

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	LICENSING
DATE	12 MAY 2015
DIRECTOR	ANGELA SCOTT (INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE GOVERNANCE)
TITLE OF REPORT	TAXI FLEET – INCLUSION OF “4x4s”
REPORT NUMBER	CG/15/64
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

At its meeting on 25 November 2014 the Licensing Committee instructed officers to report back on the suitability of 4x4 vehicles for the taxi fleet.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee:-

- i. agrees that a 4x4 vehicle is unsuitable to be licensed as a taxi or private hire car in the Aberdeen fleet; and
- ii. instructs the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to arrange publication of the updated policy and letters to go to existing licence holders currently operating 4x4 vehicles in Aberdeen regarding the change of policy

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

There are no significant resource implications associated with this report.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

5.1 Background

In 1994 the Licensing Committee agreed to gradually move to a 100% accessible taxi fleet. All new applicants are required to present accessible vehicles at the time of making an application for a taxi licence. In June 2012 the Licensing Committee resolved that the taxi fleet in Aberdeen will be 100% accessible by 6 June 2017.

Holders of taxi licences granted before the Committee's decision in 1994 can apply to substitute a vehicle which does not comply with the accessible vehicle specification or present such a vehicle at renewal of their existing licence up until the move to a 100% accessible fleet in June 2017. In terms of the Committee's longstanding policy only saloon cars and multi-purpose vehicles ("MPVs") are considered suitable for licensing as taxis in such circumstances.

At present there are nine 4x4 vehicles within the taxi fleet. Due to concerns regarding the aptness of these types of vehicles for use as taxis the Committee has instructed a report on whether said vehicles are suitable for that purpose.

The Committee also has a longstanding policy that only saloon cars, multi-purpose vehicles and accessible vehicles are considered suitable for licensing as private hire cars. At present there is one 4x4 vehicle that has been licensed as a private hire car.

5.2 Use of 4x4 Vehicles

The term "4x4" is used to describe vehicles designed for off-road use which generally have higher ground clearance. There has been a growing trend for drivers to choose the vehicles because of their design rather than off-road use and as a result 4x4 vehicles have in recent years become popular in suburban areas.

5.2.1 Accessibility

4x4 vehicles will have a high ground clearance which can typically range between 6.5 inches and 9 inches. In contrast an accessible vehicle will have a typical ground clearance of 6.5 inches however it is a requirement that all accessible vehicles are fitted with a retractable or mobile step to assist passengers in accessing and egressing the vehicle.

The high ground clearance of 4x4 vehicles will present challenges for some passengers in accessing the vehicle. As a result it is considered that the vehicles may not be suitable for some elderly passengers or passengers with disabilities.

5.2.2 Emissions

It is understood that 4x4 vehicles use more fuel than saloon cars with the same engine type. A significant factor to how damaging a car is to the environment is the size of the vehicle and fuel efficiency. As a result 4x4 vehicles are generally considered to generate higher volumes of pollutants in the atmosphere. There have been moves to develop more environmentally friendly 4x4 vehicles but at present the majority are considered to have a poor environmental performance.

5.3 Consultation with the Taxi Consultation Group

At the meeting of the Taxi Consultation Group on 18 February 2015 the inclusion of 4x4 vehicles within the fleet was discussed with trade representatives. The Group unanimously agreed that it did not consider the vehicles suitable for licensing as taxis and deemed them not “taxi friendly”. Constraints on the use of 4x4 vehicles by elderly and disabled passengers of that type of vehicle were amongst the reasons discussed.

5.4 Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that the Committee agree that 4x4 vehicles are not suitable for licensing as taxis or private hire cars.

6. IMPACT

Corporate – The recommendations fit within the vision of the Aberdeen City Local Transportation Strategy 2008-2012 to create “a sustainable transport system that is fit for the 21st Century, accessible to all, supports a vibrant economy and minimises the impact on our environment”. The Aberdeen City Council Draft Local Transportation Strategy 2015-2020 includes the following objective:-

“To work in partnership with the taxi and private hire car trade to ensure an adequate supply of safe, clean and accessible vehicles”

The licensing of high emission vehicles as taxis would be in direct conflict with the promotion of a clean taxi and private hire fleet. Further the objective will be supported by the promotion of vehicles that are suitable for use by persons with protected characteristics of age and disability. This would also promote the Council’s Equality Outcomes and the public sector equality duty

Public - Members of the public who use taxi and private hire services in the city may have an interest.

Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment- In the circumstances, because the Committee’s policy decisions could impact on the protected characteristics of age and disability an Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment has been completed.

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

The recommendations will affect existing holders of taxi licences who are currently entitled to present non-accessible vehicles as a substitute vehicle well as applicants for private hire car licences and existing private hire car licence holders.

New applicants for taxi licences as well as persons who were granted taxi licences after the Committee decision in 1994 will not be affected as those persons are required to present an accessible vehicle. As of 6 June 2017 all vehicles licensed as taxis will have to comply with the accessible vehicle specification.

If the Committee agrees to the recommendations in the report, existing taxi licence holders who currently operate 4x4 vehicles will not be able to substitute similar vehicles pending the move to a 100% accessible fleet in June 2017. Officers will write to the licence holders affected to bring this to their attention at an early stage. There are only nine licence holders who will be affected out of a maximum taxi fleet of 1079.

Further, existing private hire car licence holders who currently operate 4x4 vehicles will not be able to present similar vehicles as substitutions. Officers will write to the private hire car licence holder affected to bring this to his attention. Officers will also publish the policy on the Council's website to alert applicants for private hire car licences who may be considering a 4x4 vehicle.

If the Committee continues to allow 4x4 vehicles into the fleet this could impact negatively on the public sector equality duty and is likely to be in conflict with the Council's Local Transport Strategy which is linked to the Scottish Government's targets on reducing emissions.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Aberdeen City Council Local Transport Strategy 2008-2012
Consultative Draft Local Transport Strategy 2015-2020
Reducing Emissions in Scotland 2015 Progress Report

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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