

SUMMARY OF REPORT:

No Summary.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

**Executive Cabinet Member Report ECME/26/12
Waste, Recycling, Highways and Transport PDG Report WRHTPDG/14/13**

1. Background

In July 2012 the Executive Member approved the commissioning of an unmet demand survey to determine whether the Council's decision to restrict the number of hackney carriages remains appropriate. The limit to the number of hackney carriage vehicle licences is currently 110, with two plates currently not issued. CTS Traffic and Transportation Ltd were commissioned to carry out an independent survey on the Council's behalf. The study included public; stakeholder and trade consultations together with rank surveys. This report outlines the findings and recommendations of the survey.

2. Main Findings

- 2.1 The Bolton Interchange rank is the only active rank during both day and night hours. The rank at the Town Hall is active during daytime hours, whilst other ranks see very low levels of use (Knowsley Street) or none at all (Horwich Parkway).

Night time demand is met by three active ranks at Bradshawgate, Churchgate and Nelson Square. Demand varies throughout the night. Saturday is the key night with Friday being much quieter.

- 2.2 The public consultation identified that 67% of responders had used a licensed vehicle in Bolton in the last three months. 71% of people obtained their licensed vehicle by phone with just 7% using the ranks and only 2% by hailing hackney carriages.

The survey showed that hackney carriage usage levels are very low and knowledge of ranks was poor.

Over 400 members of the public were surveyed and the main issue identified was the need for a better service from drivers.

- 2.3 Stakeholder consultation was conducted, in accordance with Department for Transport best practice guidance, with disability representatives; the police; supermarkets; hotels; the licensed trade and the Royal Bolton hospital.

Supermarkets and Hotels said they mainly used the services of private hire companies.

Disability representatives identified that obtaining a service to better meet their needs and improving clarity of charges for wheelchair users were their main concerns.

A Greater Manchester Police representative commented on potential conflicts between the hackney carriage and private hire trade; waiting vehicles causing obstruction and driver related crime. Possible resolutions including CCTV and pre-payment were suggested.

Bolton NHS Trust said that most taxi provision at the hospital was from private hire companies. The Trust indicated its willingness to work with the Council should consideration be given to the provision of a rank on the hospital site.

The survey company had limited success (as with previous surveys) in obtaining responses from the licensed trade with only one club responding. The club indicated its customers used the Nelson Square rank adjacent to its premises.

- 2.4 Trade consultation was conducted via a postal questionnaire together with a drop in consultation day.

Hackney carriage consultees indicated they were long standing drivers, with majority owning and driving their own vehicles. As would be expected 85% of the drivers considered retaining the limit was right for the area. There was support for more ranks and better advertising of existing ranks. Other comments related to vehicle congestion; improving the driver tests and marshals.

Private hire representatives commented on over ranking on Bradshawgate; tensions between the private hire and hackney carriage drivers, especially relating to stewarding of customers to vehicles; and the large number of providers ensuring the customer had ample choice.

2.5 The report's key conclusions are:

- There is no evidence of unmet demand, with the fleet operating within 108 vehicles.
- Demand for hackney carriages' has fallen to 4,100 passengers in a typical week compared to 9,000 in 2003.
- Hackney carriage ranks and vehicles do not appear to be visible enough.
- Driver standards need to be improved.

2.6 Recommendations from the report

The independent consultant made several recommendations which are supported by PDG, including:

1. Reducing the fleet from 110 vehicles to 108 vehicles, the current operational level.
2. A review of the customer service policy.
3. Improve the clarity of charges made to wheelchair users.
4. Consider the use of mystery shoppers, to assess compliance.
5. Consider the provision of additional ranks at Royal Bolton Hospital and within the town centre.

3. Recommendation

3.1 The Executive Member is asked to :

- Consider the unmet demand survey report's findings and determine whether a restriction to the number of hackney carriage licences should remain.
- Determine whether the fleet size should be reduced from 110 to 108 if a limit to the number of hackney carriage vehicles is to be retained.
- Consider whether to explore the provision of a rank at the Royal Bolton Hospital
- Consider whether to accept; consult on and develop any of the independent report's other recommendations.
- Confirm that the cost of the survey will be recovered from the hackney carriage licence holders at £34 per year over a two year period, as previously approved (reference ECME/26/12).