

# LICENSING COMMITTEE

## Annual Report – Licensing Service

13 March 2025

### Report of Licensing Officer

### Annual Report

#### PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide an annual report to members of Licensing Committee on private hire/hackney carriage related matters, including volume of applications, complaints, and enforcement activity.

**This report is public.**

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

(1) That members note the contents of the report.

##### 1.0 Introduction

1.1 At the meeting of Licensing Committee on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2022 members approved the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy. Point 3.13 of the policy states the following in terms of reporting on Licensing Authority performance.

Licensing Officers will provide an annual report to the Licensing Committee outlining the number of private hire/ hackney carriage related applications received, the determination of those applications, and highlighting the number of applications where the decisions were made not in accordance with the Councils policy.

The report will also provide details of the number of complaints received in respect of drivers/ vehicles and operators and an overview of the nature of complaints and how the complaints were dealt with.

The annual report will also include an overview of any legal cases and appeals.

1.2 Attached at **Appendix 1** is a summary of all the information collated.

1.3 The report covers the calendar year 1<sup>st</sup> January 2024 – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024.

## 2.0 Applications

- 2.1 The Licensing service deals with a variety of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire applications, many of which are determined by Officers under delegated powers. Members are only party to decision-making in certain circumstances, it is therefore important to highlight the volume of applications received, the outcomes and highlight any exceptional cases. This will assist when reviewing application standards and the hackney carriage and private hire licensing policy.
- 2.2 The table below shows the type of licences currently issued by Lancaster City Council and administered by the Licensing service; it equates to 895 active hackney carriage and private hire related licences in the Lancaster district.

Type Of Licence	Total no. active licences 2024 figures	Duration (licence length)
Private Hire Drivers	31	1 or 3 Years
Hackney Carriage Drivers	22	1 or 3 Years
Dual Licensed Drivers (HC and PH)	429	1 or 3 Years
Private Hire Vehicles	254	4/6/12 Months
Hackney Carriages	108	4/6/12 Months
Private Hire Operators	51	1 or 5 Years

- 2.3 There has been 62 new drivers', 34 new vehicles and 5 new operator licences issued in the last calendar year.
- 2.4 Licences are subject to renewals, if a matter arises upon application to renew a driver's licence that may call into question the driver's fitness, e.g. a relevant conviction or motoring offence; this decision is delegated to Licensing Committee. If the renewal application meets the required standard, officers administer and issue the licence. A total of 107 drivers renewed their licence in 2024. (Hackney carriage, private-hire and dual)
- 2.5 Members have not been required to determine any driver renewal applications in 2024.
- 2.6 Members were required to review the suitability of 2 licensed drivers. One resulted in an immediate revocation, and one were issued with a 7-day suspension. Usually, these cases are referred to Licensing Committee following a series of complaints or significant events that question an individual fitness to remain licensed.
- 2.7 Vehicle licences are renewed at 4/6/12 monthly periods depending on the age of the vehicle, therefore each of the 362 licenced vehicles have renewed their licence at least once within the 12-month period.

Vehicles are tested prior to licensing by the Councils Vehicle Maintenance Unit. The total number of vehicle tests carried out, including retests, tests following an accident and standard testing in relation to age of vehicle is 758.

## 3.0 Summary of Complaints

- 3.1 There has been a total of 53 complaints reported to the Licensing team in the last 12 months. (01 January 2024 - 31 December 2024).

The type of complaints typically falls into the following categories and the numbers represent how many complaints per subcategory. Complaints have mostly been made by members of the public however there are occasions when operators raise concerns and complaints in reference to other operators.

**Public Safety (13)** some examples have included failing to stop at stop sign causing a collision with another vehicle, undertaking vehicles in a dangerous manner, speeding, allegations that a driver was under the influence of alcohol whilst carrying passengers and a taxi driver watching football on a mobile phone whilst carrying passengers which led to a 7-day suspension.

**Other (17)** some examples include customer leaving a wallet in a vehicle and the driver not returning it, a driver not following taxi rank protocols, driver refusing a fare due to customer having a dog, taxi drivers carrying out work with their own operator's licence but using another operators door signage, taxi driver parking in a disabled bay, taxi driver littering and vehicle proprietors selling their hackney plates without the vehicles.

**Uber/Out of Town Vehicles (11)** All 11 complaints relate to allegations of Uber/Out of Town working in the Lancaster District/importuning for hire. A driver and a vehicle licensed by one local authority can pick up and drop off passengers in another local authority's area, if the booking is made through an operator licensed by the same authority. None of the complaints received in 2024 have been evidenced as illegal activity.

**Violence and Aggression (6)** Some examples include making threats from a licensed vehicle, an altercation between 2 licensed drivers at the railway station, racist comments towards customers, an uber driver feeling threatened by a Lancaster city council driver at the University when carrying out pre-booked work, a taxi driver being abusive towards a uber driver at the Lancaster University and an alleged assault by an Uber Driver to a Lancaster City Council licensed driver.

**Overcharging (4)** All the complaints for over charging have been allegations that the driver has charged customers more than the metered fare.

**Not displaying badge/tariff (2)** The complaints related to vehicles displaying expired plates

- 3.2 When the licensing service receives a complaint, it is allocated to an investigating officer. That officer then collates all relevant information, which can include obtaining CCTV, statements from witnesses, liaison with Police and checking booking records etc. Part of the process is to also inspect the internal client records of the licensed driver/operator. This may show the complaint as a one-off incident or highlight a pattern of behaviour which is of concern. It is those cases that are presented to Licensing Committee.
- 3.3 Licence holders are notified of any complaint made against them and given the opportunity to respond to any allegation made, in addition, witnesses are often sought; in most reported complaints, it is one parties word against another and difficult to prove/disprove any wrongdoing. That is the importance of up to date, thorough record-keeping, so trends or pattern of behaviour can be identified, and the appropriate course of action swiftly taken.
- 3.4 As part of the updated licence conditions for Private hire operators (PHO), they must

adopt, implement, review, and update their customer service and complaints policy which includes managing the conduct of drivers and the timeframe for responding to complaints. Listed in the conditions are specific requirements in relation to the handling of complaints and the operator responsibilities. At least every 6 months, the PHO must submit the complaint log to the licensing service.

This will assist the Licensing Authority in ensuring all relevant matters are recorded on the client (driver) records and discussed with the operator to ensure complaints are handled in a consistent, fair manner.

Licensing Officers will be sending reminders to operators at 6 monthly intervals to ensure that they submit the complaint logs to the Licensing team.

#### **4.0 Enforcement/Compliance Activity**

- 4.1 The licensing team undertake a variety of enforcement duties, of both a proactive and reactive manner. Activity is carried out by Council Officers but can involve other agencies such as the local Police, DVSA and Lancashire County Council.

The main purpose of licensing enforcement is to:

- Secure the health, safety and welfare of members of the public who either make use of the licensed activity or who are affected by it in some way.
- Deal immediately with serious risks.
- Promote and achieve sustained compliance with the law.

- 4.2 Proactive inspections have been carried out on licensed vehicles totalling 58 inspections carried out in total. Most inspections have been satisfactory. A handful of vehicles have been issued with defect notices; the notice gives the vehicle proprietor a fixed period to ensure repair to the vehicle is made. Defects have included, bodywork damage and replacement signage required.

Very few vehicles have been suspended, all were due to not having a valid insurance certificate, vehicles being off road due to accident damage and poor vehicle standards.

- 4.3 In 2024 Licensing Officers carried out a Private Hire Operator operation with Officers carrying out 43 operator inspections. The purpose of the operation was to ensure compliance with the Council's Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy in respect of private hire operator licence conditions and associated standards.

- 4.4 The project was an important exercise to satisfy the Council that licensed private hire operators were aware of and adhering to the conditions of their licences in respect of the following criteria:

- Records of bookings (digital & manual)
- Sub-contracted work
- Vehicle log
- Driver log
- Safeguarding awareness
- Staff training records (where appropriate)
- Complaints are recorded.
- Lost property

There were 42 operators compliant to Licensing Officers' satisfaction. Licensing staff advised 1 private hire operator that improvements were required.

Licensing Officers were satisfied with the overall high level of compliance with the day-to-day recording of bookings for pre-booked journeys undertaken.

## **5.0 Appeals Hearings**

5.1 There have been no appeal hearings in 2024.

## **6.0 Conclusion**

6.1 Since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2025 the Council have fully digitalised all hackney carriage and private hire licence applications. Licensing Officers are running a drop-in session once a month, feedback has on the whole been positive. The purpose of the drop in sessions is to provide support and assistance for applicants to complete their application(s).

6.2 There are 895 active hackney carriage and private hire licences operating in the Lancaster district. The Licensing service are responsible for the administration, compliance and enforcement associated within the relevant licensing regime and legislation for each of those licences.

6.3 The private hire and hackney carriage licensing policy became effective on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022, since then the licensing service has worked alongside the local trade to ensure compliance, with awareness and education being a priority. Investigations and inspections are important to ensure compliance from licence holders, Licensing officers are proactively and reactively responding to reports and complaints to ensure public safety is maintained.

6.4 The Licensing team have received several complaints in relation to Uber/other local authority licensed vehicles working in the Lancaster District. A driver and a vehicle licensed by one local authority can pick up and drop off passengers in another local authority's area, if the booking is made through an operator licensed by the same authority. None of the complaints that we have received have identified illegal activity. However, if a member of the trade observes and can provide specific evidence of such vehicles plying for hire (picking up passengers/not pre-booked) it will be subject to a full investigation. Sightings of such vehicles will not be investigated. Licensing Officers will be carrying out routine evening shifts throughout the year to deter any illegal activity.

<b>CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b> <b>(Including Health &amp; Safety, Equality &amp; Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing):</b>
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None identified
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<b>LEGAL IMPLICATIONS</b>
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None identified
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<b>FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS</b>
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None identified
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<b>OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS, such as Human Resources, Information Services, Property, Open Spaces</b>		
None identified		
<b>SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS</b>		
The report is for noting, no comments required.		
<b>MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS</b>		
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<table border="1"><tr><td><b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b></td><td><b>Contact Officer:</b> Miss Sarah Jones <b>Telephone:</b> 01524 582766 <b>Email:</b> sljones@lancaster.gov.uk <b>Ref:</b> AR2024</td></tr></table>	<b>BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>	<b>Contact Officer:</b> Miss Sarah Jones <b>Telephone:</b> 01524 582766 <b>Email:</b> sljones@lancaster.gov.uk <b>Ref:</b> AR2024
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