

GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE – 15 JANUARY 2010

SPARE TYRE AND WHEEL CONDITION FOR TAXI VEHICLES

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee about representations made to review the Council's policy regarding the spare wheel and tyre that must be carried by both hackney carriage and private hire vehicles.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Council's current policy, as contained within 'The Examination and Assessment of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicles' document, regarding the spare tyre and wheel states: 'The tyre must be "first life", not re-treaded or remoulded. It must be of the correct size, in good condition with no bulges, cracks or cuts and not have any steel showing. The tread depth should be a minimum of 2mm over the whole of the tread area with pressure as per the manufacturer's instructions. "Space Saver" wheels are not permitted'.

3. Representation

- 3.1 Both hackney carriage and private hire traders have commented on the difficulty of buying new vehicles that adhere to the Council's current policy. They state that many of the new vehicles, saloon, estate and people carriers, that are suitable for either form of taxi work are manufactured with space saver wheels, run flat tyres or inflation kits as standard.

4. New Forest Taxi Association

- 4.1 This matter was discussed at the most recent meeting of the New Forest Taxi Association, held on Monday 19 October 2009. The Association feels that the current policy should be reviewed, inasmuch that the 'spare wheel/tyre condition should reflect the 'original' option as designed and delivered by the vehicle manufacturer.

5. Polices Of Other Councils

- 5.1 The table below sets out the approaches adopted by neighbouring authorities in Dorset and Hampshire.

Dorset

Local Authority	Inflation Kit	Space Saver	Run Flat Tyres
Bournemouth	Y	Y	X
Christchurch	Y	Y	Y
East Dorset	Y	Y	Y
North Dorset	Y	Y	Y
Poole	X	Y	X

Purbeck	Y	Y	Y
West Dorset	Y	Y	Y
Weymouth	Y	Y	Y

Hampshire

Local Authority	Inflation Kit	Space Saver	Run Flat Tyres
Basingstoke	X	X	X
East Hampshire	X	X	X
Eastleigh	Y	Y	Y
Fareham	Y	Y	Y
Gosport	X	X	X
Hart	Y	Y	Y
Havant	X	X	X
New Forest	X	X	X
Portsmouth	Y	Y	Y
Rushmoor	Y	Y	Y
Southampton	Y	Y	Y
Test Valley	X	X	X
Winchester	Y	Y	Y

- 5.2 The argument used by those authorities that refuse to license taxi vehicles that do not have a full size spare wheel and tyre can be summarised as: 'The Council acknowledges that a number of car manufacturers now provide an alternative to a full size spare wheel and tyre (inflation kit, space saver or run flat tyres). While this is considered acceptable for a vehicle in ordinary use, taxi vehicles (hackney carriage or private hire) will cover a significantly higher mileage and thus be exposed to a greater risk of accident, damage or puncture. The above listed options are generally viewed as no more than a temporary measure to enable the vehicle driver to get to a point to change the tyre within a reasonable distance. They are not designed nor should be used for extended periods, or at high speeds'.
- 5.3 The counter argument used by authorities that do not impose a condition is based around the concept that manufacturers spend a considerable amount of time, money and energy in developing new vehicles. All these vehicles have undergone vigorous testing and have obtained all the necessary approval.
- 5.4 Best practice guidance from the Department for Transport indicates that licensing authorities should adopt the principle of specifying as many different types of vehicles as possible. It also suggests that careful consideration should be given to any policy which automatically rules out particular types of vehicles or prescribes only one type or a small number of types of vehicle. This could give rise to complaints of restrictive practices and possible various legal challenges.
- 5.5 The best practice handbook for vehicle inspectors recommends that; where the alternative option for a full spare tyre and wheel is being used, then the driver should agree to an undertaking that the wheel will be changed as soon as possible. This has prompted certain local authorities, where these options are permissible, to amend their conditions accordingly to include this undertaking.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The overall aim of local authority licensing of the taxi trade is to protect the public.

6.2 Policies on this subject matter are diverse, both nationally and locally.

6.3 It is proposed that the following options are considered:

- Option A = no change to the current policy and conditions;
- Option B = to change the current policy to reflect a condition that allows an alternative(s), providing that the 'spare' option is the one as originally designed, produced and delivered by the vehicle manufacturer.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 There are no financial implications for the Council.

8. Environmental Implications

8.1 It is generally accepted that newer vehicles are environmentally 'cleaner' being more energy and fuel efficient.

9. Crime and Disorder and Equality and Diversity Implications

9.1 None.

10. Recommendations

10.1 The Committee is asked to consider the options proposed in paragraph 6.3 of this report.

Further information:

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Background Papers:

None