

Licensing Committee – 6 April 2010

6. Proposal to Licence an Electric Vehicle

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Purpose of the Report

The Committee is asked to consider a proposal to operate an electric vehicle as a Private Hire Vehicle (PHV).

Recommendations

That committee members either:

- (1) Refuse the proposal; or
- (2) Accept the proposal and allow the applicant to submit a full application for a PHV licence.

Background

Officers would normally deal with applications for PHV licences, however as licensing this vehicle would necessitate a departure from our agreed policy, it was decided that the matter should come before committee.

Report Detail

Dr Kenneth MacCormac who is currently licensed as a taxi driver with this authority has submitted a proposal to operate an electric vehicle as a PHV in the Wincanton area. The proposal reads as follows:

'There is much development in electric vehicles and the government is encouraging their use. Whether changing from internal combustion engines to electric power will really reduce overall carbon emissions is debatable, however it certainly will reduce immediate pollution in towns and streets from exhaust gases. I consider this to be desirable.

Although taxis form a small percentage of total traffic in towns it would seem sensible to investigate the viability of running an electric taxi both from performance and customer satisfaction aspects.

As a taxi driver in Wincanton I have noted that many journeys are for single passengers. Therefore it is not necessary to have a 4 seat licensed taxi for all journeys.

The performance of the vehicle is reduced by the weight that it carries. This is true of all vehicles regarding energy consumption. I request that the committee give some thought to licensing taxis for less than 4 passengers.

The vehicle I have chosen for the trial is a Citroen C1 EV'LE which is sold in Britain by the Electric Car Corporation PLC details of the vehicle can be obtained from www.eccplc.com a copy of the brochure is attached to this report.

The vehicle has 4 doors and is designed to carry a total of 4 people including the driver. I understand that it meets the dimension requirements for 3 passengers.

It is proposed at this stage to licence the vehicle as a PHV as there is no taxi rank in Wincanton and it may not be viable to drive around plying for hire.

If the vehicle is licensed for less than 4 passengers the hirers will be made aware that it cannot carry 4 passengers and can only carry however many you may permit. It is my intention to make the public aware of this by articles in the local press.

Initially I would request a trial period of 3 months to assess the viability from all aspects. The vehicles operation will be restricted to a limited radius from Wincanton.'

The Legal background

The statutory position regarding seating capacity is that a vehicle can be licensed as a taxi (or a private hire vehicle - PHV) by a local authority in England and Wales if it has fewer than nine passenger seats. So, in theory, a vehicle with only two seats could be licensed as a taxi or PHV.

However, within that statutory parameter, we as the local licensing authority have discretion in terms of formulating suitable local policies for taxis and PHVs. Our current policy in relation to the suitability of vehicles reads as follows:

VEHICLE SPECIFICATION

*Certain vehicle's, are, due to the size and/or design unsuitable for licensing. Please check the suitability of the vehicle you have in mind with a member of the Licensing Team **before** purchase. The vehicle must be in a clean and undamaged condition.*

The seating capacity of the vehicle will depend on the width of the seats. A minimum of 16 inches per person is required. If the size of the vehicle does not allow for the carriage of 4 persons (excluding the driver) the vehicle will not be licensed. The maximum number of passengers, which may be carried in a licensed hackney or private hire vehicle, is 8 persons.

The vehicle must have four doors for easy access.

The Department of Transport have published Best Practice Guidance to assist local licensing authorities in using the discretion available to them to formulate suitable local taxi and PHV licensing policies. It is on the Department's website at: www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/regional/taxis/taxiandprivatehirevehiclelic1792.

The Guidance advises licensing authorities to consider granting taxi and PHV licences to as wide a range of vehicles as possible, rather than drawing up rigid criteria which would constrain the ability of the taxi/PHV trade to provide the sort of service it wants to provide.

Financial Implications

None at this stage, however if an official application is made and refused there are the possible costs of appeal to Magistrates if licence refused.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

A key corporate priority is to ensure safe, sustainable and cohesive communities, we have to be sure that the vehicle is suitable for the carriage of passengers for hire and reward.

Other Implications

None

Background Papers: *C1 Brochure, DoT Best Practice Guidance.*
