

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Licensing Committee
DATE	19 January 2016
DIRECTOR	Richard Ellis (Interim)
TITLE OF REPORT	Removal of Minimum Engine Size Requirement to Permit Vehicles with Environmentally Friendly Engines
REPORT NUMBER	CG/16/003
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to recommend that the Committee removes its policy requirement that all vehicles used as taxis and private hire cars must have as a minimum a 1400cc engine. The reason for this is to permit modern vehicles that have lower emission/environmentally friendly engines that still provide sufficient power to be used as a taxi or private hire car but do not meet the policy.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee:

- a. removes its policy requirement that all taxis and private hire cars must have an engine of 1400cc or greater in respect of vehicles that have a modern engine type, e.g. economical reduced CO2 performance, dual-fuel, hybrid, electric, hydrogen etc.; and
- b. clarifies that all taxis and private hire cars must be able to carry safely a minimum of 4 passengers to a maximum of 8 (which may include a designated wheelchair space) and luggage as well as having a suitably low entry point to allow access for the mobility restricted and persons with a pushchair and/or shopping.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There will be no direct cost to the licensing authority as vehicles are purchased by the licence holder. There may be costs in terms of additional training for Vehicle Testers within Fleet Services who may be required to deal with the new types of vehicles and engines. The cost of such training would be covered by income from the relevant licence fees. The Reporting Monitoring Manager has been consulted and noted how the likely costs shall be covered.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

This policy change may lead to environmental benefits. It would support relevant Council transport projects such as the introduction of electric/hydrogen vehicles as well as the Local Transport Strategy taxi strands Aberdeen's air quality standards improvement obligations.

Aberdeen Taxi Group responded to the consultation on this report as follows:

"We think that the council should be careful in removing this condition as although technology has moved a long way since this decision was first taken we still have to make sure that a car is suitable.

We would ask the committee to look at whether or not they feel a car under 1400cc is able to pull a full car and luggage.

Also the report states that taxi/ph car must be able to carry 4 passengers safely. The problem I see with this is that ACC has already licensed cars with three passenger seats and from what we were aware this was not allowed.

It looks like there is a lot more research needed in to this topic as the implications could be far reaching in terms of safety (which we think would out way the environmental benefits)."

The points raised by ATG are substantially addressed by section 5 below. Over and above that the legal adviser shall provide a suitable explanation as required at the meeting.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

The minimum engine size requirement for taxis and private hire cars in Aberdeen is 1400cc.

The limit was previously originally introduced as a sensible and necessary measure to ensure that engines had sufficient power to carry passengers and luggage. However, due to developments in engine technology this measure is no longer required.

When the policy was made engines were generally less technologically advanced petrol and diesel engines. These engines only produced sufficient torque/BHP (power) to be effective as a taxi or private hire car if they were of at least 1400cc. Now there are hybrid electric engines, economical petrol and diesel engines, hydrogen hybrids etc. that all produce sufficient power over a range of different speeds to carry passengers and luggage. These engines do not necessarily meet the 1400cc limit and some are not even combustion engines. They are also more economically friendly i.e. they generate lower carbon dioxide emissions or none at all.

The limit now restricts the use of many modern more economical and environmentally friendly engine types that do not meet the limit. This places a barrier to the modernisation of the fleet and does not permit the taxi trade to use the full range of suitable vehicles some of which are already available and others that will be made available in the short and medium term over the next 5-15 years. There are already electric and hydrogen accessible taxi vehicles in latter stages of development by major manufacturers.

The removal of the 1400cc engine size requirement will allow the introduction of suitable low emission diesel and petrol, hybrid, electric and hydrogen vehicles as taxis and private hire cars. Such vehicles as well as being greener for the environment will help save in fuel costs for the licence holder.

The vast majority of taxis and private hire cars now are vehicles with diesel engines due to the fuel economy and longevity of such engines. However, it has also been recognised that moving towards a situation where there are fewer diesel engines taking short journeys within Aberdeen City (especially the City Centre) shall significantly improve air quality, which is above recommended levels on various roads in the City that have heavy road traffic.

It is important to note that if the limit is removed vehicles which are too large or small or have an unsuitable body type or design will still not be permitted as taxis or private hire cars. Taxis or private hire cars must comfortably be able carry 4 passengers as a minimum and a maximum of 8 (which may include and a designated secure wheelchair space) along with luggage. Effectively the physical factors such as size, shape and height from the ground will be more important than the engine size, provided the engine is sufficient to power the vehicle with passengers and luggage.

As previously clarified through the Taxi Consultation Group only the following are suitable types of vehicles for taxis and private hire cars respectively: accessible vehicles (including purpose built and adapted taxis); mid, full and grand size family cars and saloons; executive cars/vans; and MPV/minivans.

As is currently the case vehicles such as 4x4s, SUVs and trucks are unsuitable in type, size and design as they for example have very high

entry points and high boots that would not be suitable for the elderly or mobility restricted, or a person with a wheelchair or child in a pushchair to gain access.

Furthermore microcars, hatchbacks, ultra-compacts, city cars, supermini cars, small family cars and sports cars due to their size are also unsuitable to carry multiple passengers with luggage.

The Tester's Manual shall be updated accordingly.

6. IMPACT

Improving Customer Experience –

The provision of taxis and private hire cars is by external providers. The Council as licensing authority facilitates this service by issuing licences and ensuring that the licensing legislation and policies are adhered to in conjunction with Police Scotland. The Council also has other obligations and commitments relating to environmental legislation. Any relevant Policy must be lawful and should encourage best practice for taxi service users, whilst facilitating the taxi trade to provide a modern service in order to sustain their businesses. Permitting environmentally friendly engines is a future focused improvement which will allow the taxi trade to maintain and improve current and future customer service by providing more environmentally friendly vehicles.

Corporate -

Removing the limitation on engine size will support project work of the Council and assist in meeting the taxis strand of the Local Transport Strategy.

Political direction from the Scottish Government, the benefits to the environment and allowing transition to keep pace with modern technology all suggest that this is an appropriate and necessary policy amendment. It is also supportive of service users and the taxi trade.

Public –

This report may be of interest to members of the public, especially those who are interested in improving air quality and low emission vehicle technology.

7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

The change may necessitate training for Vehicle Testers within Fleet Services if the testing of new types of vehicle and this may require additional skills and knowledge. This risk can be appropriately managed.

There is a risk of legal challenge although this is not anticipated. The Taxi Consultation Group was consulted. No concerns were expressed by the Taxi Trade Representatives regarding the terms of the proposal.

In the past there was a risk that licence holders would attempt to use unsuitable vehicles if an engine size limit was not in place. This policy ensured the vehicles had sufficient power to carry their passengers. This is less of an issue nowadays as the technology has improved and hybrid and economical versions of engines have higher torque/BHP from smaller cubic capacity engines. Moving forward electric and hydrogen vehicles can generate the same power to carry passengers without a traditional combustion engine. As such this risk can be managed.

There are positive benefits to the policy in terms of assisting in improving the air quality in Aberdeen by allowing low emission vehicles, adhering to strands relating to taxis and private hire cars in the Local Transport Strategy, supporting Environmental project work of other Council departments, improving public perception, maintaining and improving environmental standards in parallel with other Scottish cities and ensuring that Aberdeen's taxi trade is enabled and encouraged to keep pace with modern vehicle standards.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Not applicable.

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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