

**LICENSING REGULATORY COMMITTEE****Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Plates  
24<sup>th</sup> March 2016****Report of the Chief Executive****PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To enable the Committee to consider an issue that was raised at a recent Taxi Surgery.

**This report is public**

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**(1) The Committee is asked to note the report.**

**1.0 Introduction**

1.1 All licensed hackney carriages and private hire vehicles are required to display a licence plate. The only legal requirement with regard to vehicle plates is that they should display the licence number and passenger capacity of the vehicle. However, expiry dates are included on hackney carriage and private hire vehicle plates in order to improve public safety. Any member of the public, or a police officer or licensing enforcement officer can then see at a glance whether a licence is current or has expired.

1.2 All vehicles are subject to testing at the Council's vehicle maintenance unit (VMU) to ensure that they are safe and comfortable and suitable to be licensed or continue to be licensed as a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle. The frequency of the testing is dependent on the age of the vehicle and the testing is paramount to public safety. Vehicles less than two years old are tested annually, vehicles over two years old are tested six monthly, and vehicle over ten years old are tested every four months. The date displayed on the licence plate reflects the date by which the vehicle must be tested; otherwise the licence will expire.

1.3 The system currently works extremely efficiently as proprietors know that they must book the vehicle in for retest before the expiry date displayed on the plate. Historically, before dates were included on plates, proprietors were missing tests. The cost to the department to chase up any proprietor who had not presented the vehicle for test, if expiry dates were not displayed, would be significant, and this cost would have to be reflected in the licensing fee. There was a danger that if a proprietor missed the date of the test and then the vehicle was involved in an accident the Council could be criticised for not ensuring that the vehicle had been tested in order to protect the public.

- 1.4 However, at a recent Taxi Surgery, a member of the trade suggested that the plate should no longer bear an expiry date, and that there should rather be a disc displayed in the windscreen indicating the expiry date. This is an issue that has been raised at Taxi Forum meetings over a period of years, and officers have always advised members that, in their view, it is appropriate to include the expiry date on the plate itself, and that the interests of public safety outweigh the cost of changing the plate on expiry.
- 1.5 Currently, including Lancaster, 12 of the 14 Lancashire licensing authorities include expiry dates on their vehicle plates. Of the two that do not, it is understood that one is considering introducing expiry dates. One authority has indicated that it introduced the expiry date following criticism from the court when it prosecuted someone for using a vehicle with an expired licence.
- 1.6 Each plate currently costs the proprietor £6.40. Most vehicles require two per year, with only vehicle over ten years old requiring three. For the majority, the cost works out at 25p per week. The cost in relation to increased enforcement that would be required if expiry dates were not on plates would equate to much more than that, not to mention the danger of reputational damage to the Council if any of the vehicles were involved in an accident after missing a test.
- 1.7 Another danger to the public of issuing plates without expiry dates would be the possibility of a plate getting into the wrong hands. Currently when a vehicle licence expires, proprietors are asked to return the plate. However, sometimes for one reason or another, this does not happen. An example of this would be if the vehicle had been involved in an accident and towed to a scrap yard. Sometimes proprietors sell their vehicle on and do not remove the plate before it goes. The plate would then be available for anybody to take, and with no expiry date on could be used indefinitely by anyone. Although the plates do have the vehicle registration on, anyone who is unscrupulous would not have difficulty in obtaining false number plates to match the vehicle licence plate.
- 1.8 The licence plate is in effect evidence that a licence has been granted. The content, style or manufacture of the licence plate is an operational, service delivery matter, and not a condition of licence. Accordingly, if a member decision is required on the content of the plate, this is an executive rather than a regulatory matter, and is therefore for Cabinet rather than this Committee.

## **2.0 Conclusion**

- 2.1 Officers would advise that the current plates are appropriate and consistent with best practice. However, it would be open to this Committee to refer the matter to Cabinet, if members were of the view that the content of plates should be changed.

**CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT**  
(including Health & Safety, Equality & Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

None directly arising from this report.

**LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

None directly arising from this report.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

None directly arising from this report.

**OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

**Human Resources:**

None

**Information Services:**

None

**Property:**

None

**Open Spaces:**

None]

**SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

Consulted and no comments to add.

**MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS**

The Monitoring Officer has been consulted and has no further comments.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

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