

Taxi Licensing

Disability Equalities Impact Assessment Record Sheet

Policy Title: Taxi Licensing			
Policy Owner: Pam Ross/Julie Richings			Date: 31 st October 2011
Type of Assessment	Type 1	Type	Type
Is this a policy or an action? Policy and supporting actions			
<p>Background</p> <p>This assessment has arisen from a review of Taxi Licensing policy carried out in 2010. This led to a decision to carry out further investigations on accessibility issues relating to taxi use. Any additional proposals to change licensing policy arising from this further work would then be incorporated in recommendations to the Council on further changes to policy. It is intended to present a report to Council recommending changes to policy to improve accessible taxi provision in January 2012.</p>			
<p>The Initial Proposal</p> <p>The starting point for the assessment was a proposal to amend Taxi Licensing policy to encourage the taxi trade to provide more wheelchair accessible vehicles for on taxi ranks and through private hire. It is proposed to do this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering a reduced licensing fee for accessible vehicles • Relaxing current rules on the maximum age of vehicles presented for licensing from 3 years to five years • Allowing existing vehicles to be converted to be wheelchair accessible – current rules require that vehicles must have been designed to be wheelchair accessible at first manufacture. The proposal include requirements for ensuring that conversions are carried out to appropriate standards 			
<p>Carrying out the Assessment</p> <p>This assessment is based on discussions with disabled people about their experiences of using taxis in Darlington. It is impracticable to engage with every disabled person who may use taxis. Therefore the assessment is based on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions with both individual representatives of DAD and at the DBC/DAD Sub Group to identify issues with use of taxis by disabled people • Discussion with members of People's Parliament • Two DEIA engagement sessions with Dimensions service users on 16th June and 29th June covering both taxis and budget proposals on supported buses • A discussion with the Deaf Forum on 14th June • Two DEIA engagement sessions with members of the Deaf Association Club (Eldon Street) on 26th July and 30th August covering both taxis and budget proposals on supported buses <p>Whilst these consultation and engagement sessions do not include all disabled people, they provide information from people with impaired mobility, sensory impairments and learning disabilities. They generated a consistent picture of the range of issues people experience in using taxis.</p>			

Findings / Issues

The issues identified from the consultation and engagement carried out are as follows.

- A lack of wheelchair accessible vehicles available for hire
- The use of the available wheelchair accessible vehicles by taxi owners/operators for non-disabled passengers, often when they are most required by disabled people – for example wheelchair accessible vehicles tend to be used as minibuses to transport groups, particularly on Friday and Saturday evenings, and this use is more lucrative to the operators; school runs are a priority for vehicles during peak hours
- There are specific design issues with wheelchair accessible vehicles – rear loading is preferred to side loading
- Discriminatory charging - whilst hackney fares are regulated by the licensing authority, private hire fares are flexible, and experience shows that disabled people, and in particular wheelchair users, may be quoted higher fares than non-disabled people for the same journey once the operator knows that the client is a wheelchair user; this is justified by operators in terms of the time taken to load the wheelchair
- The withdrawal of taxi tokens as part of the concessionary fare scheme has increased the cost of travel for people who cannot use buses
- Driver attitudes – this area gives rise to a wide range of concerns, including:
 - Rude and intrusive behaviour with a lack of the most basic understanding or awareness of the needs of disabled people
 - Inflexible attitudes, hurrying people, handling people and wheelchairs intrusively or without care
 - Not having regard to basic health and safety, such as having wheelchairs facing sideways rather than fore and aft, or using the proper equipment to secure wheelchairs
 - A general unwillingness to offer assistance, for example with shopping, helping people out of/into their house
- Many people contrasted the service generally available with that provided by one owner/driver (Paul Leng) who transports many disabled people in a wheelchair accessible vehicle, notably service users to and from Dimensions; this driver has had equalities training and provides an exemplary service; some taxi companies provide a decent service whilst others are not so good – examples of good and bad provided in engagement sessions.

What are the positive or negative effects that the action will have on disabled people?

Positive Impacts

The initial proposal to amend the Taxi Licensing Policy is a positive step to encourage the provision of more wheelchair accessible vehicles and addresses the first of the issues listed above.

Negative Impacts

If action is limited to the initial proposal to amend taxi licensing policy to encourage provision of more wheelchair accessible vehicles, the other issues outlined above will not be addressed. Disabled people will continue to experience difficulties and challenges in using taxis and, when combined with reported difficulties in using bus services, will continue to be disproportionately limited in their personal mobility and in access to shops, services and leisure facilities.

The proposed change to the taxi licensing policy provides the opportunity to consider other measures to address the issues identified, through this impact assessment.

People involved in the engagement sessions identified the following impacts on their quality of life arising from the limitations on their personal mobility.

- It's horrendous trying to get shopping
- It is difficult getting into town
- I feel isolated and sometimes lonely
- I often feel like a second class citizen
- I feel angry, frustrated and made to feel humiliated; I get very upset and angry
- I'm getting too scared to go out – I don't know whether I'll be able to get back home
- I'm often late for work because taxis don't come on time
- Sometimes the drivers make me feel guilty and small
- Sometimes the taxi company just puts the phone down if they don't understand me straight away)

What evidence supports this?

Notes taken at discussions with DAD and at engagement sessions with Dimensions and Deaf Forum/Deaf Club

Who was involved?

Chair and members of DAD (DEIA Sub Group), Dimensions Service users, members of People's Parliament and members of Deaf Forum and Deaf Association Club

DBC Officers: Pam Ross, Licensing Manager, Julie Richings, Licensing Officer, Simon Houldsworth, Transport Manager; Peter Roberts, Corporate Equalities Officer

What action will you take as a result of the impact assessment?

Further actions have been identified and are being progressed to address the issues identified above. In considering the recommended changes to policy, decision makers should have regard to these additional proposals. They are:

- The recommended changes to Taxi Licensing Policy include making the reduced licensing fee for wheelchair accessible vehicles conditional on drivers of the vehicle taking equalities awareness training, to address the behavioural issues identified above
- The position on side loading versus rear loading accessible vehicles has been clarified; the Licensing Service will give due consideration to each vehicle presented for licensing in accordance with the policy and will not favour one format over the other
- Funding has been secured through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund to provide a dedicated community-operated wheelchair accessible vehicle solely for the use of disabled people; management and operational arrangements are currently being discussed between the Council and Third Sector
- The adoption of a list of private hire vehicles using the provisions in S163 and following of the Equality Act will be investigated; the list gives the Council some control over fares for private hire vehicles and can also require hackney and private hire drivers to assist disabled customers.

How and when will this action be monitored?

The effectiveness of changes to Taxi Licensing Policy, and the development of the list will be monitored and assessed through the Licensing Committee.

The Community Taxi project will be monitored and project managed through the joint Council/Third Sector arrangements that are created to develop the project, and through the Council's Place/Transport Commissioning programme.

The views and experiences of disabled people arising from these proposed changes will be monitored through the DBC/DAD Sub Group.