

North Yorkshire Council

General Licensing and Registration Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday, 11 November 2024 commencing at 2.00 pm.

Councillor Tim Grogan in the Chair plus Councillors Kevin Foster, Joy Andrews, Alyson Baker, Derek Bastiman, Philip Broadbank, Barbara Brodigan, John Cattanach, Felicity Cunliffe-Lister, Stephanie Duckett, Richard Foster, Robert Heseltine, Mike Jordan, Andrew Lee, Andy Paraskos, Jack Proud, Subash Sharma, Andy Solloway (remote), Malcolm Taylor, Angus Thompson and Andrew Timothy (as a substitute for Councillor Roberta Swiers)

Officers present: Gareth Bentley, Fiona Casson, Simon Fisher and St John Harris

Apologies: Councillors John Mann and Roberta Swiers

Copies of all documents considered are in the Minute Book

14 Apologies for absence

Apologies noted (see above)

15 Minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2024 were confirmed and signed as an accurate record.

16 Declarations of interests

It was noted that all members of the committee had been lobbied by certain individuals in respect of the Inclusive Service Plan but retained an open mind before the proposals in the report.

17 Public participation

The following two public statements had been submitted to the committee and were presented at the next agenda item.

Jackie Snape (Chief Executive of Disability Action Yorkshire)

Current Situation:

In the UK, 1.85% of the population depends on a wheelchair for daily mobility—a statistic that translates to around 11,200 wheelchair users in North Yorkshire, given its population of 604,900. Currently, of the 777 licensed hackney carriage vehicles, only 69 are wheelchair-accessible vehicles (WAVs), while just 40 of the 836 private hire vehicles (PHVs) are WAVs. This equates to only one wheelchair-accessible hackney carriage for every 162 people in need and an astonishing 280 people per WAV PHV. These numbers highlight a significant gap in accessible transport for wheelchair users across the region.

While we appreciate that this proposal focuses solely on hackney carriage wheelchair-accessible vehicles (WAVs), it is important to highlight the major concern that even when

disabled individuals manage to secure a wheelchair-accessible private hire vehicle (PHV)—which is increasingly challenging—they remain vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation. Without fare regulation by NYC, these passengers face unpredictable and often inflated charges.

Barriers from the Taxi Trade:

We have been informed, directly by the taxi trade, that several licensed WAVs remain inactive due to drivers' concerns, including:

- Lower earnings compared to non-WAV drivers
- Reluctance to assist wheelchair users due to the risk of getting wet, injury, or inconvenience

In Harrogate, for instance, after 5 pm only a single WAV is available, and it is reserved for NHS purposes.

In the event of a mandate requiring a specified number of WAVs in a hackney fleet, drivers have threatened to switch to private hire to avoid compliance.

Experiences of Disabled People:

Disabled residents report consistent, distressing challenges in accessing WAV taxis:

Medical Appointments: Last week, a resident who booked a WAV taxi a week in advance was repeatedly told none were available.

Exorbitant Costs: Another resident had to pay **£87 for a 2-mile journey** to their GP, needing to book a WAV from Leeds due to local unavailability.

Social Isolation: A young disabled woman shared that she no longer goes out at night, unable to secure accessible transportation and feeling unsafe to go into town in the dark. She states 'even if I can get into town I know there is no way I can get back in a taxi, I am being penalised for being disabled'

Equal Access is a Basic Right:

Disabled people have the same rights as anyone else to participate in daily life—work, social activities, appointments, and education. They deserve reliable, safe, and affordable access to transport without incurring additional costs or barriers.

A Call to Action:

While many local authorities have moved toward 100% wheelchair-accessible taxi fleets or set a reasonable quota, North Yorkshire Council seems to have disregarded the needs of its disabled residents, prioritising the convenience of the taxi trade instead.

We urge you to reconsider North Yorkshire's approach to WAV accessibility, recognising the fundamental rights of disabled people to move freely within their communities. A balanced solution would respect and support both disabled residents and the taxi trade, fostering a community where accessible transportation is a shared priority.

Ian Lawson (Chair of Accessible Transport Group)

I believe that the recommendations from the Task & Finish group do not align with the vision within the NYC Council Plan for a good quality of life for all. The Plan emphasises your PSED to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity. Wheelchair using residents of North Yorkshire do not believe that the proposals from this committee will satisfy that duty.

The Government has issued Best Practice Guidance to promote the provision of safe, accessible, available and affordable taxi and PHV services since 2006, yet here we are in 2024 when the council's own Review of the Licensing Policy confirms the need for 200 more wheelchair accessible taxis. Despite the fact that wheelchair users have been lobbying the 7 Borough & District councils for many, many years for more wheelchair taxis, we believe that the licensing committee still does not understand how much the lack of wheelchair taxis impacts negatively on the lives of wheelchair users. The lack of frequent and accessible bus services across North Yorkshire adds to the isolation of wheelchair

users.

The Guidance warns against policy changes that result in unfair competition and have unintended consequences. We believe that imposing restrictions on taxis, but not on equally polluting PHVs, distorts the choice of taxi drivers towards more PHVs. Given the ending of the 10 year age limit for taxis and the option to operate a ZEV or hybrid taxi well into the 2030s why does the committee believe their proposals will result in any more wheelchair taxis in the next 10 years? We also challenge the unevidenced belief of the NYC licensing officers that taxi drivers will not apply to become PHV drivers. Online reports from the USA and Canada make it clear that PHV operators do not provide an equitable service for wheelchair users, when compared with non-WAV operators.

The Guidance also states that licensing authorities should incentivise the uptake of WAVs where mandating them would be inappropriate. The council did include incentives at the start of the current 5-year Policy which have not worked so why not mandate for more wheelchair taxis now? The EIA in the Proposals does not provide evidence why a mandate now in NYC will not work. For comparison, Exeter Council will only consider an application for a ULEV or hybrid taxi once half the taxi fleet is wheelchair accessible. After that, licences will only be issued on a one-to-one basis.

We believe that the Proposals have been influenced disproportionately in favour of taxi & PHV operators, as opposed to the benefit of wheelchair users. No targets or KPIs are included in the Proposals so how will the Committee judge the success of their proposals going forward?

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

Considered

The report of the Corporate Director – Environment in respect of a new Inclusive Service Plan in relation to hackney carriage and private hire licensing.

Introducing the report, the Head of Licensing advised that in response to the committee's comments the draft Inclusive Service Plan had been expanded to include further information about wheelchair accessible hackney carriage and private hire vehicles, and wheelchair users and their views and experiences of using taxis. The findings and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group established by the committee at its last meeting were appended to this and the next report and were referred to in both covering reports, since if accepted by the committee, they would impact on the wording of both the draft Inclusive Plan and the new draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy.

Members of the committee then discussed the report and asked questions. Key points made were as follows:

- Euro 6 emission standards were introduced some ten years ago for new vehicles, so by the licensing authority adhering to the 10 year age limit on both hackney carriage and private hire vehicles Euro 6 had effectively been adopted by default for most of these vehicles
- The council's own vehicle fleet were also required to adhere to Euro 6
- In response to the representations made by Mr Lawson and Ms Snape, Councillor Kevin Foster commented that the view of the Task and Finish Group was their recommendations were a step in the right direction to form the basis of a public consultation on a draft Inclusive Service Plan. He was disappointed by the low percentage of taxis which were wheelchair accessible and the high charges; however he did not believe that mandating wheelchair accessible vehicles was the way forward at this stage, but instead the draft ISP sought to incentivise the trade

to do so whilst mitigating the cost of their introduction

It was proposed that instead of the Task and Finish Group's recommendations being presented as a series of further amendments to the draft Inclusive Service Plan appended to the report, that the recommendations be adopted by the committee and the draft Inclusive Service Plan amended accordingly into a single version for consideration by the Executive.

Resolved that the committee:

Recommend to the Executive that the Inclusive Service Plan contained in Appendix A, subject to the amendments proposed by the Task and Finish Group, is the subject of public consultation

19 Review of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy

Considered

The report of the Corporate Director – Environment in respect of a proposal to revise the Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy.

Since the Inclusive Service Plan formed a large part of the revised Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy and the Task and Finish Group's recommendations also encompassed other aspects of the revised policy, it was proposed that instead of the Task and Finish Group's recommendations being presented as a series of further amendments to the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy appended to the report, that the recommendations be adopted by the committee and the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy amended accordingly into a single version for consideration by the Executive.

Resolved that the committee:

Recommend to the Executive that the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy contained in Appendix B, subject to the amendments proposed by the Task and Finish Group, is the subject of public consultation

20 Any other items

There were no urgent items of business.

The meeting concluded at 2.50 pm.