

TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2022

Taxi Policy Consultation Update

On the 7 November, Strategy and Resources Committee met to discuss proposed policy amendments following on from the public consultation on the draft Taxi and Private Hire Policy between 14 March and 9 May.

Following on from the consultation Officers proposed a number of significant amendments to the proposals, all of which were approved by the Committee. We wanted to update you on a few these specifically. For a full description please see the recommendation of Licensing and Community Safety Committee of [22 September 2022](#)

Firstly, of all the proposed Policy changes, the element which received most comments in the Consultation were the proposals around vehicle standard changes. Officers took on board the detailed comments received and put forward a number of significant changes including:

- The proposal to reduce the age limit for new licensed vehicles from 5 years currently, to 3 years, was amended to maintain the current 5-year limit, but this was linked to the vehicle also being a Euro 6 emission rating. Many of the comments received referenced the very significant recent price increases in the second-hand car market, as well as the ongoing financial impact of the Covid-19 epidemic on the taxi/ PH trade, and Officers felt this presented a compelling reasoning to look again at the proposal. Officers felt that adding the emission standard requirement to the current age-limit presented a reasonable compromise between environmental aspirations and cost of living concerns;
- The proposal to introduce an upper age limit for licensed vehicle renewal was also amended for similar reasons. Officers proposed that instead of an age-based limit, the policy, should instead again be focused on emissions, and further proposed that this policy measure be delayed in coming into effect until 1 January 2026 to allow second-hand car prices, cost of living etc., to hopefully stabilise. The Committee agreed with this approach and approved the policy measure that as of 1 January 2026 all vehicles on renewal should be Euro 6 emission standard or above;
- Likewise, the proposals for wheelchair accessible vehicles were also amended to say “for all new wheelchair accessible vehicles plated for the first time by the Council, proprietors will be required to comply with the following condition(s): Diesel vehicles must comply with the Euro 5 emission standard or above (or recognised UK equivalent). Petrol vehicles must comply with the Euro 4 emission standard or above (or recognised UK equivalent)”. The lower emission standards will allow the plating of older vehicles than for standard taxi/ PHVs, and as such help to reduce the initial purchase costs, and we hope that this will help to incentivise their uptake;

Secondly, Officers put forward another amendment around the proposal to make it mandatory for private hire vehicles to display door signs saying “private hire advance booking only”. Officers originally proposed this as a replacement for the current requirement to display a sun strip, which was felt to be outdated, but this proposal was amended further

to allow for private hire operators to incorporate the above wording into their own door signage (subject to font size specifications etc.,). This tweak to the policy wording was put forward by several private hire operators, and Officers believed that this was reasonable.

The remaining proposals put forward in the public consultation were passed without amendment including the following:

- Introduction of technical specifications and system requirements for any new CCTV systems fitted within licensed vehicles (no requirement to replace/ update any systems already installed);
- The introduction of record keeping requirements for both Hackney Carriage and PHV proprietors (daily vehicle check records, maintenance records, and a log of who drives the vehicle);
- The new policy section detailing requirements for Executive Hire Exemptions (exemption from displaying a plate when doing chauffeur work);
- The requirement for Licensed drivers to attend an interview with Licensing Officers when requested to do so in relation to a complaint received by the Council.

In addition to the previously proposed Policy changes and subsequent amendments, a number of other minor policy changes were put forward and approved:

- The vehicle Inspection report sheet to be used for all vehicle inspections has been updated and extended following a benchmarking exercise against the vehicle inspection requirements of neighbouring Licensing Authorities across Devon;
- An additional paragraph has been added to the Private Hire Licensing Driver Conditions (Appendix O Section 3.2), to make it an additional requirement for Licensed Drivers to notify the Licensing Authority where they are notified by the Police of an allegation of an offence by them that the Police are investigating.

Please be mindful that the new policy brings into effect the fact that the Council will no longer accept evidence via a HGV licence entitlement on a driving licence that a driver has passed a Group 2 medical. All applicants are required to provide evidence of a Group 2 standard medical completed and signed fit, as the medicals for DVLA HGV renewals do not include a declaration that the person is medically fit to hold the licence.

The new policy was published on 7 November, and a link to the final accessible document will be provided in the next newsletter. A [tracked changes policy](#) is available

New Driver Application Process Review

Also at the September meeting, the Committee discussed an email received from a Private Hire Operator which highlighted the lengthy period for new driver applicants to become licensed (the letter was also published in the September edition of [Private Hire and Taxi Monthly](#))

Officers undertook a benchmarking exercise with other Devon and Somerset Authorities, and proposed a number of policy amendment options for the Committee to consider.

After a detailed discussion the Committee made a decision to recommend to Strategy and Resources the following changes to the new driver application process:

- Applicants to have the option of attending a new licensed driver course OR the previous BTEC/ NVQ qualification;

- The Knowledge test to consist of questions on numeracy and local geography;

The new licensed driver course is shorter format course than the BTEC/ NVQ but was considered to still cover the most important information to a new licensed driver. Officers are in contact with course providers and hope to be in a position to approve the first course shortly. Critically, the new licensed driver training courses are currently being run every month.

The removal of the knowledge test questions on the Highway Code and taxi/ PH legislation will mean that the time taken for the tests will be shorter, thereby making more test slots available with the same resource level. Both of these questions are covered elsewhere in the application process, namely Highway Code knowledge is assessed as part of the driving test, and taxi/ PH law is covered in both training course options, so the Committee were happy to recommend this change which will be considered for final approval in the December meeting of Strategy and Resources Committee.