

North Yorkshire Council

Executive

17 March 2026

Adoption of an Inclusive Service Plan focused on Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing

Report of the Corporate Director, Environment

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval from the Executive to adopt a new Inclusive Service Plan in relation to hackney carriage and private hire licensing.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In accordance with section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, North Yorkshire Council must have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by the Act.
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 2.2 On 21 February 2023, the Executive of North Yorkshire County Council resolved to adopt a new Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy and committed to developing a separate Inclusive Service Plan aimed at improving the inclusivity of hackney carriage and private hire services across North Yorkshire.
- 2.3 In November 2023, the Department for Transport published its new Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing Best Practice Guidance, which recommends that licensing authorities develop and maintain an Inclusive Service Plan (ISP) to describe:
- the demand for accessible services in their area
 - the authority's strategy for making transport more inclusive
 - the steps that the authority will take to improve the inclusivity of the taxi and private hire vehicle services; and
 - the courses or assessments authorities require applicants to undertake.
- 2.4 In line with the commitment made by the Executive in February 2023, and in accordance with the Department for Transport's Best Practice Guidance published in November 2023, a draft Inclusive Service Plan (ISP) has been produced (Appendix A).

3.0 INCLUSIVE SERVICE PLAN

- 3.1 The draft ISP sets out the proposed strategy for making transport more inclusive in relation to hackney carriage and private hire vehicle provision in North Yorkshire.
- 3.2 The draft ISP focuses on the needs of people whose access requirements are apparent when using public transport (such as wheelchair users and assistance dog owners) but also on the needs of people with less-visible disabilities, including autistic people or those with mental illness.

- 3.3 The draft ISP identifies and acknowledges the arrangements already in place to promote an inclusive hackney carriage and private hire regime in North Yorkshire. Those arrangements include:
- ensuring compliance with the duties of drivers and operators under the Equality Act 2010
 - requiring all licensed drivers to undergo disability awareness training every three years
 - requiring all drivers of licensed wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) to complete a practical assessment
 - displaying information in licensed vehicles to advise passengers how to make a complaint to the licensing authority
 - publishing a list of WAVs on the Council's website in accordance with the Equality Act 2010; and
 - committing to exercise powers where appropriate in the event of any non-compliance.
- 3.4 The objectives of the ISP are:
- to improve the access and availability of licensed vehicles sufficiently to satisfy the demand for accessible services from wheelchair users and non-wheelchair users
 - to promote passenger rights by providing information in formats that all passengers can access in relation to the service that can be expected when travelling in hackney carriage and private hire vehicles
 - to deliver effective enforcement to ensure that users of licensed vehicles can be confident that any reports of non-compliance will be appropriately addressed; and
 - to enhance the understanding of all licensed drivers, proprietors and operators in relation to the needs and legal rights of disabled people.
- 3.5 In September 2023, North Yorkshire Council commissioned a research project into wheelchair accessibility to support the development of an Inclusive Service Plan. The research revealed a likely shortage of licensed wheelchair accessible vehicles based on anecdotal evidence and supported by comparisons with national data.
- 3.6 At present, the Council licenses 60 wheelchair accessible hackney carriage vehicles, which represents one for every 10,250 people in its population. Although WAV provision is typically lower in rural authorities than in urban areas, the national average across rural areas is one wheelchair accessible hackney carriage vehicle for every 8,150 people. North Yorkshire Council would need to license 15 more WAV taxis to reach a similar ratio. The best performing rural authorities in this regard make provision for one WAV taxi for every 2,000 to 3,000 people. North Yorkshire Council would need to license around 200 more WAV taxis to reach a similar ratio.
- 3.7 Although imposing a mandatory wheelchair accessible requirement on all licensed vehicles would be likely to achieve the desired outcome, the Council must have regard to the Regulators' Code (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, Better Regulation Delivery Office) and avoid imposing unnecessary regulatory burdens where the desired outcomes could be achieved by less burdensome means.
- 3.8 Rather than imposing a mandatory WAV requirement on licensed vehicles, the Council previously introduced incentives by waiving the licence fee and by relaxing the age limits in respect of WAVs. This approach is in line with the Department for Transport's Best Practice Guidance (November 2023), which recommends that licensing authorities should incentivise the uptake of wheelchair accessible vehicles where mandating them would be inappropriate. To some extent, this has encouraged the retention of existing WAVs, but the total remains very low, and this is unlikely to change without further intervention.

- 3.9 The Council must have regard to DEFRA's Air Quality Strategy when exercising functions of a public nature that could affect the quality of air. It is recognised that WAVs are still predominantly petrol and diesel powered and will have an impact on emissions. There is a need to enhance the number of WAVs available in North Yorkshire whilst mitigating any potential adverse effects on climate change and air quality.
- 3.10 According to the Department for Transport's Best Practice Guidance, licensing authorities should understand the demand for mixed fleets in its area and ensure that, when issuing licences, it has the right mix of vehicles. They should recognise that some designs of wheelchair accessible vehicles may not be suitable for some ambulant disabled passengers. It is therefore not considered appropriate at present to require all licensed vehicles to be wheelchair accessible.
- 3.11 The draft ISP (Appendix A) proposes to introduce a requirement for all new hackney carriage vehicle licence applications to be in respect of either a wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV), a zero-emission vehicle (ZEV), or a hybrid electric vehicle (HEV) that meets the Euro 6 standards for emissions. Existing licensed hackney carriage vehicles would retain 'grandfather rights' until they are no longer fit for purpose.
- 3.12 This proposal facilitates compliance with the Council's public sector equality duty and its air quality obligations by restricting the types of vehicles allowed. However, it does so in a way that still provides proprietors with multiple options to satisfy the policy objectives while delivering a mixed fleet with broader social benefits.
- 3.13 A hackney carriage vehicle can be hailed by passengers on the roadside, and it can stand on a rank to await the approach of passengers in addition to being pre-booked by telephone. In contrast, private hire vehicles are licensed to perform pre-booked work only, which must be obtained through a licensed private hire operator. On that basis, any accessibility needs can be discussed at the time of booking a private hire vehicle, which will not necessarily be the case for hackney carriage vehicles. It is perhaps for this reason that 64.5% of all licensing authorities require all or part of their hackney carriage fleet to be wheelchair accessible while only 4.8% of licensing authorities require all or a part of their private hire fleet to be wheelchair accessible.
- 3.14 It is acknowledged that wheelchair users will often pre-book licensed vehicles and therefore an adequate supply of wheelchair accessible private hire vehicles is necessary. At present, 8.5% of the private hire vehicles in North Yorkshire are wheelchair accessible under existing arrangements – slightly above the average of 7.2% across all 'largely rural' areas in England and Wales.
- 3.15 While it is not considered necessary to restrict private hire vehicles to WAVs, ZEVs and HEVs, the ISP proposes to introduce new obligations on all private hire operators to identify a passenger's accessibility needs prior to taking a booking, to ensure that an appropriate vehicle is provided wherever possible. Further measures are also proposed to encourage (without mandatory requirements) more wheelchair accessible private hire vehicles to be licensed.
- 3.16 Further recommendations are made in the draft ISP including:
- to explore any opportunities to attract external funding to subsidise the provision of WAV services
 - to consult with disabled passengers regularly on their experience of using hackney carriage and private hire vehicle services and to consult representatives of the hackney carriage and private hire trade in this regard
 - to require Licensing staff to complete regular disability awareness training to ensure that decisions are informed by the lived experiences of disabled people
 - to retain the requirement to undertake mandatory disability awareness training for all hackney carriage and private hire drivers every three years

- to retain the mandatory practical assessment requirement for all hackney carriage and private hire drivers using WAVs
- to retain the policy requirement for all non-WAV hackney carriage vehicles to have means for carrying a “reference wheelchair”
- to review the information contained in the Council’s published list of designated WAVs (as required by section 167 of the Equality Act 2010) in accordance with the statutory guidance
- to provide further information relating to passenger rights and how to make complaints via social media, on the Council’s website, in licensed vehicles and at hackney carriage ranks wherever possible
- to address complaints in a robust and efficient manner to ensure that disabled people can have confidence that they will be able to travel by hackney carriage or private hire vehicle free from the fear of discrimination and that appropriate action will be taken against licensed drivers and operators in the event of any non-compliance
- to work with transport station operators and other location managers where large numbers of passengers use hackney carriage and private hire vehicle services to ensure disabled passengers can always access and exit vehicles safely and easily
- to maintain engagement with disability action groups by attending regular meetings, giving appropriate attention to any feedback
- to facilitate dialogue between the licensed trade and end-users with a view to matching the supply of wheelchair accessible vehicles with the demand
- to provide information to the licensed trade about the business benefits of a wheelchair accessible service
- to convey consistent messages to the licensed trade via a regular newsletter with a dedicated space for equality provisions with input from Disability Action Groups and other interested parties; and
- to allocate adequate Licensing resources to ensure that the ISP objectives can be met.

3.17 The above proposals incorporate recommendations made by the General Licensing and Registration Committee. In September 2024, a Task and Finish Group (comprising six Members of the Committee) was established to consider the original draft ISP and policy in further detail. The findings of the Task and Finish Group are attached (Appendix B) and their recommendations were approved by the General Licensing and Registration Committee on 11 November 2024. The minutes of the Committee meeting are attached (Appendix C). Further analysis of the proposed Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy revision and proposed new ISP is attached (Appendix D).

3.18 In general, the Task and Finish Group and, subsequently, the General Licensing and Registration Committee supported officers’ proposals but made two notable revisions to the Draft ISP as follows:

- The original proposed vehicle specification (identifying only WAVs and ZEVs within the scope of suitable hackney carriage vehicles) was considered too narrow, which raised concerns from Members that it may have an impact on the trade both in terms of cost and in terms of proprietors’ willingness to continue providing a hackney carriage service. Accordingly, hybrid electric vehicles (HEVs) were included within the scope of suitable vehicles.
- The original proposal to prohibit hackney carriage vehicle licence renewals beyond December 2029 in instances where the vehicle did not comply with the new vehicle specification was considered disproportionate. Members noted that many proprietors would have purchased their vehicles with a reasonable expectation that they could be retained in accordance with the existing policy and therefore the implementation schedule was revised to ensure that all existing vehicles would retain ‘grandfather rights’ until they are no longer fit for purpose. The revised vehicle specification now applies only to new applications.

4.0 RESULTS OF CONSULTATION AND OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 The proposals to increase the provision of wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) have resulted in significant feedback from the trade, wheelchair users and groups that represent them. Overall, these views oppose one another. Attached are the trade results of the consultation (Appendix E). Attached are the wheelchair user and other results of the consultation (Appendix F). General written responses are also attached (Appendix G) containing further useful views and information to consider.

4.2 In relation to options for increasing the number of WAV taxis, the consultation confirmed that:

- There was overall agreement that it was important or very important that everyone has equal access to taxis.
- There was overall agreement that it was important or very important that there should be enough WAVs to meet the demand.
- When asked to rank the four options, the responses were split as follows:

	Ranking	
	Trade	Wheelchair users and others
All new and replacement taxis to be wheelchair accessible	4th	1st
All new and replacement taxis to be wheelchair accessible until a certain number are licensed	2nd	2nd
All new and replacement taxis to be wheelchair accessible or zero emission vehicles	3rd	3rd
All new and replacement taxis to be wheelchair accessible, zero emission or hybrid electric vehicles	1st	4th

- There was not a strong overall view on whether these options should be applied to private hire vehicles.

4.3 In general, the consultation indicates that the trade considers the proposed hackney carriage vehicle specification to be the best of the options put forward, although some believe the proposal is overly restrictive. Wheelchair users and other respondents generally call for more stringent restrictions being imposed to promote accessibility.

4.4 A review of the effectiveness of the new policy will commence 12 months from full implementation, with further research and consultation, to decide whether any further adjustments are needed.

5.0 CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES

5.1 The Council is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion. The draft ISP seeks to improve the access, availability and quality of hackney carriage and private hire services in North Yorkshire.

6.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6.1 The Council must have regard to the Department for Transport's Best Practice Guidance and therefore there is an expectation that an ISP is adopted. The recommendations in the ISP, however, are at the Council's discretion and therefore alternative options may be considered.

- 6.2 Alternative options have already been explored to encourage more wheelchair accessible vehicles to be licensed in North Yorkshire by waiving the licence fee and relaxing the age limits on WAVs. However, the number of hackney carriage WAVs in North Yorkshire remains very low and there is no reasonable expectation that this will change without further intervention.
- 6.3 Subsequent to the consultation, further options have been explored and include:
- Applying the same WAV rules to private hire vehicles.
 - Restricting new drivers to WAV vehicles permanently or for a time limited period.
 - Putting restrictions on Private Hire Operators licences requiring that a prescribed number of WAV vehicles be provided.
 - Providing funding to the trade to assist them in providing WAVs.
 - Making no change to current policy in relation to WAVs.
- 6.3.1 For practical and legal reasons none of these options were considered appropriate for recommendation.
- 6.4 The current proposal, however, is considered a more reasonable and proportionate measure to satisfy the Council's public sector equality duty and its air quality obligations without imposing unnecessary regulatory burdens on businesses.
- 6.5 The Fleet Team are currently exploring whether the Council can arrange a bulk deal supply of WAVs to resell or lease to the trade at cheaper than normal market value. Work on this is not yet complete and could be considered separately with a view to incorporating any progress into future versions of the ISP.

7.0 IMPACT ON OTHER SERVICES/ORGANISATIONS

- 7.1 The Council's Integrated Passenger Transport Service (IPT) is responsible for arranging and managing school transport for children across North Yorkshire. The availability of additional wheelchair accessible hackney carriage vehicles would be likely to facilitate these arrangements.
- 7.2 The Council's Environmental Health Service is responsible for monitoring and safeguarding air quality. The relevant officers have been consulted and support the proposals in this regard.

8.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The vast majority of the licensing authority's service costs (including the proposed consultation and any subsequent meetings) are recovered by way of licence fees and the service will continue to operate on the same cost-recovery basis in future.
- 8.2 The Council must ensure that each requirement is properly justified by the risk it seeks to address, balancing the cost of the requirement against the benefit to the public. The additional cost burden on proprietors has been acknowledged in formulating the proposed policy revisions.
- 8.3 The proposed hackney carriage vehicle specification offers more options to proprietors than in many other licensing authorities across England and Wales (where, for example, wheelchair accessibility is a mandatory requirement for all licensed vehicles) and a reasonable implementation schedule has been proposed to minimise disruption.

9.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Any legal implications have been considered and addressed within the draft ISP.

- 9.2 Licensing authorities are expected to consult with any interested parties before making policy decisions. Any such consultation must be undertaken at a time when proposals are still at a formative stage; it must include sufficient reasons for particular proposals; and the responses must be conscientiously taken into account when the decision is taken.

10.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Disability is a protected characteristic within the meaning of the Equality Act 2010. Having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not, the Council must endeavour to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and take steps to meet their needs.
- 10.2 A balance must be sought to allow the licensed trade to make a reasonable living from their business whilst also removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by persons who have relevant protected characteristics. The draft ISP is considered a reasonable and proportionate approach to ensure that wheelchair users can access taxi services in North Yorkshire.
- 10.3 An Equality Impact Assessment is attached (Appendix H).

11.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The draft ISP takes account of government guidance in respect of emission standards and the need to transition to zero emission vehicles.
- 11.2 A Climate Impact Assessment is attached (Appendix I).

12.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 Any policy implications have been considered and addressed within the draft ISP.

13.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 Hackney carriage and private hire services play an important role in transporting members of the public safely. Any community safety implications have been considered and addressed within the draft ISP.

14.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 14.1 The Council has committed to developing and maintaining an Inclusive Service Plan and must have regard to the Department for Transport's Best Practice Guidance. A review of the effectiveness of the new policy will commence 12 months from full implementation to decide whether any further adjustments are needed. The recommendation seeks to increase the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles whilst balancing its impact on the trade.

15.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 15.1 That Executive adopts the Inclusive Service Plan as detailed in Appendix A, taking account of the recommendation put forward by the General Licensing and Registration Committee that all new and replacement hackney carriage vehicles be wheelchair accessible, zero emission or hybrid electric vehicles, with existing licensed hackney carriage vehicles retaining 'grandfather rights' until they are no longer fit for purpose.

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Draft Inclusive Service Plan
Appendix B – Task and Finish Group Findings
Appendix C – Minutes of General Licensing and Registration Committee
Appendix D – Analysis of proposed changes
Appendix E - Consultation outcome from the licensed trade
Appendix F – Consultation outcome from wheelchair users and others
Appendix G – Written submissions in response to consultation
Appendix H – Equality Impact Assessment
Appendix I – Climate Impact Assessment

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing Best Practice Guidance (Department for Transport)
Air Quality Strategy (DEFRA)
Regulators' Code (Department for Business Innovation & Skills, Better Regulation Delivery Office)

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