

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

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REPORT OF: Head of Refuse & Environment

TO: Licensing Committee

21/7/2014

WARDS: All

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## **LIMITING THE NUMBER OF HACKNEY CARRIAGE LICENCES**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Council may, as part of its adopted policy on the licensing of Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles, consider whether to apply a limit to the maximum number of Hackney Carriage licences which it will issue at any time. However, this power may be exercised only where it is satisfied that there is no significant demand for the services of Hackney Carriages which is unmet. There is no power to apply a similar limit to licences for Private Hire vehicles.

### **2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 Members are recommended to instruct Officers to investigate the feasibility of carrying out a study to establish if there is evidence that there is no significant demand for Hackney Carriages that is unmet
- 2.2 Members are recommended to instruct Officers to investigate the costing of such a study and to obtain approval from the Executive Councillor for Environment for funding, to carry out a study, through the Council's budget process.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Council licences vehicles as hackney carriages ("taxis") and private hire vehicles to carry passengers and has the ability to set policy regarding standards in certain areas, consistent with legislation governing their licensing.
- 3.2 The Council Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy was most recently completely revised in October 2011, with minor amendments implemented after that time.
- 3.3 Section 9 of the policy indicates that the Council currently has no limit on the number of Hackney Carriages that are licensed, but that it intends to carry out a demand survey, to determine the present position, with a view to deciding whether a limit should be imposed.

- 3.4 There has been concern expressed by the trade that the number of Hackney Carriages operating in the city is excessive and that, at times, there are more taxis seeking space on ranks than the provision of rank space will accommodate.
- 3.5 Ranks available during the day are supplemented by additional rank space in the evenings and early mornings. This is useful in enabling customers of venues in obtaining journeys home at night to do so, but there are currently issues in relation to signage and availability of the some night time ranks, which are being pursued with the County Council.
- 3.6 It has also been observed that there are times of the day when the rank at the railway station has no taxis available and where passengers are required to queue for some while. The rank at the station is on private land and not accessible to all licensed taxis, though there is a rank in Station Road, available to all taxis, but often under used and empty.
- 3.7 A demand survey was undertaken by CTS, funded by the taxi trade, in 2012. It consisted of interviews with a range of people, including taxi users and others, but in general, the trade did not engage with the survey and officers consider that it did not provide a sound evidence base for concluding that there was no unmet demand.
- 3.8 A fresh demand survey would need to consider all of these issues, to establish the current position with some reliability.
- 3.9 There is concern, both within the trade and at officer level, that the total number of taxis and Private Hire vehicles operating in the city is too high, with congestion on the city streets at certain times, particularly at night. Many Private Hire vehicles are not licensed by the City Council, but by South Cambridgeshire DC, though this is entirely legal, provided that journeys are pre-booked with the operator.
- 3.10 The issue of illegal plying for hire by Private Hire vehicles is addressed by periodic enforcement exercises in which prosecutions have been taken against offenders and subsequent referral to Licensing Sub-Committee will enable sanctions to be imposed on offenders, where considered appropriate.

#### **4. LEGISLATIVE PROVISIONS**

- 4.1 The Transport Act 1985, Section 16, provides that *“the grant of a licence may be refused, for the purpose of limiting the number of hackney carriages in respect of which licences are granted, if, but only if, the person authorised to grant licences is satisfied that there is no significant demand for the services of hackney carriages (within the area to which the licence would apply) which is unmet.”*

#### **5. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

- 4.2 Officers view is that regular independent surveys of demand are required to provide evidence that there is no significant unmet demand before a

limit is introduced and thereafter at intervals of, 3 years, to ensure that information is up to date.

- 4.3 In order for the demand survey to be regarded as properly independent, it should be funded by the Council, rather than by the taxi trade and Members will need to identify the source of funding for this purpose.
- 4.4 Assuming that funding will need to be provided as part of the budget process, a survey could be carried out in spring 2015.

## **6. IMPLICATIONS**

a) **Financial Implications**

Provision is made in the council's budget for the taxi licensing service, which is run on cost recovery basis. The funding for the demand survey would not be covered by the licence fees as currently set, and would need to be identified with the Executive Councillor for Environment.

(b) **Staffing Implications**  
*None*

(c) **Equal Opportunities Implications**  
*None*

(d) **Environmental Implications**  
*Nil*

(e) **Procurement**

A procurement process will be required to select an organisation to conduct a survey, if agreed.

(f) **Consultation and communication**

(g) **Community Safety**

Cambridge City Council has a duty to provide a safe and secure taxi service. This includes setting minimum standards of safety for all travelling passengers, including those with disabilities and mobility issues.

BACKGROUND PAPERS: None

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Report file: M:\LICENSE/04 – Other Licences\ Committee Reports

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