

# LICENSING REGULATORY COMMITTEE

## Incentives in Relation to Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles 5<sup>th</sup> June 2014

### Report of Licensing Manager

#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report has been prepared following members' request for officers to look at the possibility of financial incentives through reduced licence fees for proprietors who voluntarily license a wheelchair accessible vehicle.

**This report is public.**

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

**Members are asked to consider whether it is feasible to offer any sort of incentive which would encourage vehicle proprietors to voluntarily provide wheelchair accessible vehicles.**

##### 1.0 Report

- 1.1 At a meeting of the Licensing Regulatory Committee held on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2014 members asked officers to present a report to a future meeting in relation to possible incentives being offered to proprietors who agree to license a wheelchair accessible vehicle with this authority and then agree that the vehicle will remain wheelchair accessible throughout the lifetime of the licence.
- 1.2 It was suggested that some sort of financial incentive be offered in the form of a reduction in the licence fee.
- 1.3 It was not made clear whether members would expect this reduction to be offered in respect of the vehicle licence fee, or, through the driver's licence fee, to drivers of the vehicles (who might include the proprietors). Officers would suggest that it would be almost impossible to administer any arrangement whereby a driver of the vehicle is offered a financial incentive through the licence fee, as drivers can move from vehicle to vehicle. In any case the current cost of a driver's licence is already set very low and barely covers the cost of administration.

- 1.4 Members should be aware that the licensing of hackney carriage and private hire vehicles aims to recover as far as possible the full cost of administering the scheme and some enforcement costs, as permitted by the legislation. If a reduction was offered to some proprietors there would be a shortfall in the fees that would be recovered and the cost would possibly have to be recovered by inflating the fees throughout the rest of the licensing regime, unless the Council was prepared to stand the shortfall. However, there is no budget for such a shortfall.
- 1.5 In any event, officers do not consider that a small reduction in fees would serve to encourage proprietors to convert to wheelchair accessible vehicles as the cost of the vehicle would far outweigh any reduction that could be offered.
- 1.6 Officers have discussed this matter with some owners of wheelchair accessible vehicles that are not currently required to be wheelchair accessible, and asked them if they would be prepared to add them to our list of mandatory wheelchair accessible vehicles if an incentive were to be offered. The reaction to this suggestion was negative as the proprietors who were asked stated that they want to keep the flexibility and the option of changing the vehicle at any time to a non-wheelchair accessible vehicle. For example one proprietor said that whilst he can manage to push a wheelchair up a ramp now, as he is getting older he will probably want to change the vehicle to a saloon. He also commented that when he wants to sell the vehicle he would probably have more interest if the options remained open.
- 1.7 If members are minded to increase the number of wheelchair accessible vehicle within the hackney carriage fleet officers would recommend that more time be spent on this matter and discussions with the trade should take place to consider what, if any incentives would encourage the trade to change a non-mandatory wheelchair accessible vehicle to a mandatory wheelchair accessible vehicle.
- 1.8 One option which would be cost free would be to advertise all of the mandatory wheelchair accessible vehicle on the Council's website, and to publicise via a press release that anyone who would like a list of such approved vehicles should refer to our web site.
- 1.9 Some members of the trade have asked about allowing advertising on vehicles. The advertising is known as bubble wrap advertising and members may have seen vehicles in other areas which are completely covered in advertising. This option could be considered as another possible incentive in relation to the provision of more wheelchair accessible vehicles, e.g. if such advertising was permitted only on purpose built wheelchair accessible vehicles there would be a financial benefit to the proprietor who could raise revenue through the advertising. However, careful consideration would need to be given as to how this would affect the overall appearance of the hackney carriage fleet, and how members of the public would be able to identify licensed vehicles.

## **2.0 Conclusion**

- 2.1 Clearly there are various options that can be considered and members are asked to consider the report and to allow more time for full discussions to take place with hackney proprietors before any decision is made in relation to incentives being offered.

**CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

None applicable to this report.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Any reduction in fees would have a financial impact and would need to be considered as part of the fee setting / budget process.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Legal Services have been consulted and have no further comment.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

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