

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Head of Legal and Administrative Services

Licensing Committee – 10 January 2007

Subject: Survey of Demand for Taxis including Wheelchair Accessible Taxis

1. Purpose

- 1.1** To provide an update following the decision at the meeting of the Committee in September 2006 to continue consideration of the report on the outcome of the survey of demand for taxis including wheelchair accessible taxis to allow relevant user groups to be consulted and a report on that exercise to be submitted to the Committee.

2. Background

- 2.1** In accordance with the decision of the Licensing Committee on 9 November 2005 in relation to the issue of taxi accessibility within the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven Taxi Licensing Zone, a survey of demand for taxis including wheelchair accessible taxis was carried out by the Transport Research Institute Taxi Studies Group based in Napier University, Edinburgh.
- 2.2** A report on the outcome of the survey was submitted for consideration at the meeting of the Licensing Committee which was held on 7 June 2006. A copy of the report is attached (Appendix 1).
- 2.3** Having heard Mr. Neeson of West Dumbarton Taxi Trade Association, who requested that consideration of the report be continued to allow the trade sufficient time to consider the contents of the report on the Taxi Study, it was agreed that consideration be continued to the next meeting of the Committee.
- 2.4** At the meeting of the Committee which was held on 6 September 2006, consideration was given to a further report by the Head of Legal and Administrative Services and a paper by Mr. Tom McEntegart of Messrs Anderson Fyfe LLP, Solicitors, detailing the response by Dumbarton and Alexandria Taxi Trade Association to the West Dunbartonshire Taxi Study undertaken by the Transport Research Institute Taxi Studies Group. A copy of the paper by Mr. McEntegart is attached for reference (Appendix 2). Mr. McEntegart had requested permission to address the Committee in relation to the Taxi Study Report and he made a detailed submission on behalf of the Trade Association.
- 2.5** After discussion and having heard Councillor McColl, it was agreed that consideration of the matter be continued to allow relevant user groups to be consulted and a report on the outcome of that exercise to be submitted to the Committee. An excerpt from the Minute of the meeting is attached for reference (Appendix 3).

3. Current Position

3.1 In accordance with the decision of the Committee on 6 September 2006, the undernoted local organisations were consulted on the issue and invited to submit their views:-

- Age Concern Dumbarton
- Vale of Leven Age Concern
- Dumbarton Senior Citizens Committee
- Goodlife Positive Attitude
- West End Project
- West Dunbartonshire Independent Living Support
- West Dunbartonshire Access Panel
- Dumbarton & District Disabled Children's Forum

3.2 Letters were received from two of the above organisations, Age Concern Dumbarton and West Dunbartonshire Access Panel, detailing their views on the matter. Copies of the letters are attached (Appendices 4 and 5).

3.3 Age Concern Dumbarton is against a move to 100% wheelchair accessible taxis. They contend that many of their members, who could be regarded as "ambulant disabled", find wheelchair accessible taxis very difficult to enter and exit.

3.4 West Dunbartonshire Access Panel remains in favour of the previous decision of the Licensing Authority to move towards 100% wheelchair accessible taxis.

3.5 Both of the above organisations have requested permission to address the Committee in support of their views. In addition, following consultation with the Convener of the Committee, Councillor McAllister, in relation to a request from Age Concern Dumbarton, it is the intention of the representative of that organisation to show a short video to illustrate the difficulty which elderly members of the community have when attempting to enter or exit various types of wheelchair accessible taxis.

3.6 On the basis of the research undertaken in the study, the consultants concluded that neither the Clydebank nor Dumbarton and Vale of Leven Taxi Licensing Zones demonstrate any extent of Significant Unmet Demand. This indicates that the current numbers of licences remain appropriate to the supply of taxis in both zones. In fact there are some indications that the current numbers of taxis exceed the level required to provide an appropriate level of service. The Trade Association has previously indicated that this conclusion is accepted.

4. Options

4.1 It would appear that there are only two options available to the Licensing Authority with respect to the issue of taxi accessibility within the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven Taxi Licensing Zone.

Option 1

- 4.2** The first option would be to accept the recommendation of the consultants that there should be a long term move to a fully accessible fleet in the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven zone. Should this be the chosen option consideration would require to be given to the timescale to be adopted.
- 4.3** At present, it is Council policy that the maximum age for saloon vehicles to be operated as taxis is eight years from date of first registration. Acceptance of the recommendation of the consultants that a move towards a fully accessible taxi fleet should be facilitated by saloon vehicles being replaced by accessible vehicles when they reach the maximum permitted age would ensure a more gradual move to full provision of accessible taxis.
- 4.4** If the consultant's recommended approach is accepted, it is considered that the requirement for vehicles to be replaced with accessible taxis which was due to come into effect on 1 January 2006, but which was deferred, should become effective after a short period of grace. In this regard it is considered that an implementation date of 1 April 2007 would provide the trade with adequate notice of the requirement.
- 4.5** On the basis of the recommended approach, the provision of a fully accessible taxi fleet in the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven zone would be achieved by April 2015.

Option 2

- 4.6** The second option would be to agree that a quota or percentage of the total taxi fleet in the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven zone should become wheelchair accessible. The Trade Association has previously indicated that it accepted the conclusion contained in the Taxi Study Report that there was an immediate need for 23 fully accessible vehicles.
- 4.7** The problems of enforcing such a decision have been highlighted in previous reports to the Committee. At the meeting of the Licensing Committee on 9 November 2005 the Committee agreed that the trade should continue to work towards providing 25 wheelchair accessible taxis in the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven zone and that this figure should be achieved by April 2006. However, in the period from November 2005 to the present, there has been an overall reduction in the number of accessible taxis operating in the zone, from 12 to 10. This would appear to cast doubt on the ability of the trade to fulfil any requirement which may be set by the Council on a self-regulating basis.
- 4.8** A third option, which would involve a specific number of new taxi licences being granted in respect of wheelchair accessible vehicles, could not be justified having regard to the accepted conclusion of the Taxi Study that there is no Significant Unmet Demand for the services of taxis in the area.

5. Personnel Issues

5.1 There are no personnel issues.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 There are no financial implications.

7. Recommendations

7.1 It is recommended that the Committee agrees:-

- (a) to note the finding of the study that there is no Significant Unmet Demand in either the Clydebank or Dumbarton and Vale of Leven Taxi Licensing Zones;
- (b) to hear representations from Age Concern Dumbarton and West Dunbartonshire Access Panel in relation to the issue of taxi accessibility in the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven Taxi Licensing Zone; and
- (c) to determine which of the options detailed in section 4 of the report should be approved.

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Head of Legal and Administrative Services

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DR 21/12/06

Background Papers:

- 1. Report to special meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 9 November 2005.
- 2. Minutes of special meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 9 November 2005.

3. Report on Study of Taxi Supply in West Dunbartonshire by Transport Research Institute Taxi Studies Group, Napier University, Edinburgh.
4. Report to meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 7 June 2006.
5. Minutes of meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 7 June 2006.
6. Letter dated 21 August 2006 from West Dumbarton Taxi Trade Association.
7. Report to meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 6 September 2006.
8. Minutes of meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 6 September 2006.
9. Letter dated 30 September 2006 from Age Concern Dumbarton.
10. Letter dated 17 November 2006 from West Dunbartonshire Access Panel.
11. Letter dated 6 December 2006 to Age Concern Dumbarton.
12. Letter dated 6 December 2006 to West Dunbartonshire Access Panel.

Wards Affected: All Wards.

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