

Licensing Applications Committee

12 February 2026



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Licensing Policy
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Executive Director/ Statutory Officer Commissioning Report	Emma Gee, Executive Director for Economic Growth and Neighbourhood Services
Report author	Clyde Masson, Principal Licensing Enforcement Officer
Lead Councillor	Cllr John Ennis, Lead Councillor for Climate Strategy and Transport
Council priority	All
Recommendations	1. That (following a public consultation) the proposed Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Licensing Policy is now approved

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Under the terms of the Policing and Crime Act 2017 ('PCA') the Department for Transport (DfT) has introduced Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards for hackney carriages (taxis) and private hire vehicles (PHVs). These Statutory Standards were published in July 2020 (and subsequently updated in 2022) and the Council, acting as the Licensing Authority, is required to have due regard to them when exercising its licensing functions.
- 1.2. Within the Statutory Standards it is recommended that Licensing Authorities have a publicly available Policy that brings together all their procedures for hackney carriage and private hire licensing. This should include convictions policies, licence conditions, vehicle standards and a 'fit and proper person test'.
- 1.3. The Licensing Applications Committee (LAC) meeting on 22 July 2025, resolved that the Council's proposed Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Licensing Policy, be published for public consultation with the hackney carriage and private hire vehicle trades and that a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the LAC to consider the outcome of the consultation and adoption of the final Policy. This is that report.
- 1.4. The proposed Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Licensing Policy is attached at Appendix 1.
- 1.5. The Policy includes existing procedures and licence conditions with some amendments and additions as recommended within Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards. There have also been a number of changes made to the Policy document that was presented to the Committee on 22 July 2025 in response to feedback from the consultation process.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. Until now, Reading Borough Council has not developed a single policy to incorporate both hackney carriage and private hire licensing. Differing licence conditions, enforcement, vehicle specifications and emissions policies created an unbalanced system. Our Licensing Strategy "Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Strategy 2023-2028",

action plan contained a commitment to review existing policies and combine them to meet the statutory standards' recommendation for a single combined policy.

- 2.2. Currently, hackney carriage vehicles have an 'Age & Emissions Policy' and private hire vehicles have only an Age Policy'. Whilst driver application processes are largely the same, enforcement differs considerably. Hackney carriage drivers are subject to a 3-warning letter system, conditions and Bylaws with private hire and school transport drivers having conditions and a penalty points system. When the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 came into effect, a new framework was established for private hire and hackney carriage licensing. In 2006 the Council decided to introduce a penalty points system as permitted within the Act for private hire drivers (reviewed and updated twice since). However, it was decided to maintain the existing conditions and bylaws from the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 for Hackney Carriage drivers as the system worked sufficiently at that time.
- 2.3. On 13 July 2023, the Licensing Applications Committee noted the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards 2022. These Standards form the basis of the draft Taxi & Private Hire Licensing Policy bringing it in line with the Department for Transport (DFT) and the policies of other Local Authorities.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-standards/statutory-taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-standards>

- 2.4. The Committee also approved the current version of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Criminal Convictions policy on 07 November 2023.

3. The Proposal

- 3.1. The Licensing Applications Committee at its meeting on the 22 July 2025 resolved that the draft Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Licensing Policy, be published for public consultation with the hackney carriage and private hire vehicle trades for a minimum of eight weeks.
- 3.2. The consultation was published online via the Council's Consultation Hub from 26 August 2025 to 27 October 2025. The Reading Taxi Association, Reading Private Hire Driver's Association and operators were informed of the consultation. Emails were sent to licensed drivers and details of the consultation were added to the Taxi Licensing section of the Council website and email signatures of Licensing Officers and members of Business Support.
- 3.3. The Licensing Team also held 4 drop-in meetings at the Civic Offices and All Saints church hall, Reading to engage with the taxi and private hire trades and to answer questions or help with accessing the consultation portal. Drivers were asked to spread the word within their networks.
- 3.4. There were 2,178 comments made by 137 different individuals on the proposed policy document via the consultation portal and several emails were sent directly to the Licensing Team. These included a written response from the Reading Taxi Association and a number of emails from individuals and operators and are included in Appendix 2.
- 3.5. Due to the large number of responses received, officers collated and ordered them within an excel spreadsheet according to the sections of the policy document they related to. A document summarising the responses and the main points raised is attached at Appendix 2.
- 3.6. Having considered the consultation feedback, officers have made amendments to the Policy where it was considered appropriate to do so, bearing in mind current legislation and the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards.
- 3.7. Licensing officers held meetings with the hackney carriage and private hire trades on 04 December 2025 to provide feedback on the responses received and the amendments that have been made to the proposed Policy as a result.

A summary of the amendments that have been made to the draft Policy in response to the public consultation are set out below

3.8. Section 4 – Guidance on the suitability to hold a licence

Paragraph 4.6 Changed to add ‘...where information received regarding allegations of serious criminal offences or inappropriate behaviour from Police or other responsible authorities/officers raises grave doubts...’ This clarifies that the information being acted on is from a responsible authority.

3.9. Section 6 – Enforcement

Paragraph 6.6 – the reference to ‘complaint’ changed to ‘provide feedback’ as this was deemed to be a more positive approach.

3.10. Section 7 – Hackney carriage and private hire vehicles

Paragraph 7.2.2 amended to say that a Certificate of Good Conduct is required after 3 months or more. This is to clarify the time scale required and aligns with recommendations in the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards.

3.11. Paragraph 7.4.5 changed such that category A, B and S vehicles will not be licensed if they are new to the fleet. For vehicles that are already licensed, category ‘N’ vehicles will be licensed and category ‘S’ vehicles will be permitted on a case-by-case basis. This change has been made after feedback from the trades that newer vehicles, especially hybrid/electric ones, are often written off if they are damaged in an accident due to the cost of repairs. For clarity, Category S vehicles are those which have suffered structural damage and have been written off by the insurer as they were “uneconomical to repair”. This damage could be to any part of the vehicle’s structural frame, including the chassis. After repairs, Cat S cars need to be re-registered with the DVLA before they go back on the roads. Category N vehicles have suffered non-structural damage – this could be to the brakes, steering, electrics, safety-features, or even just cosmetic damage. Cat N cars have also been written off by the insurer as they were uneconomical to repair, but the vehicle’s structural frame or chassis did not suffer any damage.

3.12. Paragraph 7.10.3 ‘*Vehicle MOT and compliance tests must be conducted at alternate testing centres on a rolling basis. For example, if the annual MOT/compliance is carried out at Test Centre A the next test must be done at Test Centre B, and so on*’ has been removed in its entirety. This removes the requirement to alternate between centres, this is in response to comments where there have been difficulties in obtaining bookings as required.

3.13. 7.10.3 be further amended to ‘*If a hackney carriage/private hire vehicle receives minor defects/advisories as part of an MOT, these should not appear on 3 consecutive tests. If the same minor defects/advisories appear on a second test, a letter may be sent to remind the owner to have them rectified and these must be repaired before the next test. If they appear again as part of the third MOT, the vehicle may be suspended until they are rectified. If there are serious concerns that a vehicle is not suitable, the vehicle may be revoked*’. This change is to allow for the issues to be addressed within a year and assure that minor defects/advisories do not become dangerous and ensure vehicles remain safe for passengers and other road users. Advisories are there for a reason and not to be consistently ignored.

3.14. Paragraph 7.12.9 be amended to add that a sign/sticker indicating card payments are accepted may also be displayed.

3.15. Section 7.14, the requirement to carry fire extinguishers and first aid kits, has been removed in its entirety.

3.16. Section 7.15 amended with a paragraph added to clarify the use of dashcams. ‘*Permission is not required for the installation of dashcam equipment if it only covers the external front and rear-views and nothing within the vehicle. If any dashcam equipment provides internal video of the vehicle, this will be considered to be a CCTV system and must be operated in accordance with paragraph 7.15.2 above. If the dash-cam records*

audio there needs to be a sign visible to passengers notifying them of this. The equipment installed must have the ability to turn off audio recording if requested to do so by passengers.

3.17. Section 8 - Hackney carriage and private hire drivers

3.18. Paragraph 8.4.2 amended to remove requirement for a medical to be carried out by a driver's own GP and replaced with 'a GP qualified to do Group 2 medical examinations'. It is understood that many GP surgeries do not offer this examination or that an appointment cannot be readily booked.

3.19. Paragraph 8.7.1 amended to change the time to 6 years which is the equivalent of 2 3-year licence periods.

3.20. Paragraph 8.8.1 amended to clarify the requirement would apply to new applicants and will not be retrospectively imposed unless there were concerns about the standard of a licenced driver's ability to converse in English.

3.21. Private Hire Vehicle Legislation and Conditions

3.22. Condition 15, the second bullet point amended to add the vehicle registration and the third bullet point to clarify operator advertisement to be displayed on the front doors only.

3.23. Condition 18 '*The proprietor shall keep written records of any maintenance checks of the vehicle and these shall be available for inspection by authorised officers of the Council*' has been removed in its entirety as not required.

Approval of advertising/livery on licensed vehicles

3.24. Paragraph 7.1 amended to add '*Private hire vehicles are permitted to display operator advertising and/or livery on the exterior of the vehicle subject to approval in Section 1 above*'.

3.25. Paragraph 7.2 amended to remove '*and operator*' from the paragraph as operator details are only permitted on the front door panels.

3.26. Private Hire Operator Licence Conditions

3.27. The following is removed from Condition 9 '*Operators are required to evidence that safeguarding protections are applied which are equivalent to those of Reading Borough Council by the company to which they sub-contract any bookings. If a PSV with PCV driver is used, the hirer must be informed of this and notified that the driver is not required to have an enhanced DBS check.*' Officers believe that this is not necessary as the operator/driver will have been subject to the relevant checks to obtain a licence.

3.28. Condition 10 amended from '*...the Council will require access to the system so that the Council is able to establish that records are entered sequentially and that it is able to establish the date and time at which the record was created*' to '*...officers shall be able to view the records to establish that they are entered sequentially and that it is able to establish the date and time at which the record was created*'.

3.29. Condition 11 amended to remove the reference to '*totally responsible*' and replaced with '*The operator shall be responsible for ensuring and evidencing that staff training and procedures are in place for controllers and dispatch staff in relation to the handling of personal information and conduct towards drivers, customers and members of the public.*

3.30. Condition 13 amended from 12 months to six months so as not to contradict condition 2.

3.31. Hackney Carriage Driver's Byelaws, Conditions and Penalty Points Scheme.

3.32. There were a large number of comments received on this section of the policy. The 1,198 comments received from the consultation on this section of the policy. The proposed penalty points scheme is based on the one currently being used in relation to Private Hire vehicle driver's licences. The position is that this penalty points scheme with the existing

points allocations be applied to hackney carriage driver licences with some exceptions. These changes are attached at Appendix 3.

3.33. Private Hire Driver's Conditions and Penalty Points Scheme

3.34. There were a large number of comments made on this section of the policy, many of which disagreed with the proposed increase in the points values for breaches of the conditions. The current position is that the existing conditions and penalty points scheme will remain in place, maintaining the points values with some exceptions. These changes are attached at Appendix 4.

3.35. General comments and feedback

3.36. There were comments made in general that did not fit within the scope of the policy. These related to funding incentives for cleaner/green vehicles, engagement with the trade to promote services, an increase in the number of hackney carriage ranks (especially in Craven Road and Friar Street), to collaborate more with the trade and comments regarding drivers going to other Licensing Authorities.

3.37. There were also a large number of comments received from school transport drivers in response to the proposal to no longer offer a restricted private hire driver's licence for school transport work only. The comments requested for the school transport driver's licences to remain as these drivers only want to do school transport work. The majority of these respondents were drivers that are parents or retired people who only wish to work a few hours a day or to fit around caring for their school-age children. These comments were reiterated by an email received from a school transport operator.

3.38. In response to this feedback the revised proposal is for the school transport driver's licence to remain, with applicants not required to pass a driving assessment and the location and theory tests required for a private hire driver's licence. To date, school transport drivers have a separate set of conditions to private hire drivers however, going forwards the proposed private hire driver's licence conditions and penalty points scheme will be implemented. This proposal will reduce the number of sets of conditions being enforced allowing for greater clarity to licensees and members of the public and ensure consistency across both types of private hire driver's licences.

3.39. There were no comments made or objections raised to the removal of separate licences for school transport vehicles and operators. The current proposal is that the school transport operator and school transport vehicle licence regime is discontinued and incorporated into that for private hire operators and private hire vehicles. It is proposed that this will be on renewal of a school transport vehicle licence and for a 1-year school transport operator's licence. For school transport operators with a 5-year licence, their licence would be re-issued as a private hire operator's licence within 1 year of the policy being approved.

Options Proposed

3.40. The following options are available to the committee.

1. Approve the Policy with the proposed changes as outlined above.

2. Approve the policy subject to any further amendments proposed and agreed at committee on 12 February 2026.

3.44. The approval and implementation of a Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Licensing Policy will provide clear and readily available guidance to current licence holders, applicants and members of the public. Currently the information contained within the proposed policy can be found in different separate policies agreed at different times, and held in different areas of the Reading Borough Council website. The recommendation that the policy be accepted, allows this information to be accessed within a single document that allows transparency regarding Reading Borough Council's regulatory framework and enforcement of hackney carriage and private hire licensing. Furthermore, it demonstrates adherence to the recommendation in the Statutory Standards.

- 3.41. School transport licensing was considered for removal in its entirety to streamline processing and reduce administrative burden on the Council. Due to the response from consultees, it was important to keep the school transport driver category, we would recommend this option as a fair solution.
- 3.42. The removal of the school transport vehicle licence category will enable more wheelchair accessible vehicles to become available on the general private hire fleet. There are many vehicles that are currently used for school transport only that are wheelchair accessible and, in some cases, specifically designed for the transport of larger electric wheelchairs. Making these vehicles available for use by the general public would contribute towards the Council's aim for increasing the transport options available for wheelchair users, allowing them greater choice and flexibility to travel in and around Reading.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

4.1. Secure Reading's economic and cultural success

Taxi and private hire vehicles, drivers and operators form an important integrated part of the overall sustainable transport network. Their own economic success depends on offering a competitive, high-quality service in a highly regulated landscape. The economic and cultural success of Reading depends on a reliable and safe transport infrastructure. This policy provides more economic stability, certainty and consistency.

4.2. Deliver a sustainable and healthy environment and reduce our carbon footprint

The new policy continues our management of vehicle ages and emissions status of vehicles on the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire fleets to balance the competing demands yet follow the roadmap to net zero. Developing Reading as a Green City with a sustainable environment and economy at the heart of the Thames Valley – reducing the emissions from the Taxi and PHV fleets will contribute to a lower carbon footprint and reduce the NOx (Nitrogen Oxides) and particulate matter in the air which is associated with poor health outcomes.

4.3. Putting residents first

By conducting this comprehensive policy review, pulling it all together in one space, consulting widely, aligning with the statutory standards, modernising and improving content, we are ensuring that these transport sectors licensed by Reading Borough Council are fit for the future.

Customer safety is the principal aim for the licensing scheme. This Policy updates a number of areas to ensure improved customer safety, for instance the new QR code sticker to be displayed in vehicles for customers to leave compliments, comments and complaints, and improvements to the availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV) are proposed.

4.4. Building on strong foundations

Ensuring the Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle sector remains integrated into our sustainable transport network to continue to move passengers to destinations safely, contributing to the economy with low impact on the environment through cleaner vehicles.

Taxis and PHVs are one of the most flexible elements of the transport system operating 24/7 on a commercial basis. They are integral to supporting residents and local businesses to thrive by transporting residents and visitors around the Borough. The services are a primary mode of passenger transport for many people for whom mainstream public transport is not an option or suitable. Taxis and PHVs help support many disabled and vulnerable people to live more independent lives. They also play an important part in supporting the night-time economy, providing a safe and secure mode of transport home for many people.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019.
- 5.2. A Climate Impact Assessment has been conducted and can be viewed alongside this report.
- 5.3. Transport is the biggest greenhouse gas emitting sector in the UK accounting for around 27% of total carbon emissions. As set out in the Reading Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-25, this figure is lower in Reading with transport accounting for around 20% of carbon emissions. However, significant investment in sustainable transport solutions is vital in order to respond to the Climate Emergency declared by the Council in February 2019 and to help achieve our target of a carbon neutral Reading by 2030.
- 5.4. The existing Hackney Carriage Vehicle Emissions and Age Policy has been incorporated into this new overarching policy document, which intends to improve both the hackney carriage vehicle fleet and the private hire fleet by removing older more polluting vehicles, and creating a safer more reliable fleet which will improve local air quality within Reading.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. A public consultation was carried out between 26 August 2025 and 27 October 2025. Members of the Licensing Team also engaged with drivers and operators during meetings held to discuss the consultation process and to provide feedback on the comments received on the consultation. This is all outlined in section 3 of this report.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1 Licensing authorities are required under the [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) to pay regard to the need to eliminate conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010, to promote equality of opportunity and to foster understanding between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 7.2 Disability is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, and disabled people may face particular barriers accessing taxi and private hire vehicle services if authorities fail to regulate services inclusively and to uphold the rights of affected passengers.
- 7.3 Licensing authorities should actively promote inclusivity, equality and independence for disabled people and ensure that they only issue licences to those that are fit and proper to hold one.
- 7.4 An inclusive service accessible to disabled people is one where:
 - there are sufficient vehicles meeting disabled people's access needs, to allow them to travel as easily, between the same locations and at the same times, as non-disabled people;
 - policy decisions are informed by an accurate and up-to-date understanding of the experience and needs of disabled people with a range of visible and less visible impairments;
 - action is taken proactively to improve the accessibility of the services supported;
 - disabled people have confidence that services will meet their needs and that, if things go wrong, their concerns will be understood and investigated thoroughly;
 - if operators and drivers fail in their responsibilities, that appropriate enforcement action is taken to prevent its recurrence and protect other disabled passengers.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1 [Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998](#) requires local authorities to consider the crime and disorder implications of all their activities and functions and do all that they reasonably can to reduce crime. Licensing authorities do this by setting licensing requirements that protect passengers, but this duty also extends to considering ways that licensing requirements and policies can reduce crime against drivers, who are subjected to robbery, verbal and physical assault, which can be racially motivated or aggravated.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1. The Council's statutory powers to regulate the operation of taxis are contained in the [Town Police Clauses Acts 1847](#) and [Part II the Local Government \(Miscellaneous Provisions\) Act 1976](#).
- 9.2. The proposed Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Licensing Policy attached as Appendix 1 has been drafted in light of statutory guidance issued by the Department for Transport (DfT) ([Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards](#)) which recommends that Licensing Authorities have a publicly available Policy that brings together all their procedures for hackney carriage and private hire licensing.
- 9.3. The Draft Policy also takes account of the [Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing Best Practice Guidance for Licensing Authorities in England](#) (as amended in November 2023).
- 9.4. As stated in the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards, the primary and overriding objective of licensing must be to protect the public.
- 9.5. In addition to ensuring that taxi and private hire vehicle services are safe, the Statutory Standards also recognise that the public have a reasonable expectation that the services available will be accessible and affordable.
- 9.6. Licensing authorities are required under [section 22\(2\) of the Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act 2006](#) to have regard to the [Regulators' Code](#), which states that:
- Regulators should avoid imposing unnecessary regulatory burdens through their regulatory activities and should assess whether similar social, environmental and economic outcomes could be achieved by less burdensome means. Regulators should choose proportionate approaches to those they regulate, based on relevant factors including, for example, business size and capacity.*
- 9.7. Licensing authorities should be focussed on mitigating safety risks for passengers and drivers and enabling fair competition within the trade by ensuring consistency of regulation and enforcement. Licensing authorities should actively promote inclusivity, equality and independence for disabled people and ensure that they only issue licences to those that are fit and proper to hold one.
- 9.8. It is for licensing authorities to ensure that their licensing policy and requirements are proportionate, so that passengers can choose from a wide range of safe services. As indicated above, the primary function of the licensing regime is public safety; however, an unduly stringent regime on other issues may restrict the supply of taxi and private hire vehicle services by putting up the cost of operation, or otherwise restricting entry to the trade. Licensing authorities should recognise that too restrictive an approach can be counter-productive, restricting the licensed trade to such an extent that the public resort to the use of unlicensed, unvetted and uninsured drivers and vehicles.
- 9.9. In formulating the attached draft Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Licensing Policy, the Council has consulted with the taxi trade and considered how the proposed requirements will affect the delivery of safe, available, affordable and accessible services.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1. Sections 53 and 70 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 allow the council to charge fees for the grant of licences in respect of hackney carriage and private hire drivers, vehicles and operators. The council cannot make a profit from licence fees and there must be a carry forward of any surplus, but there can also be recovery of any deficit. The reconciliation of any surplus or deficit will take place over a three-year cycle.
- 10.2. Any changes made to the current policy must be defensible in the court if an appeal is lodged.

11. Timetable for Implementation

- 11.1. If approved, the Policy would be implemented immediately with conditions being applied for all licences granted from the day after the Policy is approved.
- 11.2. For current licences that are due to expire within the next 6 months following the approval of the Policy, the new conditions will be applied to the relevant licences on renewal. Licences that are due to expire after 6 months from approval of the policy will be re-issued with any new conditions attached for the remainder of the licensing period. This is to retain the integrity of the current licence period.
- 11.3. The burden for compliance rests with drivers, operators and vehicle owners; it is for them to seek out and understand the rules that apply to them. Compliance with the Policy, as entered into the public domain by way of open committee meeting and the Council website is strict. There is no requirement for officers to ensure drivers, operators and vehicle owners have read and understood the Policy before it becomes incumbent on them to follow it.

12. Background Papers

- 12.1. There are none.

Appendices –

- 1. Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Licensing Policy**
- 2. Comments summary document & consultation responses**
- 3. Proposed changes to Hackney Carriage Driver's Bylaws, Conditions and Penalty Points Scheme**
- 4. Proposed changes to Private Hire Driver's Conditions and Penalty Points Scheme**