

Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Policy – Summary of key draft policy proposals

The draft Policy sets out how we propose to regulate taxis (hackney carriage vehicles) and minicabs (private hire vehicles) across Buckinghamshire (excluding Milton Keynes). The Policy incorporates national legislation and best practice. It also reflects the feedback we received in our recent public survey. Our main priorities are public safety, working effectively with taxi services and reflecting customer needs. In the Policy we aim to balance the needs of passengers and those of local taxi operators and drivers.

Go online up to the 21st December 2021 to feed into the Policy consultation at <https://yourvoicebucks.citizenspace.com/communities/taxi-licensing-consultation/>

1. Hackney Carriage Zones

About

Buckinghamshire Council currently has separate ‘hackney carriage’ zones. The zones reflect the former District Council areas of Aylesbury Vale, which has 2 zones (town and rural), and 1 each in Chiltern, South Bucks and Wycombe areas. Hackney carriages (taxis) can currently wait on ranks and collect passengers within their corresponding zone only. Each zone is subject to separate rules, which affect the type of vehicle that is licensed and the fares that can be charged. A taxi travelling from one zone to another is currently unable to pick up a fare in the destination zone for a return journey.

What people said in our recent surveys

We asked whether we should keep separate taxi operating zones in the future. Responses were mixed with many respondents unsure, some saying we should keep zones and some that they should be removed.

What the draft Policy says

The Policy proposes removal of the separate zones, replacing them with a single, countywide zone. This will create a single set of rules for the taxi trade and the Council. The Department for Transport recommend a single zone approach and states that separate zones reduce the supply of taxis, limit customer choice and are confusing for customers.

Key impacts

- a single zone will provide choice and consistency for customers
- a simpler licensing system where all taxis operate to the same rules and tariffs will reduce administration and enforcement costs

- a single zone will provide greater freedom for the taxi trade, encourage competition and allow local market forces to determine the level and availability of vehicles – for example, it will remove the current 50 vehicle limit in Aylesbury town
- a single zone will help to reduce unoccupied journeys and the impacts of these on fuel efficiency and on the environment as taxis will be free to ply and stand for hire across the whole Buckinghamshire area
- taxis may be less or more available in some areas, depending on demand
- may enable more entrants to the taxi trade, providing new employment opportunities
- may reduce or increase employment opportunities available for the existing taxi trade
- more wheelchair accessible vehicles may be available in some areas
- may result in an increase in earning potential for some of the taxi trade through less empty return journeys
- taxi drivers may have less local knowledge of some areas
- taxi ranks will need to be reviewed to see if they are still in the right places and will provide adequate space for vehicles. There may be opportunities to create more taxi ranks/stands in the future

2. Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVs)

About

At the moment the different taxi zones have different numbers of wheelchair accessible vehicles ranging from between 1 to 100% of the total fleet. This means that customers have different levels of availability depending on which zone they hire a vehicle in. If the taxi zones are removed then vehicles will be able to ply and stand for hire across the whole Buckinghamshire area. This should increase availability for customers, making it easier to source a journey in a wheelchair accessible vehicle.

What people said in our recent surveys

We asked how important it was that taxi vehicles are wheelchair accessible. Generally, people felt this was important, with disabled people and those with a long-term health condition feeling this was fairly or extremely important.

What the draft Policy says

The policy says that all new taxis must be wheelchair accessible vehicles. Existing taxi providers will be able to replace their vehicle with a similar one when it reaches the maximum age limit ensuring the long-term provision of a mixed fleet. Where the existing vehicle is a 'black cab or similar type' taxi providers will be able to replace the vehicle with a different type of wheelchair accessible vehicle if they wish to.

Key impacts

This should limit the number of new entrants to the market for the existing licensed trade whilst enabling competition and the natural application of market forces which should benefit the customer in the long term.

3. Vehicle Age

About

Currently, the age of a vehicle that can be licensed as a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle differs across the four existing zones.

What people said in our recent surveys

We asked how important it was that taxi vehicles were safe and roadworthy and 90% of people told us that this was extremely important. Many also said that vehicle interiors should be clean, tidy and presentable and exteriors should be in a good condition. There was a clear view that the overall safety, condition and standard of licensed vehicles should be high.

What the draft Policy says

The policy sets maximum taxi vehicle age limits of 5 years old at first licence with any licence ceasing when the vehicle is 10 years old. Vehicles will receive one standard annual inspection whatever their age.

Existing vehicles which are licensed by the Council and were not previously subject to this age requirement and are older than 10 years will continue to be licensed until the vehicle is 15 years old or until 1st April 2023 (whichever is sooner) when the licence will cease. This delayed implementation date enables the taxi trade time to plan and prepare for this change in their fleet.

Key impacts

Vehicles deteriorate due to a combination of age and use and are constantly being improved by manufacturers. Newer vehicles are safer, less environmentally damaging and less likely to break down. A younger fleet should improve the overall standard of vehicles available for customers as well as reducing the level of enforcement activity required.

4. Emissions Policy

About

Although there are fewer taxis on the road than private cars, they have a disproportionate impact on air quality. This is because they often operate in urban areas where there are lots of people and do a high number of miles. The National Society for Clean Air and Environmental Protection carried out a review in 2005 and found that taxis were more likely

than other vehicles to fail emissions tests. Taxi emissions impact on the health of local people, as well as taxi drivers who could be exposed to poor air quality for 8-12 hours each day.

What people said in our recent surveys

We asked how important it was that taxi vehicles are environmentally friendly and many people said that this was important. They also told us that it was important that the Council provides incentives for the use of electric taxi vehicles

What the draft Policy says

We aim to improve the environment and air quality across Buckinghamshire by encouraging the use of low and ultra-low emission taxis. This includes electric, hybrid and liquefied petroleum gas [LPG] vehicles. The Policy proposes that from 1 April 2021 we will not issue new vehicle licences to vehicles unless they comply with Euro 5 or 6 emissions standards.

Nationally it is a requirement that vehicles first registered from January 2011 must be minimum Euro 5 and from September 2015 minimum Euro 6. Therefore **if the proposed vehicle age limits are adopted this requirement will be met automatically.**

We also propose to issue licences to ultra-low or zero emission vehicles only by 2030. To encourage the use of less polluting vehicles, taxis that produce ultra-low or zero emissions will also be licensed for a longer period until they are fifteen years old.

Key impacts

Alongside other environmental strategies, this should help the Council to reduce air pollution levels in Buckinghamshire.

5. CCTV

About

Currently, it is not a requirement that taxi vehicle owners and operators install and use CCTV in vehicles. If they choose to, we provide them with relevant guidance. The Department of Transport introduced new standards for taxi and private hire vehicles that recommend Councils consult on whether CCTV would have a net positive or adverse impact on safety.

What people said in our recent surveys

We asked how important it was that taxi vehicles have CCTV installed, 59% of people said that this was fairly or extremely important

What the draft Policy says

The Policy proposes to require the use of CCTV in taxi vehicles from April 2023. The delayed implementation date gives the existing licensed taxi trade time to plan and prepare for this

change which will require financial investment. It also gives time for technology development in this area which may increase choice and reduce installation costs.

Key impacts

CCTV protects the safety of customers and taxi drivers and helps enforcement

6. English Language

About

All taxi drivers are expected to speak, understand and read English so they can communicate clearly with passengers and officials. This is important for many reasons including:

- to follow instructions or directions from passengers
- dealing with stressful and emergency situations
- to identify and report situations where there may be safeguarding concerns about a passenger

The Department of Transport has introduced new national statutory standards that require all new drivers, and those who have not previously been tested, to pass an English language test.

What people said in our recent surveys

We asked how important it was that taxi drivers can understand and speak clearly in English. We also asked how important it was that taxi drivers can read basic English. A significant majority of people told us that it was extremely important that drivers can understand and speak clearly in English and can read basic English.

What the draft Policy says

The Policy proposes that all taxi drivers must pass an English language test. **From 1 April 2022, any existing drivers who have not previously taken the test will also be required to take and pass it.** If they have not passed the test by this date, we will be unlikely to renew their licence until they have done so. This time period is to give those who may need it, or who are concerned, time to get support and assistance to enable them to pass. The Council offers Adult learning ESOL courses to those who do not have English as a first language <https://www.adultlearningbc.ac.uk/english-for-speakers-of-other-languages-esol/> which may help those that are worried about this change.

Key impacts

All drivers will have a consistent, minimum level of English language communication.

7. Safeguarding Training

About

Taxi drivers and operators can play an important role in spotting and reporting exploitation, abuse and neglect of young or vulnerable people. However, this is only the case if they are aware of and alert to the signs of potential abuse and know where to turn to if they suspect that a child or vulnerable adult is at risk of harm or is in immediate danger. All licensing authorities should provide safeguarding advice and guidance to the taxi trade and should require taxi and private hire vehicle drivers to undertake safeguarding training. In Buckinghamshire taxi drivers already complete mandatory safeguarding training as part of their licence application

What people said in our recent surveys

We asked how important it was that taxi drivers received safeguarding training and a significant majority of people told us that this was extremely important.

What the draft Policy says

The Policy proposes private hire company operators must complete safeguarding training in the future, as well as drivers. It also proposes a requirement for refresher training every 3 years.

Key impacts

Undertaking regular refresher training will mean that drivers and operators are up to date on safeguarding risks and understand how to identify and report concerns.

8. Drug Testing

About

The Council views the use of illegal drugs as completely incompatible with being fit and proper to hold a licence to drive members of the public.

What people said in our recent surveys

We asked you how important it was that the Council undertakes drug and alcohol tests on drivers where appropriate. A significant majority of people told us that this was extremely important

What the draft Policy says

The Policy proposes that where there are concerns the Council may require applicants or drivers to be tested for the unlawful use of drugs.

Key impacts

Where there are concerns, this will help the Council to better identify whether an existing driver, or licence applicant, has used illegal drugs. Driving under the influence of illegal

drugs is dangerous so the ability to test drivers will help reduce the risk of potential harm to passengers and other road users.

9. Penalty Points System

About

We are proposing to roll out the penalty points system (already used for licensed drivers in the Aylesbury area for several years) to drivers, operators and vehicle licence holders across the whole Buckinghamshire area **There is no proposal to introduce financial penalties for the trade.**

What the draft Policy says

Penalty points may be awarded to licence holders for failure to comply with the Council's taxi and private hire conditions and standards. Licence holders who accumulate 12 points or more with 18 months will have their licence reviewed, which may result in temporary suspension or additional assessment and testing.

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Licensing Committee will consider responses from the consultation in early 2021 and decide whether to recommend that the Policy is approved and adopted by the Council.

November 2020.