

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

LICENSING COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 24th January, 2024

Present:- Councillors: Steve Hedges (Chair), Lucy Hodge, Toby Simon, Michael Auton, Samantha Kelly, Onkar Saini, George Tomlin and Deborah Collins (in place of Ann Morgan)

Also in attendance: Carrie-Ann Evans (Team Leader, Legal Services), John Dowding (Lead Officer (Licensing)) and Aled Williams (Team Manager - Environmental Protection & Licensing)

1 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

2 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR (IF DESIRED)

A Vice-Chair was not required on this occasion at the Committee.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Councillors Ann Morgan, Shaun Hughes, Tim Warren and Sarah Moore had sent their apologies to the Committee.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

5 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

There was none.

6 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC - TO RECEIVE STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS

There were none.

7 MINUTES: 18TH FEBRUARY 2021

The Committee approved these minutes as a correct record.

8 REVIEW OF HACKNEY CARRIAGE UNMET DEMAND SURVEY REPORT 2023

The Lead Officer (Licensing) introduced the report to the Committee and highlighted the following areas from within it.

The Council currently regulates the number of Hackney Carriage Proprietor (vehicle) Licences the Council issues for the city of Bath. Because of this the Council is under a duty to carry out a review of any significant unmet demand for Hackney Carriage services every three years. This report requests Members to consider the outcome of the Hackney Carriage Unmet Demand Survey (the Survey) carried out by independent consultants in 2023 and, if necessary, make recommendations on the findings to the Cabinet Member.

Currently Hackney Carriages are restricted by zone and numbers within the authority. There are two zones which were set up at the time of local government reorganisation in 1996. Zone 1 has the same boundaries as the former Bath City Council and Zone 2 has the same boundaries as the former Wansdyke District Council (now referred to as North East Somerset). There is no restriction on the number of Hackney Carriages in Zone 2 (North East Somerset).

In 2023 a further Survey was undertaken to see if there was any significant demand that was unmet within Bath. The Survey was initiated in March 2023 and included 178 hours of rank observation, pedestrian surveys and consultation with licensed vehicle drivers and stakeholders.

The main conclusion from the Survey is that there is no unmet demand at this time in Bath City (Zone 1) which is significant and therefore a limit on vehicle numbers can be retained at the present level (125).

Ian Millership, who had conducted the survey on behalf of the Council, addressed the Committee and gave them a presentation. The presentation will be included as an online appendix to these minutes, a summary is set out below.

Aim of the Survey

- Identify any significant unmet demand (or otherwise).
- Provide Committee evidence of current position regarding unmet demand and its significance at this point in time.

Definitions

- Hackney carriages (HCV) - Vehicles that can be taken from a rank, hailed or booked.
- Private hire vehicles (PHV) - Vehicles that can only be booked, many now use apps allowing much more immediate booking often based on proximity of vehicle.
- Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAV) - Vehicles that can carry a passenger travelling in their wheel chair – a range of types but all have to be approved locally. Not all 'London style' and certainly not all can take every wheelchair. Can exist in either hackney carriage or private hire fleet.

- Unmet demand – someone arrives at a rank and there is no hackney carriage that could be available for immediate hire. Excludes waiting for vehicle to move up to front of rank (geometric delay).

Fleet / Industry issues

- PHV numbers reduced strongly in pandemic.
- Current numbers at 2007 level
- 12% zone 1 HCV are WAV, one WAV HCV zone 2, small number of PHV WAV
- Strong e-scooter trial in area - 8-9% of their trips formerly licensed vehicles

Rank activity

- 178 hours observed in early February.
- Bath Spa rank 59% of average weekly level / Abbey rank 40% / Westgate rank unused.
- Estimate of 6,446 passengers per week, 40% less than 2020
- More of vehicles seen at Abbey but also most reduced share (68% 2020, 51% now)
- 9% (10%) of total estimated station passengers leave in an HCV.

Public consultation

- 33% (60%) had used licensed vehicle (LV) in area in last 3 months – strong reduction. 4% HCV only / 14% HCV + PHV / 16% PHV only
- 95% of booked trips by app, 85% to main company, 10% to international app, 5% shared four other apps.
- Main two ranks known about, 43% said they used (47%)
- 50% felt there were enough HCV (80% in 2020)

Stakeholder consultation

- Just one response, typical national lack of response. Their main issue was with PHV and app surge pricing.

Trade consultation

- 13% response (16%, 7% last two surveys)
- 43% (62%) from private hire / 91% (86%) owned own vehicle.
- 75% (80%) agreed with the limit.

Disability

- Low usage of WAV at ranks (one at station, two at Abbey) - But this is one more than in 2020.

Unmet demand evaluation

- Index of significance of unmet demand (ISUD) increased from last time (to 13.18 council, all ranks 73.53). Still not at level of significance (80).
- Overall, this suggests less vehicles active now than in 2020 given that overall demand is reduced.

Key conclusions

- No evidence of any unmet demand that is significant.
- Current limit policy can be retained.
- Spare plates available but no demand for them.

Final key comments

- Repeat survey with fresh surveys at any point up to February 2026.
- Unmet demand much closer to becoming significant than in 2020 so three-year review could be too long.

Councillor Deborah Collins commented that she was disappointed in the response from stakeholders, especially potential disability representatives. She asked if they were contacted on further occasions.

Ian Millership replied that they had contacted as many as they were able to and that a detailed list of organisations had been supplied to him. He added that he was aware of the good relationship that the Council has with a number of disability groups. He said that the Department for Transport were considering further ways of gathering evidence from these organisations.

The Lead Officer (Licensing) added that a previous project by the Government in 1997 relating to increasing the availability of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles had faded into obscurity.

Councillor Lucy Hodge referred to the 13% response rate from the trade consultation and asked how many drivers this represented.

The Lead Officer (Licensing) replied that there were around 450 drivers working across B&NES in both Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Vehicles.

Councillor Hodge asked how the survey was carried out practically.

Ian Millership replied that in previous years he had received help from family members and other people, but that this was no longer achievable. He added that video cameras were put in place to observe rank use, plate data was gathered in person and social media was also used within the survey.

Councillor Samantha Kelly asked if any further comment could be given on the low number of available Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles.

The Lead Officer (Licensing) explained that feedback from the trade indicated that there was a very low demand for accessible vehicles and this was reflected by the rank observations taken during the survey.

In terms of Private Hire, the Lead Officer (Licensing) replied that it was not the local business model for private hire operators to own vehicles and employ drivers. He added that driver and vehicle owners are self-employed and choose their own hours. Unfortunately, it is possible for a journey to be booked through a company in advance only for the driver to be unavailable or decide not to work that day. This does leave the operator in a difficult situation.

Councillor Kelly asked if there was any incentive that could be offered to encourage further respondents to the survey.

The Lead Officer (Licensing) replied that the communications with the trade explains the importance of responding as it their business that could be affected by the results.

Councillor Toby Simon referred to the low number of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles and asked if new vehicle licences could only be issued to vehicles that are wheelchair accessible.

The Lead Officer (Licensing) replied that for new HCV licences that is the policy of the Council.

Councillor Simon proposed whether a discussion with the School Transport service would be able to result in further services being available to those residents who are in a wheelchair.

The Lead Officer (Licensing) replied that the Dial-a-Ride service, that also provides School Transport, was already used substantially to assist members of the public with mobility needs.

Ian Millership added that any vehicles that provide a transport to school service would be less likely to drive in the evening in case their vehicle became damaged and then prevented them carrying out their service the following day.

Councillor Deborah Collins said that she would like to see the number of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles increased, either through new vehicles or existing ones being upgraded.

Councillor Onkar Saini asked if the Council had faced any particular challenges since the Deregulation Act 2015.

The Lead Officer (Licensing) replied that he could not recall any and that drivers from other Local Authorities had worked within B&NES for a number of years. He added that joint enforcement observations are carried out and that there were no known problems.

Councillor Saini asked if any complaints had been received regarding the triple licensing lock whereby PHVs require the operator fulfilling the request, the driver and vehicle to all be licensed by the same authority.

The Lead Officer (Licensing) replied that there had been no spike seen in such events and that if any were to occur they could be reported via email to Licensing@bathnes.gov.uk .

The Committee **RESOLVED** to recommend that:

- i) The number of vehicle licences in Zone 1 remains at 125
- ii) The limitation policy remains in place.

The meeting ended at 10.56 am

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services