

REPORT OF GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

(Meeting held 17 March 2006)

1. PROPOSALS FOR THE INTRODUCTION OF WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VEHICLES AS HACKNEY CARRIAGES (REPORT A) (MINUTE NO 37).

On the recommendation of this Committee the Council on 24 October 2005 decided, with effect from 1 April 2006, to cease exercising control over the numbers of hackney carriage licences issued (so-called “deregulation”). At the same time the Council agreed that in respect of applications for new hackney carriage licences made on or after 1 April 2006, only vehicles which were wheelchair accessible would be licensed. The effect of this decision was that taxis licensed before 1 April 2006 (plates nos 1 – 88) could continue to be licensed yearly without having to be wheelchair accessible, provided they remained in the same ownership, but any new licences issued (nos 88 and above), or when vehicles on plates nos 1 – 88 were replaced or transferred to new ownership, would have to be wheelchair accessible. In making its recommendation to the Council in this regard, the Committee was mindful of the fact that Government regulations requiring taxis to be wheelchair accessible had not yet been made.

At the request of the newly-formed Hackney Carriage Owners’ Association, members of which met with representatives of the Committee on 1 February 2006, the Committee has given this matter further consideration. Representatives of the Association expressed concern at the new policy of only accepting wheelchair accessible vehicles for newly issued licences. They stressed that they would be placed at a severe economic disadvantage by not retaining the right to supply non-wheelchair accessible vehicles on current plates. This situation would arise when their current vehicles required replacement, either through a normal replacement programme or perhaps following accident damage or mechanical failure. They therefore made strong representation that the right to license non-wheelchair accessible vehicles be retained on existing plates until such time as wheelchair accessible vehicles were required by regulation. They also indicated that current customers, some of whom were disabled, had advised that they were happy to continue using saloon cars.

The Committee understands that, although the Disability Discrimination Act received Royal assent in 1995 there has been delay in introducing regulations to enhance vehicle accessibility standards. The original timetable, published in 1997, states that by January 2012 all taxis would have to comply with Taxi Accessibility Regulations. However, following a study by Cranfield University, the Under-Secretary of State for Transport in 2003 made a written statement to the House of Commons to the effect that regulations will require licensing authorities to introduce taxis that are fully accessible for disabled people between 2010 and 2020.

Having reconsidered the matter in the light of the representations from the Hackney Carriage Owners' Association, the Committee is of the view that the need to replace existing licensed vehicles with wheelchair accessible vehicles would be an unfair imposition on the taxi trade. The Committee now recommends a managed approach to the change, to allow existing owners to license non-wheelchair accessible vehicles until regulations require wheelchair accessibility. However, wheelchair accessible vehicles will be required for any new licences issued following deregulation on 1 April 2006.

RECOMMENDED:

- (a) *That it be a condition of new hackney carriage licence numbers (Nos. 89 and above) issued on or after 1 April 2006 and which were not in existence prior to that date that the vehicle be wheelchair accessible; and***
- (b) *That all types of vehicle which conform to the Council's specification and requirements will be licensed where application is made to change a vehicle on a licence number which was issued on or prior to 31 March 2006 (Nos. 1 to 88), whether or not the vehicle is wheelchair accessible.***

**Cllr W H Dow
CHAIRMAN**