

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Head of Legal, Administrative and Regulatory Services

Licensing Committee – 4 November 2008

Subject: Wheelchair Accessible Taxis – Dumbarton and Vale of Leven Taxi Licensing Zone

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To report on (1) the possibility of taxi operators who contract with the Council being required to provide wheelchair accessible vehicles; and (2) the outcome of discussions between officers and representatives of the taxi trade in an effort to increase the number of accessible vehicles available for hire in the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven Taxi Licensing Zone to at least 23.

2. Background

- 2.1** The issue of taxi accessibility within the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven Taxi Licensing Zone has been the subject of numerous reports to Committee and Council over a protracted period of time. It had previously been agreed that the taxi trade would be required to provide 23 accessible taxis by the end of March 2008. A copy of the most recent report on this matter, which was submitted to the meeting of the Licensing Committee on 3 June 2008, is appended for information.
- 2.2** At the meeting on 3 June 2008, it was agreed:-
- (1) to note the contents of the report;
 - (2) that officers be instructed to discuss the possibility of taxi operators who contract with the Council being required to provide wheelchair accessible vehicles, as referred to in paragraph 4.6 of the report, with officers from Educational Services and Social Work and Health;
 - (3) that the taxi trade should participate in discussions with officers in an effort to increase the number of accessible vehicles available for hire to at least 23; and
 - (4) that a further report be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.
- 2.3** At the meeting of the Committee which was held on 2 September 2008, it was noted that discussions with officers and the taxi trade had not been concluded and that the report would be submitted to the next meeting of the Committee.

3. Current Position

- 3.1** Discussions were held with officers from the Social Work and Health Department and Educational Services and the position is as follows:-

Social Work and Health

It was established that the Social Work and Health Department does not contract with taxi operators. The department contacts Clydebank T.O.A. on an ad hoc basis when taxis are required.

Educational Services

There are currently 128 contracts in place with taxi operators or private contractors for the conveyance of approximately 160 pupils. The total value of the contracts amounts to approximately £441,000. At present only 12 pupils who are transported in wheelchairs are accommodated in taxis which are wheelchair accessible. It was evident from discussions that the department would have serious concerns over the ability to meet statutory requirements to provide transport for those pupils who are entitled to free home to school transport should a decision be taken to introduce a contract condition which would require the provision of accessible vehicles. It is anticipated that many taxi operators and private contractors who contract with the Council for school transport services would be reluctant to provide wheelchair accessible vehicles and would not bid for such contracts in the future.

3.2 Following a meeting with representatives of the taxi trade, the Committee may wish to note the following points:-

- (a) 14 wheelchair accessible taxis were in operation in the area as at 25 March 2008;
- (b) it is anticipated that the number of wheelchair accessible taxis in operation will have increased to 18 by the time of the Licensing Committee meeting on 4 November 2008 or shortly thereafter, subject to orders being met by the suppliers of these vehicles;
- (c) it is maintained by representatives of the taxi trade:-
 - (1) that the current provision of accessible vehicles is adequate to meet demand;
 - (2) the two taxi companies operating in the area now have a system in place whereby if one company receives a request for a wheelchair accessible taxi and cannot fulfil the hire immediately, they contact the other company to pass the hire on; this ensures that the waiting time for an accessible vehicle is kept to an absolute minimum;
 - (3) there are virtually no complaints to the taxi offices about the availability of wheelchair accessible taxis (it can be confirmed that no complaints have been received by the Council's Licensing Section in this respect in recent times);
 - (4) the increased financial costs of operating accessible vehicles remains an issue, however, the trade has introduced a system of subsidies which are paid to operators of wheelchair accessible taxis, funded from a levy on all other taxi operators, designed to encourage the provision of such vehicles;

- (5) in the present economic climate it can be difficult for individual taxi operators to obtain finance to purchase wheelchair accessible vehicles;
- (6) there can be fairly long delays between ordering such vehicles and delivery from the suppliers.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1** The Social Work and Health Department does not contract with taxi operators and concerns have been expressed that the Educational Services Department would be unable to meet statutory requirements in relation to the provision of school transport services should a decision be taken to introduce a contract condition which would require the provision of accessible vehicles. In view of the concerns which have been expressed it is suggested that it would not be a viable option to pursue the imposition of such a condition.
- 4.2** The taxi trade has taken action to improve the provision of accessible taxis in the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven Taxi Licensing Zone and, whilst progress has been relatively slow, the overall position has improved in the last year.
- 4.3** The Committee may wish to consider allowing the trade an extended period of time to continue to work towards achieving the target of 23 wheelchair accessible taxis which was set previously.

5. Personnel Issues

- 5.1** There are no personnel issues.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1** There are no financial implications.

7. Risk Assessment

- 7.1** There is no increased risk to the Council associated with the contents of this report.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1** It is recommended that the contents of the report be noted and that consideration be given to allowing the trade an extended period of time to continue to work towards achieving the target of 23 wheelchair accessible taxis which was set previously.

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Head of Legal, Administrative and Regulatory Services

Appendix: Report submitted to meeting of Licensing Committee held on 3 June 2008.

Background Papers:

1. Minutes of meeting of Licensing Committee held on 3 June 2008.

Wards Affected: N/A.

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