

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee

Date **9 July 2013**

Report of: **Director of Regulatory and Democratic Services**

Subject: **ANNUAL TAXI VEHICLE RENEWALS**

SUMMARY

As of 1 May 2013 Fareham Borough Council had a taxi fleet of 238 Hackney Carriage and 35 Private Hire vehicles. Vehicle licences are granted on an annual basis and all licences are granted on 1 May and expire on 30 April the following year. Each year in January the renewal paperwork is sent to all of the owners and they then present all of their vehicle documents up to March. In March and April the licensing team undertakes the inspection of all of the vehicles, to ensure they are kept in a clean, serviceable and roadworthy condition. This report details the work involved with the annual vehicle licence renewals and provides a summary of the result of the inspections.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee notes the content of the report and the work involved with the annual Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Renewals.

INTRODUCTION

1. The Town and Police Clauses Act 1847 and the Local Government (Miscellaneous) provisions Act 1976 allow Local Authorities to license Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicles. In licensing such vehicles, Local Authorities can specify conditions relating to such vehicles. Fareham Borough Council has set conditions relating to the design and condition of vehicles; these were updated and approved by the Licensing and Regulatory Affairs Committee at its meeting on 22 January 2008.
2. Fareham Borough Council has a taxi fleet of approximately 238 Hackney Carriage and 35 Private Hire vehicles. Vehicle licences are granted on an annual basis and all licences are granted on 1 May and expire on 30 April the following year. Each year in March and April the licensing team undertakes the process of renewing all vehicle licences. Part of the renewal process involves the inspection of all of the vehicles, to ensure they are kept in a clean, serviceable and roadworthy condition.
3. Due to the fluid nature of the fleet numbers of vehicles vary day by day. For instance, approximately 20 vehicle owners who wished to change their vehicle let their plates expire at the end of April. This was done so that they did not have to pay to transfer (£185) and also renew (£185). By letting their vehicles expire and then re-plating them early in May, they only paid the £185 fee for a new plate. Therefore all numbers are approximate.
4. It should be noted that the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire licensing regime also involves the licensing of drivers who renew annually on the anniversary of the grant of their first licence. These renew at the end of each month throughout the year. There are also 9 operators (of Private Hire Companies) these renew at the same time as the vehicles.

PROCESS

5. Renewal paperwork is sent out to owners approximately 8 weeks before the renewal is due giving a date approximately 4 weeks in advance to return the paperwork to the licensing team. A date is also given at this time for the inspection.
6. In addition, a regular newsletter is produced and in January vehicle owners were advised as to the inspection arrangements and of the standards their vehicles should meet (see Appendix A).

PAPERWORK

7. Each owner receives a letter setting out the documents required, the date paperwork must be returned to the office and the date the vehicle is due to be inspected. Enclosed with the letter is an application form, an engineer's report (for completion by an independent engineer) for each vehicle and a payment slip. These must be completed and returned to the office with the registration document, a current MOT certificate (where applicable), insurance documents and the fee. This year the fee for renewing a vehicle licence remained unchanged at £185.00. This price has remained the same since May 2009, when it was increased from £176. Owners were informed that a missed appointment fee of £34 would be applicable if they did not return the paperwork by the date given without informing the officers beforehand.

BACK OFFICE WORK

8. Each set of paperwork is scanned onto the system and a BPMS (business process management system) case is opened. This is a checklist that enables the officers to record when paperwork has been seen alongside an electronic image of that paperwork. The registration document is checked to ensure the person plating the vehicle is the owner or co-owner of the vehicle. The MOT certificate and engineer's report are checked to ensure they are current and apply to the vehicle being presented. Insurance documents are checked to ensure that they cover the vehicle for working as a taxi and that they are current and the driver is named. If a cover note is presented a note is made that the full policy document must be seen when the cover note expires. A copy is taken of the receipt (payment is usually made in the cash office prior to the owner going to the licensing section).
9. Once the checking has been completed and all documents are present and correct, the paper licence and plate are produced. The plates have a hologram on them and are produced by printing onto acetate, which is stuck onto the hologram and then covered by a sheet of perspex. This gives a strong, durable plate that is easy to read. This year due to the change in corporate branding, Private Hire plates were coloured white and Hackney Carriage plates the corporate blue. The combination of the hologram and production method means that these plates are not easily reproduced outside the Council.
10. The completed licence, plates and a customer satisfaction survey form with reply envelope are then stored in boxes until the inspection.
11. This year inspection forms were pre-printed on carbonated pad. This enabled the Licensing Team to give a form with any defects listed or any advisory information or a record that the vehicle had been inspected and passed. Leaving a copy for the licensing team to enter results into Ocella (in-house computer system).
12. Preparatory work for the renewals was carried out almost entirely by the Assistant Licensing and Regulatory Support Officer. Payments were made to the Cash Office.
13. The cost of undertaking this work is met by the taxi licensing fee and is provided at no cost to the Council.

THE INSPECTION

14. To ensure that there is sufficient time for any defects to be made good, although the renewal date is 30 April, inspections were carried out in the second week of April.
15. For the last five years the inspections have been held in Portchester Community Centre car park. However, due to the demolition / building works it was decided that a new location was required. The location chosen needs to be easily accessible to the vehicles, including high-sided vehicles such as minibuses, convenient and safe for members of staff and, above all, not cause a hazard or nuisance to other road users. It was decided that the bottom tier of Lysses car park would meet these requirements and this is where the 2013 inspections were held.

16. Staff have high visibility jackets and vests and safety boots or shoes and always have a mobile phone on site for their protection. All staff have been trained on what checks are required as part of the inspection process.
17. The inspections were spread out across five days in one week and amounted to approximately 60 vehicles a day. Re-inspections were scheduled for the 26 April. Owners were given the option of changing the date of inspection, if inconvenient, so this number was a guide only. Owners had been advised that a £34 fee would apply if they missed their inspection day without prior notice.
18. All vehicles had a valid MOT (where applicable) and engineer's report. The main purpose of the inspections was to ensure the vehicles were clean and serviceable and met the Council's standards to enable the licence to be issued.
19. Each vehicle was inspected and any defects annotated on the inspection sheet. Where there were no defects the new plate and paper licence were issued and the old plate either returned there and then or brought into the Civic Offices at a later date. (Some plates are affixed in such a way that they are not easily removable).
20. Vehicles with defects such as scratches to paintwork, lights not working correctly, or no/out of date fire extinguisher, would be refused their plate until such time as they could be re-inspected. In the majority of cases this would be on 26 April, the day reserved for this purpose.
21. Vehicles that were not able to make the inspection dates, or had defects which needed a longer time to be made good, could be inspected in the newly marked space in the Ferneham Hall Clinic car park or the turning circle by prior arrangement. Vehicles which were not issued with a new plate before 1 May would not be eligible for use as a taxi until such time that they had been re-inspected and issued with a plate.
22. All vehicles presented for inspection were issued with a new plate. No vehicles were refused a new plate on this occasion. Some owners were advised that their vehicles would need a complete overhaul to pass next year's inspections.

BACK OFFICE WORK

23. The inspection forms were scanned on to the system and the case closed and a record made in Ocella of the inspection and defects found. Returned plates are collected by Mogo (the manufacturer) to be recycled.

STATISTICS

24. The following summarises the results of the annual vehicle inspections:-
 - 203 Hackney Carriages inspected
 - 35 Private Hire vehicles inspected
 - 235 Vehicles in total;
 - 192 Vehicles passed with no defects;
 - 22 Vehicles with minor defects (after required work); (last year 13);
 - 0 Vehicles with major defects; (last year 0);

- 24 Vehicles given advisory notes (e.g. will not go through next year unless scratch repaired etc) (new system)
- 17 missed appointments (8 of these by one owner); (-2 on last year); and
- 37 inspections rearranged; (-7 on last year).

NB: Although the fleet consisted of 238 Hackney Carriage and 35 Private Hire vehicles, not all of the vehicles were renewed (as many were lapsed by the owners and new vehicles plated later. A small number of vehicles are still awaiting renewal. A number of vehicles have become Hackney Carriages from Private Hire.

RISK ASSESSMENT

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

CONCLUSION

26. The annual renewals were well organised and the standard of the licensed fleet generally found to be high.
27. Officers will continue to undertake inspections and monitoring of vehicles during the course of the year to ensure that the standards are being maintained.

Background Papers:

None.

Reference Papers:

None.

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Ian Rickman (Ext 2401).