a report to the Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee where the Committee agreed that the age limit for Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles, when first plated as a licensed Hackney Carriage, be increased from 5 years to 10 years. As the cost of a vehicle that was ten years old was less than one that was 5 years old, it was hoped that the Trade would react and increase the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles in the fleet.

It was also resolved that an update on the position with regard to wheelchair accessible vehicles be brought to the meeting of the Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee scheduled to take place on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2019.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee note the contents of this report.

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. On 13<sup>th</sup> June 2017, the Head of Environmental Health took a report to the Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee for Members to consider whether the current arrangements for wheelchair accessible vehicles were sufficient.
2. At this meeting it was reported that Fareham Borough Council had 3 wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) although private hire companies in the surrounding areas had WAVs and could pick up any unmet demand.
3. Neither the proposed guidance nor technical specifications for wheelchair accessible vehicles had been forthcoming from the Government.
4. The situation regarding the provision of wheelchair accessible vehicles was unchanged from previous meetings.
5. Members discussed and considered in detail whether the wheelchair accessible hackney carriage and private hire vehicles that serve the Borough are meeting the needs of people with disabilities. It was agreed that further evidence should be gathered from relevant parties to ensure that all issues are fully understood.
6. At the meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> June 2017, The Head of Environmental Health reported on an investigation with representatives from Dial a Ride, Shop Mobility, the MS Society and the Health Forum.
7. It was reported that in Fareham less people were using Dial-a -Ride due to a 50% rise of wheelchair users meaning there were less seats available for the elderly (wheelchairs taking up more room) and cuts to funding due had not yet been implemented.
8. Bus subsidies would be removed by 2019 which would mean that people who travel by bus on a wheelchair may then need to use another service such as taxis.
9. The main reasons preventing drivers from running a WAV were:
  - a. Initial cost of vehicle
  - b. Running and maintenance cost of vehicle
  - c. Journeys take longer (loading and unloading) than a saloon vehicle but the fare is the same.
10. The Committee agreed that the age limit for Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles, when first plated, be increased from 5 years to 10 years (but that the vehicle must still be in immaculate condition).

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

11. Since increasing the age limit in June 2018, one additional WAV has been plated bringing the total to 4.
12. The council is still not in a position to subsidise the cost of the vehicle or running costs. The licence cost is relatively low in comparison to the cost of a vehicle so would offer little incentive if waived.

13. The situation remains the same as funding has not been withdrawn to other services offering wheelchair accessible vehicles.
14. The Government may still come up with a definition of a WAV. Although this is unlikely to be prescriptive it should still be considered. However, the Welsh Government are currently consulting on a reform of Taxi Legislation in Wales proposing that a Welsh Joint Transport Authority is formed and there is a national single authority that are responsible for taxi and private hire licensing using a single set of standards. Although this wouldn't apply to England if brought in, England may follow suit should the scheme be successful.
15. The Disability Discrimination Act prevents additional charges being levied for passengers who are in a wheelchair.
16. Speaking to various groups representing wheelchair users at the beginning of 2018 there was anecdotal evidence that from time to time wheel chair users have difficulty in getting taxis that can accommodate them. However, the Licensing Section very rarely receive complaints of this nature.

### **RISK ASSESSMENT**

17. There are no significant risk considerations in relation to this report

### **CONCLUSION**

18. The increase in the age for first plating a WAV has not made a significant change to the number of plated vehicles. There has been an increase of only one. In the absence of any national standards for wheel chair accessibility it would still be difficult to introduce a requirement on the Trade locally.

### **Background Papers:**

None

### **Reference Papers:**

None

### **Enquiries:**

For further information on this report please contact Ian Rickman. (Ext 4773)