

Licensing & Regulatory Committee

Date: 20th December 2017

Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Licensing Policy Test and Inspection of Vehicles

Report of the Chief Fire Officer: Mr Paul Hedley

Cabinet Member: Councillor John Riddle

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with further information relating to the testing and inspection of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicles particularly relating to the Berwick area.

Recommendations

1. Members note the additional information and consider whether changes to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy may be appropriate.

Key Issues

1. Following a report to the committee on 25th October 2017 further information was requested in order to allow full consideration as to whether the Council should amend its hackney carriage and private hire licensing policy with regard to the testing of vehicles in the Berwick area.
2. The current policy requires vehicles to be inspected at MOT testing facilities under the control of Northumberland County Council.
3. The committee requested information relating to the following matters:
 - the current number of vehicles licensed
 - current Northumberland County Council testing facilities within Berwick
 - How much it would cost to develop an mot testing facility
 - Whether there would be any scope for renting other facilities part time and sending mechanics to Berwick.
 - How our fees compare to other private garages
 - Clarification as to when vehicles can be driven after MOT failure.
 - Viability of contracting all testing to one private garage.

3. The main focus of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing regimes is the protection of the public. This includes ensuring that the vehicles licensed as hackney carriage or private hire vehicles are safe and suitable for the purpose of transporting the public.
4. Any changes to the Council policy would require consultation with all interested parties across the County.

Background

1. The Council currently has six hackney carriages zones which correspond to the old district boundaries.

Zone	Number of Hackney Carriages
Alnwick	17
Tynedale	141
Berwick	65
Blyth	250
Castle Morpeth	85
Wansbeck	57
Total	615

2. Private hire vehicles are licensed for the whole of Northumberland County Council area

Area	Number of Private Hire Vehicles
Berwick	23
Total Number of Private Hire Vehicles	431

3. The age profile of current licensed vehicles is below.

Zone	Under 3 Years	Between 3-5	between 5-8	Over 8
Berwick	10	20	14	21
Alnwick	3	3	4	6
Blyth Valley	67	49	66	68

Castle Morpeth	9	13	29	34
Tynedale	18	36	46	41
Wansbeck	5	8	15	29
Private Hire	123	79	100	129

4. The Council has three MOT testing facilities which are based at Stakeford Depot, Lionheart Industrial Estate in Alnwick and Tyne Mills garage in Hexham. The Council does not have any testing facilities within the Berwick area nor does NCC employ any MOT testing staff in premises nearby.
5. The cost to develop a new MOT testing station would be in excess of £100K.
6. There could be arrangements made for the Council to rent premises from an existing MOT facility within Berwick and for a Northumberland County Council authorised tester to use these facilities. However, this would entail costs associated with rent but also travel of the mechanics and changes to insurance. It would also affect the availability of testing at the current garages.
7. The Council currently charges £55 for a Taxi Test, this is broken down to £40 for the MOT and £15 for the compliance element relating to conditions and cleanliness. There is a maximum amount MOT test stations can charge for an MOT which is set by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency and that is £54.85. As garages are not conducting taxi tests at present it is difficult to compare. A check of local garages has revealed that the current fees charged by the Berwick garages for a MOT is between £39 and £45.
8. One of the benefits of testing being completed by NCC inspectors is the ability for testers to be authorised to immediately suspend a vehicle licence. The inspectors are currently only suspending vehicles in cases of serious MOT failure. From June to December nine suspension notices were issued. Three relating to Berwick vehicles and six for Hexham.
9. There are two ongoing investigations where the information has been provided by the Councils testing station.
10. Prior to 2015, Council policy allowed the testing of vehicles by independent authorised testing stations. 43 garages were authorised to conduct tests on behalf of the Council. 5 testing stations were within Berwick.
11. Problems were encountered due to lack of information provided to the Licensing Section from the garages where vehicles were presented that did not meet the required standard. There were also complaints regarding the standard of testing and subsequently the standard of the vehicles licensed. On transfer of the testing to

Council garages there was a report that the existing vehicles were initially presented to our garages which did not comply with the Council compliance standards. There has been a significant improvement in the standard of the vehicles presented for testing since the introduction of the policy

12. The Council's Fleet Transport Section have confirmed that vehicles can be driven back to the owners' designated repair site providing the failure is not related to a dangerous or safety related failure item. Regular vehicle maintenance should mean that these types of failures are extremely rare.
13. Advice has been sought in response to the Committee questions relating to the viability of a single garage being authorised to conduct the taxi testing on behalf of Northumberland County Council. Due to the number of vehicles involved it is not envisaged that capacity for a garage would be an issue. However, the Council should be clear as to why one garage should be authorised and not all those that meet the required standard. Due to previous experience Officers would recommend that any contract issued to a single provider includes a requirement to communicate with the Licensing Section. Consideration should also be given as to whether this type of arrangements should be available for all applications such as new vehicles or just renewals or whether this should be available to all operators/vehicle owners or just those who have a proven compliance and maintenance record.
14. The following details have been provided in relation to the taxi testing from 1st October 2017 to 7th December 2017

Testing Station	Number of Taxi Tests	Failed	%
Lionheart Alnwick	39	17	44
Tyne Mills Depot	70	25	36
Stakeford	105	27	25

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IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT

Policy:	The NCC Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy may be amended
Finance and value for money: renting MOT premises.	Costs associated with officer travel or
Human Resources: and Fleet Transport staffing levels	Resource implications for both Licensing
Property:	None
Equalities:	None
Risk Assessment:	Not applicable
Crime & Disorder:	None
Customer Considerations:	None
Carbon Reduction:	None
Consultation: consultation.	Any amendment to the policy would require
Wards:	All

Finance Officer	n/a
Monitoring Officer/Legal	n/a
Human Resources	n/a
Procurement	n/a
I.T.	n/a
Executive Director	PH
Portfolio Holder(s)	JR