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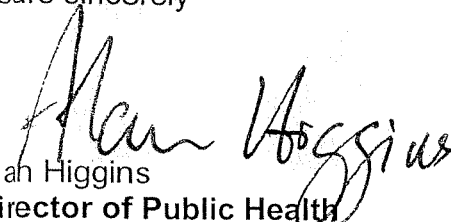
Dear Tony

Consultation on Proposals to Require Licensed Taxis to be Purpose Built Vehicles

I must apologise for not responding to the above consultation within the prescribed period. The attached paper was drafted for discussion at a meeting of the PCT's Executive Team. However, owing to a heavy agenda of high priority items, the paper has not been discussed at the Executive Team meeting.

In view of the consultation period now being closed, I feel it is appropriate to enclose the attached paper and endorse the views expressed as my personal response to the consultation albeit late. I hope this is of some use to you and I apologise again for missing the deadline.

Yours sincerely


Alan Higgins
Director of Public Health

OLDHAM PRIMARY CARE TRUST

CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS RELATING TO LICENSED TAXIS

Background

Oldham currently has a mixed fleet of licensed taxis and private hire vehicles, including 76 saloon cars and 9 purpose-built vehicles. There are all identified with the illuminated sign "Taxi", and all saloon cars are required to be painted white. However, running such a mixed fleet presents problems for customers, particular people with disabilities who may find getting in and out of saloon cars difficult.

Proposal

Oldham MBC Environmental Services have issued a consultation paper concerning the regulation of licensed taxis and private hire vehicles in the Borough. One element of this is a proposal to require taxis to be of the London 'Black Cab' type. This is in line with the government's proposal to enable access to black cabs (legally referred to as hackney carriages) under the Disability Discrimination Act. Against this is a view that older adults can find getting in and out of stepped vehicles (like black cabs) just as difficult as standard private cars.

The consultation document recommends that there should be a phased implementation of the requirement that renewals and new vehicle applications should be purpose built, as follows:

After 1st April 2007 – all applications for a new hackney carriage licence would be required to be purpose built vehicles (fulfilling the standard used by *Transport for London*)

After 1st April 2008 – the Council would cease to issue renewals for non-purpose built hackney carriages

By 31st March 2009 – all licensed hackney carriages would be purpose built.

This transition period would appear to be reasonable in ensuring that owners can phase in new vehicles over a three year period, resulting in a fleet of licensed taxis and private hire vehicles that are distinctive and provide improved access to people with disabilities.

Other issues

1. Advertising

Implementation of a purpose-built fleet would enable hackney carriage operators to take advantage of advertising opportunities, which are currently not permitted. The proposal is that advertising should be permitted on certain areas of purpose-built hackney carriages (external and internal). This seems reasonable, in ensuring that operators are able to generate additional income (which could offset the cost of the new vehicle) while ensuring that the Council has control over advertising content – for example, continuing to ban the advertising of alcohol.

2. Environmental Impact

The Council is proposing a phased improvement in emission standards, based on Euro Technology I to IV. It is recognised that this will result in additional costs for the fitting of emission reduction equipment (in both purpose-built vehicles and existing vehicles requiring equipment conversion) of around £3000 per vehicle over a period of three years. It is therefore proposed that there should be an environmental change to all journeys with effect from the November 2007 tariff: this increase is expected to be of 10p per journey and would remain in place for three years.

Given the importance of improving air quality on enhancing health, especially for people living in urban areas, this proposal seems entirely appropriate, and an environmental change of 10p per journey would not seem excessive.

3. Delimitation and Fare Regulation

Oldham MBC currently restricts the number of taxi licenses issued. The government has asked all councils to remove such restrictions as soon as possible. Oldham MBC has considered this issue, and has reached the conclusion that, while retaining a fixed total number of licenses imposes restrictions on new businesses entering the market, to remove all restrictions would run the risk of a flood of new licensed vehicles that could lead to overloading of taxi ranks and problems with capacity. The Council is therefore proposing a controlled expansion of limits, with a suggested level of 10 additional plates at each renewal period.

4. Dispersal Planning

The Council is proposing the implementation of a **Hackney Carriage and Bus Only Zone** during the periods on Friday and Saturday nights most at risk of disorder, especially after pub closing times. The initial zone would be to the east of Oldham Town Centre, around the junction of St Mary's Way and Yorkshire Street. Private hire vehicles and other private vehicles would be prohibited from entry. There would also be **Private Hire/Private Vehicle Drop-off Zones**, which would ensure customer access to the centre of Oldham without infringing the Hackney Carriage and Bus Only Zone. And

there would be implemented a revised Taxi Queuing System and a new Private Hire Dispersal Point, operated by Council employed marshals, able to take bookings for private hire vehicles as an overflow if hackney carriages were not available.

These improvements would help to ensure that members of the public are able to get home safely after their evening in Oldham, minimising the risk of unlicensed vehicles and drivers attempting to entice members of the public into their vehicles, with well-recognised risks of violence and sexual assault.

5. Accessibility for wheelchair users

For wheelchair users who can only travel while seated in their wheelchair, the increased availability of hackney carriages in Oldham would be unlikely to affect their use of taxis: safe travel requires the secure fastening of their wheelchair in the vehicle, which can only be achieved through use of specialist transport like *Ring and Ride*. For wheelchair users who are able to use normal taxi seating, it is likely that a hackney carriage would make their access easier, so the availability of additional hackney carriages would improve overall access.

Overall Recommendations

In broad terms, the proposals within this consultation appear well thought through and consistent, and the PCT should give the Council its support, including the following areas:

- i) Phased implementation of the requirement that renewals of taxi licences and new vehicle applications for licences should be purpose built
- ii) Advertising should be permitted on certain areas of purpose-built hackney carriages (external and internal)
- iii) Phased improvement in emission standards, based on Euro Technology I to IV
- iv) Controlled expansion of limits on the number of licensed hackney carriages
- v) Implementation of proposals for dispersal of hackney carriages and private hire vehicles on Fridays and Saturdays

K E Holloway
Modernisation Directorate

23 February 2006