

LICENSING COMMITTEE24 June 2024
10.35 am - 12.50 pm

Present: Councillors McPherson (Chair), Bick, Blackburn-Horgan, Clough, Griffin, Moore and Young

Councillor Hossain attended the meeting to address the Committee.

Officers

Environmental Health Manager: Yvonne O'Donnell
Team Manager, Communities: Jo Dicks
Committee Manager: Chris Connor
Meeting Producer: Sarah Steed

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL**24/9/Lic Apologies**

Apologies were received from Councillors Bird, Pounds and Wade.

24/10/Lic Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made.

24/11/Lic Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 January 2024 and 23 May 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

24/12/Lic Public Questions

Members of the public asked questions, as set out below.

Question 1

Despite numerous complaints from Taxi wheelchair customers about lengthy wait times, the Council's January report highlighted a significant loss of 27 Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVS) cars in Cambridge city public hire fleet last year alone. Committee and officers are not addressing this issue at any meetings. Could you possibly address the issue during the upcoming meeting?

The Environmental Health Manager responded:

- i. WAV vehicles could still be licensed as a petrol or diesel vehicle.
- ii. Work being done to see what could be done for wheelchair accessible users to access WAVS. Including adding telephone numbers to website and removing age restriction on WAVS.
- iii. The availability of WAVS was not just a Cambridge issue but a national issue.

Supplementary Question

In the January 2023 Committee Meeting, Members discussed sliver car with a green stripe on vehicles meaning that the vehicle was deemed a safe vehicle. Stated that the public were not aware and wanted to know what was being done to promote this in the city.

The Chair of the Committee responded:

- i. Stated it was a great feature and that he promoted this. Stated he would speak to Officers about what more could be done to further promote it.

Question 2

What happens when an electric vehicle breaks down?

The Environmental Health Manager and The Team Manager, Communities, responded:

- i. Vehicle replacements must be like for like, with the type of vehicle already on that plate.
- ii. Since June 2022 if a temporary loan company cannot provide an Electric Vehicle (EV) would allow an Ultra Low Vehicle plug-in (ULV). Window tints did not need to comply as long as the passenger could be seen in daylight.

Supplementary Question

What happens if the insurance company does not have an EV or an ULV?

The Environmental Health Manager responded:

- i. Each case would be looked at on a case-by-case basis. Would speak to loan company and if an EV or ULV could not be obtained, could accept a standard hybrid vehicle

Question 3

Self-charging vehicles are more economical now why not extend the deadline?

The Team Manager, Communities responded:

- i. Standard hybrid vehicles could be less expensive than EV's at the moment.
- ii. The policy in regard to environmental conditions was not based on economic activities. The purpose was to cut pollution and carbon emissions.
- iii. Hybrid and EV running costs were in fact comparable.

Supplementary Question

- i. Would not want to buy an EV that was outside the manufacturer's warranty due to potential running costs. Did not make financial sense for drivers.

The Team Manager, Communities responded:

- i. Comparison of hybrid and EV was undertaken by Officers, prices were comparable.
- ii. South Cambridgeshire Council were also bringing in a policy that all vehicles would need to be ULV or EV by 2028.

Question 4

The report had an error - are people against hybrid?

The Environmental Health Manager responded:

- i. Error had been spotted and corrected.

Supplementary Question

- i. Stated that in the Officer's report, only fourteen vehicles would be affected by policy change, stated that was incorrect and that all saloon vehicles would be affected.
- ii. Stated since January 2024 only twenty-four existing saloon taxi's were replaced with standard hybrid vehicles.
- iii. Stated that UK Government had a target that all vehicles should be zero emissions by 2040, asked why Council did not follow UK Government report.
- iv. Stated that the Council's designated charging points were now more expensive than regular charging points.

The Team Manager, Communities, responded:

- i. There was a price increase at EV charging points due to increase in national electricity prices. When prices increased 18 months ago Council sustained a 25p rate for taxi drivers at Council charging points.

- ii. Had negotiated a competitive set of rates with electricity provider for charging points. Currently was 57p per KW hour.
- iii. Prices were competitive for taxi drivers.

Question 5

In winter EV vehicle batteries frozen, people were stuck in their cars, have you looked into this to see if it is safe enough? If an EV vehicle car breaks down because the battery has frozen or catches on fire and passengers can't get out. Will the council be liable for implementing a policy without looking into health and safety?

The Team Manager, Communities, responded:

- i. Vehicle fires in EV were extremely rare. Swedish agency reported twenty-three fires from 61,000 EV during 2022. That would make is 20 times less likely to have a fire in an EV than a standard vehicle with an internal combustion engine.
- ii. Data from Australian Department of Defence EV Fire Safe and they have reported fewer than 500 EV battery fires ever globally out of 20 million EV worldwide. If it were a risk it would be reflected in insurance premiums, which it was not.
- iii. Cold weather does affect battery performance. It had a 10-20% impact on vehicle range between 0 and -20 degrees.
- iv. Had difficulty finding any credible instances where vehicle batteries had been frozen and people were trapped inside vehicles. The Officer stated he would be happy to look at any evidence presented to him regarding that.

Supplementary Question

- i. If there was no danger for EV why did Cambridge Fire Service issue warning regarding 2 vehicle fires in Cambridge recently.
- ii. Why did scrapyards have a container containing water where all EV had to be put for 48 hours?
- iii. Stated that EV were not safe and not as economical or efficient as a plug in hybrid vehicle.

The Team Manager, Communities, responded:

- i. Stated not familiar with that particular report from Cambridge Fire Service however they had been clear that there was danger from illegally imported electric scooters and batteries for electric bicycles.

- ii. There was significant health and safety governing the production and use of EV cars and the facts do not bear out speaker's statement.
- iii. Scrap dealers had special setup to deal with EV because lithium batteries do present hazards. However, that did not imply EV presented any greater risk.

Cllr Hossain spoke as a Ward Councillor and said the following:

- i. Stated that the charging times for EV were too long for distance the vehicle could cover.
- ii. Stated that prices were not economical.
- iii. Stated that time limits at charging points were not sufficient to fully recharge EV.
- iv. Stated that range of vehicles was less than advertised.
- v. Stated that repair costs were high and not covered by warranty due to being a taxi driver.
- vi. Stated there were not sufficient public toilets in the city.

24/13/Lic Standard Hybrid Vehicle Report

The Committee received a report from the Environmental Health Manager.

In response to Members' questions the Environmental Health Manager and Team Manager, Communities said the following:

- i. In 2016 this Committee took a commitment to ask Officers to investigate what was needed to make a commitment to net zero. That research took place for 2 years.
- ii. A report was brought to Committee in 2018 and the new policy was implemented in 2020. This was phased in over 2 years.
- iii. From 2020 vehicles that were coming to their age limit, had to be replaced by a plug-in hybrid or an EV. Any vehicles within the existing age limit could remain on the fleet.
- iv. The age limit was extended from 9 years to 12 and 15 years for ultra-low and EV's.
- v. Drivers had the lifespan of their vehicle to make the change to make a business decision.
- vi. The Council's aspiration was for all vehicles to be ultra-low or EV by 2028. Considering it for wheelchair-accessible vehicles as well however market does not yet make this feasible. Therefore, were focusing on saloon vehicles.
- vii. If current vehicles live out their current lifespan, there would still be a few vehicles on the fleet not conforming to new standards by 2028.

- viii. Drivers would not be forced to change their vehicles earlier than they thought they would have.
- ix. There were approximately 500 licensed taxis operating within Cambridge City. There were approximately 1400 taxis registered with South Cambridgeshire.
- x. Cambridge City Council had installed 18 EV charging points.
- xi. Currently most South Cambridgeshire vehicles were not EV.
- xii. Utilization of EV charging point network was still low. The most used site was used about 15% of the time. On average the network was used about 5% of the time.
- xiii. There were currently 60 EV apart of the fleet.
- xiv. It was economically advantageous to charge at home as the cost was lower.
- xv. A feasibility study was carried out with the Energy Saving Trust which looked at the location, number of charge points needed and the behaviour of taxi drivers. Drivers were consulted with in 2016 regarding EV charging point locations. That information had been brought to the Committee before policy went into effect in 2018.
- xvi. The taxi trade was a business and need to operate as economically as possible however as a Council were committed to tackling climate change and net zero.
- xvii. 22% of Cambridge City taxis were ultra-low or EV.
- xviii. Planning to pursue a restriction on city centre access for non-electric and ultra-low emission vehicles.
- xix. There were fourteen hybrid vehicles and nineteen petrol or diesel vehicles whose life span would end within the stated timeframe.

Councillor Hossain made the following comments:

- i. Charging points quality was not sufficient. Too slow to charge vehicles.
- ii. The cost needed to be looked at.
- iii. Drivers who could not charge EV at home were at a disadvantage, needed to have higher quality charging points provided.

The Committee:

Resolved by 6 votes to 1 to endorse the recommendations:

- i) Confirmed the decision made on 29th January 2024 and remove the inclusion of standard hybrids within the policy with emissions of less than 120g/km of CO₂ with effect of 30th June 2024.

- ii) Noted that 14 standard hybrid vehicles are affected by the policy from 1 July to 30 June 2026 – the date the trade have suggested to delay implementation.
- iii) Agreed the Environmental Considerations part of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy as attached to this report as Appendix A.

The meeting ended at 12.50 pm

CHAIR