

## LICENSING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE - 9 DECEMBER 2020

**Present:** Councillor Edwards (Chair), Barnett-Ward, Carnell, Maskell, Page, Rowland, Skeats and Woodward.

**Apologies:** Councillor D Singh.

### 1. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 October 2019 were confirmed as a correct.

### 2. HACKNEY CARRIAGE VEHICLE EMISSIONS AND AGE POLICY REVIEW

The Director of Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services submitted a report providing the Committee with an outline of the amendments and new initiatives to the Hackney Carriage Emission and Age Policy that had been adopted at the meeting on 23 October 2019. A table setting out the Emission Standard compared to the age of the vehicle was attached to the report at Appendix 1. The Council had consulted with the Reading Taxi Association (RTA) and the Reading Cab Drivers Association (RCDA). The Council received representations from the RTA, the details of which were set out in Appendix 2. Other local authorities had introduced similar policies to that proposed by the Council and a comparison of other local authority policies was detailed in Appendix 3.

The report explained that Reading Taxi Association (RTA) had requested a delay to the implementation of the Emissions and Age Policy due to the current challenging economic conditions as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. RTA reported that they were currently running at a loss of 70 to 75% of their work during the day and up to 95% after 10.00 pm, with only 50% of the fleet working currently. They were seeking financial reprieve until the pandemic was under control and explained that they could not afford to upgrade their vehicles.

The report set out the staged approach which vehicle licence holders had to adhere to that had been agreed at the October 2019 meeting; if they didn't adhere to the staged approach they would not be issued with a licence. The Council had implemented incentives, which were set out in the report, to encourage the take up of Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV's) and electric vehicles but, to date there was only one ULEV vehicle on the fleet.

The Council's Environmental Protection and Nuisance Team, which dealt with air quality and emissions in the town, had commented on the Policy and reported air quality improvements since its introduction in October 2017. Officers in the team were not in favour of any reduction or delay in the Policy, as this would impact on air quality, health and be contrary to local and national policy. However, the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic had also been recognised and therefore a relaxation of the Policy for a short period with the view to reviewing it again, as set out in the report, had been recommended. The taxi trade had also requested that all taxis up to and including EUTO 5a were given an extension of three years. They had also requested the removal of the minimum of ten years new to fleet requirement for a period of a year.

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The report explained that Environmental Protection and Nuisance officers had put alternative options together for consideration taking into account the RTA's request(s) whilst still having a realistic target to improve air quality and adhere to existing strategies. The options were as follows:

Option 1 - No change to the existing Hackney Carriage Vehicle Emissions and Age Policy as adopted in October 2019.

Option 2 - Pause the Emissions Policy until 1 October 2021 and the Policy will then continue unchanged. Between 1 October 2020 and 1 October 2021, fifteen vehicles were due to come off the fleet. This proposal would ensure that drivers were not put under any undue financial pressure in the current climate and would allow them time to recover, whilst not impacting the overall aim of the Policy.

Option 3 - Pause the emissions Policy until 1 October 2022 and then allow the Policy to continue unchanged. This would give 130 taxis up to an extra two years on the fleet. This option would be kept under review as officers looked to understand the lasting impacts of the pandemic. There would be no emission improvement from the fleet for this extended period of time, but after this point the older vehicles would be removed, so the overall aim of the Policy would remain intact. The proposal would not result in a change to the end date of the original Policy proposal.

Option 4 - The RTA had proposed that all vehicles up to and including EURO 5a were given an extra three years on the fleet and that the minimum age for new vehicles was raised to ten years for one year. This would mean that the oldest vehicle on the fleet would remain until 31 December 2023 and 197 vehicles would then be required to leave the fleet between this date and 1 October 2028.

The report stated that officers believed that delaying the removal of the oldest vehicles from the fleet by three years was too long and, although the impact of the pandemic was acknowledged, there was no evidence to suggest that it would continue for this length of time. The option was not considered proportionate as it did not take the benefits to air quality and the health of residents into consideration. Officers also did not agree with the proposal to allow vehicles up to ten years old onto the fleet for one year as it would have the effect of allowing a window for drivers to bring older vehicles onto the fleet.

Since the introduction of the Policy the fleet had made some improvements with 14 vehicles coming off the fleet due to their age and upgrading to Euro b standard. Vehicles were not being upgraded to the ULEV or electric vehicles with the cost involved being cited as the reason. The report included a table that detailed the effect of the proposed options on the existing Policy.

The report explained that the Council would still encourage Hackney Carriages to upgrade and were working on improving the officer and incentives that were in place to support this. Funding had been secure in the Council's Capital budget to install Rapid (50kW) EV charge points across the Borough. These charge points would offer a 20 to 30 minute charge time per vehicle. The report therefore sought approval for the use of some of this funding to install dedicated EV charge points for taxi fleet

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use only on Gun Street, Bridge Street and the Cattle Market Car Park. Approval of the traffic orders for these proposals would be considered at the meeting of Traffic Management Sub-Committee on 14 January 2021.

It had been recommended that the Council opt for the co-investment model, with the supplier, Joju, and the Council both contributing 50% to the capital and installation costs with a 50:50 profit share. This option would offer maintenance and management support. Once approval to proceed had been obtained each location would require a site survey to finalise designs and installation costs and the rapid charge points would then be delivered within six months.

The report explained that the Council had investigated the feasibility of the purchase of several electric taxis to rent out to drivers on short term leases to enable them to experience the benefits of driving electric. The Council was also exploring with the London Electric Vehicle Company whether or not it would be viable to provide a number of ULEVs for short term rent so that drivers could become familiar with the ULEV before purchase. However, the proposal was cost prohibitive as in order to break even after five years the Council would need to lease the taxis to drivers for £1,103.17 to £1,203.25 per month. This option was more expensive than the driver leasing the vehicle directly unless the Council were prepared to lease the vehicles for less and therefore make a loss. The report therefore proposed that the project should not be pursued further but that the option should be left open to review in case any external funding streams became available to make the option financially viable.

The report stated that due to the proposed pause in the Policy and to try and encourage the uptake of ULEV or electric vehicles it had been suggested that the existing fee discounts were amended to open up the free licence for the first year on the fleet to start immediately. Subsequent years would then revert to licence fee reduction as per the original Policy agreement.

Finally, the report stated that once the obstacle to the initial cost of purchasing an electric vehicle had been cleared there were clear benefits to drivers of electric taxis. Electric vehicles would offer significant fuel savings to drivers, for example, weekly fuel savings of £110, based on 120 miles per day five days a week, giving a five year saving of £27,389. In addition, service and maintenance costs which were cheaper as was vehicle tax and an indication from businesses that they wanted to use clear green taxis. In order to promote this message officers would carry out further engagement with drivers to try to understand more about what they needed to be in place in order to commit to the switch to an EV earlier than the last possible moment specified in the Policy. Officers would provide drivers with information on financing options and, where possible, would introduce drivers to advocates of EV taxis. Officers were also in discussions with the Energy Saving Trust with regard to what other driver engagement projects could help to accelerate EV uptake.

Councillor Page addressed the Committee and stated that the Council was fully cognisant and sympathetic of the impact the pandemic had had on the taxi trade. However, the Council had no formal resources to support the trade and there had been nothing from Government in the form of grants to assist drivers in the purchase

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of ULEVs; officers were looking for any opportunity to support the trade in the purchasing of these vehicles. The speed of recovery from the pandemic was unknown, although Reading had been very resilient in the past. With regard to the purchase of electric vehicles although the figures did not show any benefits currently this would be kept under review but, it had to be recognised that impact on air quality from the brakes and tyres of such vehicles, and the production of the vehicles themselves, caused as much pollution as ordinary vehicles. Councillor Page therefore proposed that an additional recommendation be added that a review of the Policy and other issues impacting on the taxi trade and economy of the town should be carried out and a report submitted to the Committee within 12 months, the proposal was agreed by the Committee.

Asif Rashid, Chairman of Reading Taxi Association, was present at the meeting and addressed the Committee.

### Resolved -

- (1) That the proposed amendments to the Hackney Carriage Vehicle Emissions and Age Policy 2019 to pause the Policy for two years and then allow the Policy to continue unchanged as set out as Option 3 in the report, with the end date of the original Policy remaining the same and to accept further officer recommendations and to keep the revisions made under review as a result of the pandemic be agreed;
- (2) That the installation of Rapid Charge Points at the locations proposed in paragraphs 5.1.2, 5.1.3 and 5.1.4 of the report, to support the implementation of the policy, be approved;
- (3) That the Rapid Charge Points installation proposal and implementation of relevant Traffic Orders would be considered at Traffic Management Sub-Committee on 14 January 2021 be agreed;
- (4) That the proposal not to pursue the Electric Taxi Lease Scheme but, that this measure be kept under review as officers continued to research funding streams be noted;
- (5) That a review of the Policy and other issues impacting on the taxi trade and economy of the town be carried out and a report submitted to the Committee within 12 months.

(The meeting started at 6.30pm and closed at 7.22pm)