

LICENSING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 20 FEBRUARY 2024

Present: Councillor Woodward (Chair), Asare, Davies, Dennis, Keane, Kitchingham, Mitchell, Page and Rowland

Apologies: Councillors Edwards, Robinson and Tarar

13. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Licensing Applications Committee meeting held on 7 November 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

14. HACKNEY CARRIAGE UNMET DEMAND SURVEY

The Committee considered a report on the outcome of the Hackney Carriage Unmet Demand Survey that had been conducted by Licensed Vehicle Surveys and Assessment (LVSA) Traffic Consultants between April and October 2023 with the final report having been received in January 2024. The report asked the Committee to consider whether it was appropriate to continue to limit the number of Hackney Carriage Licences (plates) issued by the Council to 216 or to otherwise amend the current policy approach.

A document setting out the results of the 2023 Unmet Demand Survey carried out by LVSA on behalf of the Council titled 'Reading Taxi Survey', was attached to the report at Appendix 1. A copy of section 9 of the Department for Transport's (DfT) Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing Best Practice Guidance for Licensing Authorities in England was attached to the report at Appendix 2 and a copy of the Competition and Markets Authority's (CMA) guidance on the Regulation of Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles: Understanding the Impact on Competition was attached to the report at Appendix 3.

The report explained that, in accordance with the provisions of the Town and Police Clauses Act 1847, as amended by the Transport Act 1985, the Council currently limited the number of Hackney Carriage Vehicle Licences issued to 216. The Transport Act 1985 Act permitted the Council, acting as the relevant licensing authority, to limit the number of licenced Hackney Carriages (taxis) if, but only if, it was satisfied that there was no significant unmet demand for taxi services in the area. The report explained that the DfT had published guidance in 2023 that advised that licensing authorities could continue to choose to limit the number of Hackney Carriage licences, provided that, in order to justify the imposition of quantity restrictions, they had conducted an unmet demand survey at least every five years to assess any significant unmet demand.

The Council had previously conducted Unmet Demand Surveys in 2009, 2012, 2015 and 2018. The 2012, 2015 and 2018 surveys had not identified any unmet demand that was significant. The survey conducted in 2023 had been delayed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic in order to allow time for the Hackney Carriage trade and fleet to return to more typical operating conditions. The 2023 Unmet Demand Survey had taken place between April and October 2023 and consisted of a survey of drivers carried out by the Council's Licensing section, on street interviews with members of the public relating to their use of taxis and private hire vehicles, a consultation exercise conducted with key stakeholders, and taxi rank observation surveys that were conducted in October 2023.

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The LVSA report explained that there was evidence of a continued but slowed reduction in rank-based demand. It found that the current policy of limiting the number of Hackney Carriage vehicles continued to provide a benefit to the travelling public and had provided the Hackney Carriage trade with stability during the COVID-19 pandemic. The report found that the majority of the trade, both owners and renters, supported the policy of there being some kind of a limit on the number of Hackney Carriage Licences that were issued. None of the consultation respondents had called for the complete removal of the limit.

The LVSA report identified the need for the Council to continue monitor the level of public service by conducting further rank observation surveys. It noted that, whilst the level of unmet demand was still well below the level at which it would be considered to be significant it had nevertheless increased when compared to the results of the previous survey. This implied that there had been a reduction in the level of service which needed to be monitored. It therefore recommended that the next Unmet Demand Survey should take place within two years, preferably in October 2025, in order to ensure that the trend towards unmet demand becoming significant did not continue.

The LVSA report concluded that there was no evidence of any significant unmet demand for the services of Hackney Carriages in the Reading area at present. It recommended that the Committee could therefore opt to retain the present policy of limiting the number of Hackney Carriages Vehicle Licences (plates) and that it could do so at the current 216 limit. Furthermore, the Committee could be reassured that the policy of limiting the number of plates to 216 could be reliably defended if it were to be challenged.

Mr Ian Millership from LVSA attended the meeting and gave a presentation summarising the findings of the 2023 Unmet Demand Survey.

Mr Asif Rashid, Chairman of the Reading Taxi Association and Syed Abbas and Mr Mubashir, both members of the trade, were present at the meeting and addressed the Committee on the item.

Resolved:

- (1) That the results of the LVSA Unmet Demand Survey, as attached to the report at Appendix 1, be noted;**
- (2) That the Best Practice Guidance issued by the Department for Transport (DfT) be noted;**
- (3) That the recommendation contained within the LVSA Unmet Demand Survey report to conduct the next unmet demand survey in October 2025 be noted;**
- (4) That the policy of limiting the number of Hackney Carriage Vehicle Licences at the current level of 216 be retained.**

(The meeting started at 6.30 pm and closed at 7.13 pm)