

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee

Date **19 June 2018**

Report of: **Head of Environmental Health**

Subject: **TAXIS AND WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBILITY REPORT**

SUMMARY

On 13th 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 are sufficient. The Committee resolved that officers should consult with local disability groups and Hackney Carriage/Private Hire Associations to gain a clearer picture of the issues faced by disabled residents and provide a further report on Taxis and Wheelchair Accessibility for consideration at a future meeting of the Committee. This consultation has now been carried out and the findings and recommendation are presented in this report.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee agrees that the age limit for Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles, when first plated as a licensed Hackney Carriage, be increased from 5 years to 10 years (but that the vehicle must still be in immaculate condition).

INTRODUCTION

1. On 13th 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 (WAV) although private hire companies in the surrounding areas had WAV and could pick up any unmet demand.
3. Neither the proposed guidance or technical specifications for wheelchair accessible vehicles had been forthcoming from the Government.
4. Therefore, 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. It was resolved that, having considered whether the current arrangements for wheelchair accessible vehicles are sufficient, officers be requested to:
 - (a) consult with local disability groups and Hackney Carriage/Private Hire Associations to gain a clearer picture of the issues faced by disabled residents; and
 - (b) provide a further report on Taxis and Wheelchair Accessibility for consideration at a future meeting of the Committee.

INVESTIGATION

7. The Head of Environmental Health and the Licensing Manager spoke to representatives from Dial a Ride, Shop Mobility, the MS Society and the Health Forum. The situation regarding WAVs in Fareham was explained and the representatives were asked for the peoples' experiences, problems and thoughts. The main points which came out were:
 - In Fareham the overall users of Dial-a-Ride had dropped in number. However, this was due to the rise by 50% of wheelchair users meaning there were less seats available for the elderly or those who do not use a wheelchair. In other areas (Gosport) where there are more accessible taxis, numbers had remained constant.
 - Dial-a-Ride is funded by Fareham Borough Council, Gosport Borough Council and Hampshire County Council and at the time of speaking to the agencies, this funding was due to be withdrawn. Since that time, it has been decided that funding will remain.
 - 6-8k from FBC
 - 6.8k from GBC
 - 48k from HCC for both FBC/GBC, i.e. a total of £96k.

- Dial-a-Ride cannot take people out of the Borough within which they live, i.e. if a person wanted to visit a relative at QA they could not use the service.
 - The trip to Queen Alexandra Hospital (QAH) would cost approx. £3, in a taxi £30, some operators up to £70.
 - Bus subsidies will be removed by 2019 which will mean that people who travelled by bus on a wheelchair may then need to use another service such as taxis.
 - Often customers with wheelchairs are faced with long waits due to no vehicles being available in the Borough.
 - People do not know who to complain to.
8. A questionnaire was sent to all licensed drivers in the Borough (305) not all of whom own a current vehicle. 24 responses were received which is 7.8% .
9. The main points raised were:
- Drivers overall did not feel there was a requirement for more WAVs with 17 of those who responded (24) saying they had not had to turn away work. Some pointed out that many wheelchairs are foldable and will fit in a saloon car.
 - The main reasons preventing drivers from getting a WAV were:
 - Initial cost of vehicle
 - Running and maintenance cost of vehicle
 - Journeys take longer (loading and unloading) than a saloon vehicle but fare is the same
 - Incentives put forward by drivers to encourage more WAVs were:
 - Subsidise cost of vehicle
 - Increase age limit for WAVs
 - Lower licensing fees for WAVs
 - Raise fares charged for WAVs

CONSIDERATIONS

10. In addition to the above from the survey, it is possible to require all new vehicles to be wheelchair accessible, however this would risk there becoming an artificially high value to existing saloon plated vehicles and would not necessarily see new WAV's being plated.
11. The council is 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.
12. The status quo remains the same as funding has not been withdrawn to other services offering wheelchair accessible vehicles.

13. The Government may still come up with a definition of a WAV. Although this is unlikely to be prescriptive it should still be taken into account.
14. The Disability Discrimination Act prevents additional charges being levied for passengers who are in a wheelchair.
15. Currently, Hackney Carriage vehicles plated for the first time must be no older than 5 years since first registration. If this were relaxed to 10 years for wheelchair accessible vehicles, this would effectively subsidise the cost as older vehicles are less expensive. All vehicles are required to have both a valid MOT and also an independent engineer's report, so public safety would not be compromised.
16. This change would be contrary to the air quality objectives the Council is trying to achieve, however the policy could be kept under review and when the number of WAV vehicles has increased to a more reasonable number could be reversed.

RISK ASSESSMENT

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

CONCLUSION

18. Should the Committee wish to allow for more Wheelchair Accessible vehicles without the need to adopt a 100% WAV policy, we need to encourage more proprietors to change to this type of vehicle by adopting the following:

Increase the age limit for first time plated WAV Hackney Carriage Vehicles from 5 years to 10 years (but must still be in immaculate condition).

Background Papers:

None

Reference Papers:

None

Enquiries:

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