

VARIATIONS TO HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE POLICY

Officer contact: Caroline Steven

DDI: 01494 - 421222

Email: caroline_steven@wycombe.gov.uk

Wards Affected: All

PROPOSED DECISION

That the current policy requiring that all wheelchair accessible hackney carriage vehicles are side loading is maintained.

Members are also asked to note the update on progress by the sub-group dealing with commercial advertising and to determine the best way forward in this respect.

Executive Summary

Members will recall that various amendments to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy were considered at their last meeting in February this year and that an amended policy was approved. Two matters remained undetermined at the conclusion of this meeting, however, and it was agreed that these would be reconsidered at the next meeting of the committee. These matters relate to commercial advertising on licensed vehicles and the loading point of wheelchair accessible hackney carriage vehicles.

Corporate Implications

The Council is required by law to license the operation of taxis and private hire vehicles. The paramount consideration in this respect is the safety and convenience of those travelling in licensed vehicles. The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 permits local authorities to place conditions on licensed private hire and hackney carriage drivers and vehicles. Conditions should be aimed at improving service and protecting the users of licensed vehicles.

Policy/Community Plan Implications

The amendments suggested would contribute to all of the objectives set out in the Corporate Plan.

Detailed Report

Rear Loading Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles

1. The draft revised policy included a proposal to permit rear loading wheelchair accessible vehicles. This type of vehicle has not previously been authorised as a hackney carriage. Several comments were received from individuals in support of this proposal, which was also generally supported by the private hire trade. A large section of the hackney carriage trade, however, is opposed to this proposal on the grounds of public safety.
2. Following the last committee meeting, the High Street rank was inspected by the Division's Health and Safety Officer and the use of rear loading vehicles (one of which had been provided for this purpose by a private hire operator) was considered.
3. It was the opinion of the health and safety officer that it would not be possible to load a wheelchair user from the kerb into this type of vehicle and this would

therefore necessitate loading the wheelchair user from the highway. In order to achieve this the wheelchair would need to be lowered into the highway from a high kerb. This could prove to be dangerous for the wheelchair user and would not be possible in the case of power chairs, which would need to enter the highway at a point where the kerb was level with the highway and which may be at some distance from the rank.

4. The possibility of loading wheelchair users from the nearby loading and disabled bays in the High Street was discussed, although there is no guarantee that any of these bays would be available at any given time. Other ranks within the town centre also do not have this option available in that there is no alternative loading area nearby.
5. There has been a suggestion from some trade members that passengers should be offered the option of using rear loading hackney carriages when they are pre-booking a vehicle to be collected from home or another location where it would be possible to safely load the user.
6. This is not considered to be a viable option, however, given that hackney carriages predominantly work from the town centre ranks where it is not deemed to be safe to load or unload wheelchair users. Private hire vehicles are capable of being pre-booked and are permitted to be rear loading in line with the Council's current policy.
7. The issue of the rank kerb height has been raised over several years with Bucks County Council Highways and has again been raised with them recently. Confirmation has been received that the design of the ranks does take other matters into account such as the camber of the road and drainage requirements. There are no plans for any amendments to the town centre ranks and this is issue not within the county council's current priorities, although the design of some of the ranks may be reconsidered as part of the possible future Oxford Road changes. Confirmation has also been received that the high kerb at the High Street rank is necessary to prevent rain water run-off flooding the pavement. The officer also noted that planning permission is required to drop any kerb.
8. As a result of the above, it is considered that rear loading hackney carriage vehicles are not suitable or safe to be used as a result of the design of the town centre ranks. It is suggested that the issue should be reconsidered if the design of the ranks changes in the future.
9. Three e-mails have been received from wheelchair users in support of rear loading wheelchair accessible hackney carriage vehicles and these are at appendices A-C

Advertising

10. The private hire trade have requested that commercial advertising is permitted on private hire vehicles. This subject was discussed at the committee meeting in February and it was decided that a sub-group be set up to consider the issue further.
11. Benchmarking was carried out nationally which resulted in sample advertising policies / conditions being received for the sub-group's consideration. It was also confirmed that a large majority of local authorities throughout England and Wales do not permit commercial advertising on licensed vehicles.

12. The sub-group were due to meet on the 22nd June but unfortunately this meeting had to be cancelled due to the unexpected absence of one of the Members. Another of the Members who had been included in this sub-group is no longer sitting on this committee and so only two Members were present. As a result, the Chairman proposed that this issue should be brought back before the committee for further consideration at this meeting.

Background Papers

Files in Environmental Services