

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC GROWTH & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

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| TO: | LICENSING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE | | |
| DATE: | 21st FEBRUARY 2023 | | |
| TITLE: | HACKNEY CARRIAGE UNMET DEMAND 2023 | | |
| LEAD COUNCILLOR: | TONY PAGE | PORTFOLIO: | STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT PLANNING & TRANSPORT |
| SERVICE: | CLIMATE STRATEGY AND TRANSPORT | WARDS: | BOROUGHWIDE |
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1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To allow members to consider if an Unmet Demand Survey should be carried out during the recovery of the Hackney Carriage trade following the Covid 19 pandemic.
- 1.2 To allow members to consider whether it is appropriate to amend the current limiting policy approach to hackney carriage numbers.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 **Members note that due to the current financial hardship that is affecting the Reading Borough Council Hackney Carriage a decision was made not to implement the survey in 2022 but to wait until October 2023 when it is hoped that the current financial difficulties following the Covid 19 pandemic, and the current cost-of-living crisis will have eased with the return of business to the trade.**
- 2.2 **Members consider retaining the current policy of not issuing any further hackney carriage licences outside of the agreed number of 216 already licensed.**

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 The Town Police Clauses Act 1847, as amended by the Transport Act 1985, enables Councils to restrict the number of hackney carriage licences issued in their area, but only if they are satisfied that there is no significant unmet demand for hackney carriage services. In order to be satisfied that there is no significant unmet demand a survey must be carried out, at least every three years.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Current Position: A moratorium on the issue of new hackney carriage vehicle licences was implemented in March 2009 and has been maintained ever since, following analysis of unmet demand surveys completed in 2012, 2015 and 2018, each of which confirmed there was no significant underlying unmet demand for hackney carriages in Reading. Officers were in the process of arranging a new survey in accordance with the Taxi requirements of Section 16 of the Transport Act 1985 and the Department for Transport and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing: Best Practice Guidance 2010 (Sections 45 to 51) when the Covid19 pandemic caused the country to go into 3 national lockdowns. On the 12th of July 2022 the Licensing Applications Committee resolved to delay the Unmet Demand Survey until October 2023

4.2 Options Proposed:

To hold the survey at a financial cost to the Hackney Carriage Trade. The cost of the survey would be somewhere in the region of £15,000 which would be a cost of between £55 - £60 to the 216 owner/drivers.

4.3 Other Options Considered:

The following guidance has been produced by the Department for Transport which says:

“Section 16 of the Transport Act 1985 does not specify the frequency of the unmet demand assessment, but the Department’s Best Practice Guidance issued in 2010 suggested this is conducted every three years. Though the decision as to when an unmet demand survey is conducted remains that for a licensing authority, we are aware that we are in a very unusual situation at present; while this continues it would seem highly unlikely that there would be significant unmet demand for taxis. We would expect unmet demand surveys to be conducted once travel levels return to more normal levels or if concerns are raised by the trade or public.”

Following on from the Covid 19 Pandemic the country is now in a cost-of-living crisis which is affecting aspects of the daily life of everyone. In light of the advice above and considering the current circumstances where many people are working from both home and the workplace or are simply changing their travel habits to find cheaper forms of travel delaying the unmet demand survey for a 3rd time is an option. The last unmet demand survey was last carried out in 2018.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 Thriving Communities

The Hackney Carriage trade suffered financially as a result of the Covid 19 Pandemic and now are struggling with the cost-of-living crises and as a result this is having an impact on them both physically as they are working longer hours due to a reduced customer base using their service which in turn is affecting them mentally as the strain of longer hours, reduced income and increased running costs is affecting them daily.

5.2 Working with the Hackney Carriage Trade and listening to their concerns, worries and understanding the stress that they are under and supporting them in rebuilding their essential service that they supply to the residents and visitors to

Reading will only improve the already positive working relationship that RBC have with them.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There are no environmental or climate implications contained within this report as it only asking for a decision from members when to conduct a new survey.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 A consultation was carried out with the Reading Taxi Association (RTA) who represent 250 RBC licensed Hackney Carriage Drivers and also with the drivers themselves to capture those that are not members of the RTA. The consultation was carried out by email and just asked 2 questions of whether to hold or delay the Unmet Demand Survey.

7.2 At the time of writing this report we have received a reply from the Reading Taxi Association stating that the response from their members was that they had only 10 members out of their membership of 250 asking for a further delay to the Unmet Demand Survey. We have also received a further 8 responses from drivers with two (2) drivers in support of the survey in 2023 and six (6) asking for a delay to the survey until 2024. All responses are Appendices I & ii below.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 There is no impact on equality contained within this report.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Section 16 of the Transport Act 1985 and the Department for Transport and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing: Best Practice Guidance 2010 (Sections 45 to 51)

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The only financial implications will be those incurred by the licensed RBC Hackney Carriage owners/drivers.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Appendix i - Emails to and replies from the RTA
Appendix ii - Email to and the individual replies from drivers
Appendix iii -Climate Impact Assessment