

Taxi Licensing Consultation 2012

Survey results

Total number of responses

114 survey responses were received (42 paper, 72 online). In addition, one response was made by telephone, 11 by email and a small number of comments were made via Twitter and Oxford Mail's web site). A taxi operator also commissioned a report responding to the draft policy. The consultation period was 19 March to 22 June 2012.

Verbal comments were also made at two workshops with members of the taxi trade, with Didcot Access Forum and members of Vale's disability panel and a workshop with young people aged between 11-18.

Verbatim Comments

All comments made in response to open ended questions are shown at the end of the document are as written by respondents.

**Which district are you mainly responding about? Please choose ONE district only.
For example, this could be the district you live or work in**

58 (51%)	South Oxfordshire
56 (49%)	Vale of White Horse

Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the draft policy?

17 (15%)	Strongly agree
42 (37%)	Tend to agree
14 (12%)	Neither agree nor disagree
21 (18%)	Tend to disagree
11 (9%)	Strongly disagree
7 (6%)	Don't know

New or changed policies for both districts

Penalty points (see 'policy enforcement 1 and 2')

Introduction of a penalty points enforcement scheme; drivers who exceed 12 points in any 12 month period will be suspended pending a committee or panel hearing.

42 (38%)	Strongly agree
20 (18%)	Tend to agree
17 (15%)	Neither agree nor disagree
11 (10%)	Tend to disagree
22 (20%)	Strongly disagree
0 (0%)	Don't know

16 (100%)

- However, I am unclear how being given points works, or what penalties apply
- To threaten drivers with possible suspension due to minor offences which are not criminal nor considered dangerous is just obscured. Who would be policing these offences? i.e. 4/10/16/23/28 And 21 roof light.... if the vehicle has a certificate of compliance its roof light will be the correct light, are you saying that after a test it would be changed by the owner for what purpose? So as far as I can see there are many suggested penalty points set in place on irrelevant situations.
- I feel it is unfair due to the fact of innocently breaking a rule, although more serious offences should be considered rather than minor ones
- There are procedures in place already. Unable to see how the council would discover many of the offences. If a complaint received, presumably there would be right of reply and appeal leading to further bureaucracy and expense
- Penalty Points scheme should be unnecessary, if there were already effective enforcement.
- But some points seem too high this is presuming common sense is involved i.e. bad traffic condition meaning it's unable to arrive promptly expecting on pre-book work.
- It would be nice if Abingdon licencing could get a grip of their selves. Very poor service.
- To single out any one trade or profession in this way is discrimination and is contrary to human rights.
- Unnecessary punishment scheme not subject to any other form of employment or business
- The law is adequate. Do not trust council to administer fairly.
- Penalty point systems impose restrictions on Officers when carrying out enforcement and prevent them from being able to assess individual circumstances as framework of such systems are too prescriptive. As a result, repeat offenders of minor offences, showing a disregard for taxi legislation and policy can often be able to continue offending as points are reset annually whereas a driver who makes one mistake, which is against character, can end up with a harsher penalty. Dealing with individual cases by Officers and then through Committee and/or magistrates as necessary is often fairer and sends a more robust message to the trade.
- The threshold should be lower. 12 points is a high rate of offence, noting that it is likely that the driver will have offended substantially more times than they are caught.
- 12 Points are very narrow target. 24 points should be set. Minor cases such as leaving taxi unattended for natural reasons, driver should receive just a verbal warning.
- Some penalties open to interpretation. Too easy to accumulate 12 points!
- This is wholly unsustainable with current case law. The theory is excellent, though needs fine tuning.
- Needs more consultation. I don't believe the council needs this level of power over somebody's ability to earn a living.

Wheel chair accessible vehicles (see 'policy vehicle 5, 6 and 7')

To allow a wider range of wheelchair accessible vehicles. To require certification for wheelchair adapted vehicles when a vehicle has been modified post manufacture to provide access or special facilities for disabled passengers. To add safety requirements where rear loading lifts are in use.

31 (28%)	Strongly agree
40 (36%)	Tend to agree
28 (25%)	Neither agree nor disagree
3 (3%)	Tend to disagree
5 (5%)	Strongly disagree
4 (4%)	Don't know

12 (100%)

- There are a lot of elderly people in the SODC village areas that do not have access to buses so this should be a mandatory option.
- an incurred additional cost that will not be recovered quickly nor effectively with the current pricing and economic climate, and also disabled clients in my experience would prefer to be treated as equal as an able bodied person.
- Having spent nearly £28,000 on a vehicle there isn't enough work to make it pay
- It's always seemed wrong that rear loading vehicle were never good enough. But don't overlook that a lot of people (OAP) can't get into disabled access vehicles.
- Rear loading ramps for school work are a necessary facility
- Rear access vehicles are a must in this trade for school transport and other organisations we serve
- Section 5.3.3 states that you are not going to allow rear loading of wheelchairs, so why are safety requirement mentioned in this question? I do not understand why rear loading is not to be allow as I have travelling in London on numerous occasions in this manner and found it very acceptable, easy to load and forward facing. Emergency vehicles and community transport all have rear loading.
- Provision needs to be proportionate to needs of District. Whilst there is a need for WAV's, there is also an element of customers who wish to be able to use a saloon style vehicle. Measures should ensure that both are adequately catered for.
- Policy vehicle 7 expensive!
- Not available in taxi format at moment.
- Provided these extra responsibilities are reflected by lower licensing fee.
- You clearly do not understand what you are asking or is available. Have your consulted with you local Access group?

Vehicle testing requirements (see 'policy vehicle 9 and 10')

To require all vehicles to be licensed as hackney carriages and private hire vehicles to undergo a compliance test before the issue of a licence. Testing must be undertaken in a council approved testing centre in accordance with requirements for a certificate of compliance.

62 (56%)	Strongly agree
26 (23%)	Tend to agree
9 (8%)	Neither agree nor disagree
6 (5%)	Tend to disagree
7 (6%)	Strongly disagree
1 (1%)	Don't know

12 (100%)

- Local garage maintains vehicle to a higher standard so that we do not have a test failure. Previously appointed garages have failed vehicles and having taken no action but returned for retesting the vehicle passed.
- This is already in place? I always get my vehicles tested first
- Certificates of compliance or MOT's required are difficult to schedule when few testing stations are appointed. This is from prior experience. The status quo fits a busy working environment and the same standards are met.
- Providing you provided several testing stations
- No change
- A strict testing procedure is a must for our trade because of the high mileage that we do.
- It is unclear as to what the 'compliance test' actually consists of. Does this include an MOT or is it simply a set of measures for testing required by the Council? If so, how would the tests be regulated to ensure the same standard is achieved across the District/s?

- I would like to see such testing incorporating a test of whether anyone has been smoking in the vehicle. As a person whose health suffers from cigarette smoke, even if it's only seeped into upholstery and carpet, I have had issues with some drivers still smoking in their vehicle, despite regulations. This happened outside of our district, but it alerted me to potential risks with smoking generally.
- With the proviso that if a vehicle that either fails or has an advisories that they came represent it within 14 day free of charge. The same as a standard MOT
- One Standard Charge for MOT and retest should be free. One MOT per year because it is done by a compliance centre
- One centre only!
- Yes, the current position is appalling. Authorised test centres are essential.

Accidents (see 'policy vehicle 22')

If a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle is involved in a road traffic accident that causes damage to the vehicle that requires repair the drivers or owners shall report the accident to the council within three working days.

36 (32%)	Strongly agree
37 (33%)	Tend to agree
13 (12%)	Neither agree nor disagree
16 (14%)	Tend to disagree
9 (8%)	Strongly disagree
0 (0%)	Don't know

13 (100%)

- I thought that this was already the case
- Public holidays may prevent driver from reporting accident to the council so the time period should be extended during those periods
- Except that I fear this could cause taxis to put off repairs which are marginal. This could be counter productive.
- I don't think the council needs to know of an accident unless a claim is made under liability as this affects neither the vehicle, driver or governing body, providing the vehicle has been repaired and a vosa inspection has been approved
- Accident reporting procedures ensure operator, contractor (if applicable), insurance companies, police (if necessary) are notified. Unable to see how another layer of reporting would benefit the council or customer.
- Depending on damage as the vehicles are quite often to minor hits resulting in scratches no repair needed. Also though we already had to do this
- Why not treat as any other traffic accident & drive/owners inform their own insurance companies. It is/should be the duty of the driver of the hackney carriage/private hire vehicle to report it to the council. They are the ones in possession of the license.
- No change
- Not sure what benefit this test will be, as the person would not be able to pass the other requirements anyway.
- Under legislation, is not necessary for such an accident to be reported within 72 hours, therefore forming a duplication?
- We do own repair- council qualified to do the job?
- Is the council qualified to judge the road worthiness of the vehicle?
- If a vehicle has cosmetic damage this does not make it un-roadworthy and a further test after rectification is another un-necessary cost.

Spoken English test (see 'policy driver 3')

Introduction of a spoken English test for drivers who cannot demonstrate a basic level of spoken English. The test will be externally administered.

74 (65%)	Strongly agree
28 (25%)	Tend to agree
7 (6%)	Neither agree nor disagree
4 (4%)	Tend to disagree
0 (0%)	Strongly disagree
0 (0%)	Don't know

17 (100%)

- I have stopped using one firm in Didcot as the drivers do not understand English and they have also made me feel unsafe in the taxi, to the point where I have in one instance made them stop before my destination at a place of safety and then walked the rest of the way home.
- There are too many drivers who can hardly speak English so I would welcome that
- Essential. We have had examples of drivers who don't speak English and have then caused property damage by poor parking on arrival (eg driving brainlessly onto newly laid turf lawn!) Taxi company rude and didn't care. Driver lost for words - through lack of English. I'm not sure he ever understood what the issue was.
- This requirement should not be used as a licence for external bodies to make money from applicants
- I have experienced some bizarre situations with English speaking drivers; however this is really important
- Would agree if administered by the council. Do the council test for language skills in other areas? Shared resources would be a better use of council taxes.
- Should not be applied retrospectively, or to [?] with GCE 'A' level or GCE 'O' level English of grade 'C' or above.
- English is the language of this country, a requirement to speak it should be one of the 1st priorities when licensing a service of any kind.
- This should already be being done
- Should not be done "in-house". Independent examiners should be used to safeguard public & councils issuing the licenses.
- Dangerous territory. Could lead to racial disputes.
- Having used taxis within the Vale on regular occasions in the last 12 months, I have never been concerned about the drivers ability to communicate. However, I appreciate this may differ in other parts of the District/s. Therefore, shouldn't such steps only be taken after an assessment by the Licensing Officer to deem such a test necessary to avoid unnecessary costs being passed on to both applicants and Council.
- Standards should be high. Lack of communication skills cause many problems with licensed taxis.
- Essential
- Essential
- Who sets the criteria?
- If they can't communicate how can they deliver a service?

Sexual activity (see ‘policy driver 23’)

There must be no sexual activity, including consensual activity, between drivers and passengers either in a licensed vehicle or when a licensed driver is on duty.

77 (69%)	Strongly agree
25 (22%)	Tend to agree
7 (6%)	Neither agree nor disagree
2 (2%)	Tend to disagree
1 (1%)	Strongly disagree
0 (0%)	Don't know

8 (100%)

- Worrying where this came from in the first place!
- When I used to live in Banbury it was incredibly scary taking taxis because I was often asked if I was married or engaged this in itself is obscene and incredibly rude.
- Think this is going over the top with rules.
- Any body
- If am invited in the house or I invite my friend into my house during working hrs on a break and we end up having a good time, what's wrong with that. People have it on office desks etc.
- Common sense most company already enforce this most of us aren't in habit of taking up the sexual offers.
- Licensed vehicles not a brothel! Licensed driver should be working not enjoying him/herself!
- If two consenting adults wish to indulge it is not for the council to dictate. There are laws to cover indecent activity.

Public liability insurance (see ‘policy private hire operator 8)

The councils will require applicants to provide evidence that public liability insurance to the value of £5 million has been taken out for premises that are open to the public (e.g. waiting rooms) and will not issue a licence until it is satisfied that this is the case.

51 (45%)	Strongly agree
39 (35%)	Tend to agree
17 (15%)	Neither agree nor disagree
3 (3%)	Tend to disagree
1 (1%)	Strongly disagree
2 (2%)	Don't know

6 (100%)

- Good idea.
- 5M seems excessive - what evidence is there that such a large sum is needed?
- There are a lot of unregistered taxi hire services hanging around Thame and Haddenham station often run from sheds!
- Don't you see evidence of this
- Not all operators have waiting rooms open to the public.
- As long as the council views this high costing when considering tariff increases.

Planning consent (see 'policy private hire operator 9')

Councils will not normally determine an application for an operator's licence unless the applicant can demonstrate that the premises have either (in terms of activity and hours of use sought) planning consent, or that is otherwise lawful. Holders of an operator's licence should note that the grant of an operator's licence does not allow the use of the premises as a private hire operator's base in the absence of planning permission.

39 (35%)	Strongly agree
33 (30%)	Tend to agree
30 (27%)	Neither agree nor disagree
1 (1%)	Tend to disagree
3 (3%)	Strongly disagree
5 (5%)	Don't know

6 (100%)

- Good. All part of safety.
- One thing I think the council should remember is that most taxi companies are sole traders and are home run, and the vale consists of small towns
- This is a duplication that could result in being unenforceable, as surely the planning departments would need to take the appropriate action, not the Licensing Team?
- Premises need to be appropriate!
- Are you saying to obtain an operator's license you need planning permission. If so I agree if not then I do not agree.
- Have we checked all current operators?

New or changed policies for South Oxfordshire

Certificates of compliance (see 'policy vehicle 9')

No vehicle may be used as a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle unless it has been given a certificate of compliance from an approved testing station and has been appropriately licensed by the councils. The councils will only accept certificates of compliance that are valid for at least 11 months.

60 (58%)	Strongly agree
24 (23%)	Tend to agree
10 (10%)	Neither agree nor disagree
2 (2%)	Tend to disagree
5 (5%)	Strongly disagree
2 (2%)	Don't know

4 (100%)

- They should also be displayed in the taxi
- No to 'Approved Testing Stations' as previously restricting choice has led to severe scheduling problems due to lack of choice making it very difficult to plan appointments.
- Is this the same or different vehicle test to that already referred to earlier in the survey? Confusing to new applicants what tests are actually required.
- Current provisions are adequate.

Disability awareness qualification (see 'policy driver 6')

Applicants for a hackney carriage/private hire driver's licence will be required to undergo disability awareness training. Alternative qualifications that can be evidenced and are not more than five years old may be accepted such as NVQ in Road Passenger Transport

33 (31%)	Strongly agree
31 (30%)	Tend to agree
17 (17%)	Neither agree nor disagree
14 (13%)	Tend to disagree
9 (9%)	Strongly disagree
1 (1%)	Don't know

11 (100%)

- Totally agree as a disabled person & wheelchair user there have been Taxi's on the rank in the high street that can't even take my compact folding wheelchair. Also a lot of drivers from certain firms like Auto taxis offer no assistance in getting in or out of the Taxi. Plus park too far away from the kerb when arriving at the destination
- This is a bit OTT. Some degree of disability awareness is obviously necessary, but the councils should guard against training or qualification being used as a bar to applicants, or a licence to print money for third parties
- I am surprised this is not mandatory any way.
- this may be used as a new way to claim under the drivers insurance additionally if a claim is presented due to the fact that nhs operatives have to have the same personal cover
- No change to present Vale policy, requiring existing licence holders to undertake such training within six months of renewal of licence.
- Most people can use common sense. Better to robustly enforce discrimination laws than waste council tax payers' money on "awareness" courses.
- Although I strongly agree with this I am concerned about the cost implications of drivers having to pay 24, plus the possibility of losing a day earnings and on top of this pay for the hire of a room. The Council should consider, as part of their Equality Duty, to use a council meeting room at no cost to the delegate as I feel this will deter current drivers taking part voluntarily.
- Clarity of alternative qualifications would be an advantage.
- Agree only if the driver is driving a wheelchair accessible car.
- Only after a driver has started and been issued a badge not as another barrier to entry.
- Have stated before cost to business, loss of productivity and course delivered fell woefully short of value for money. Frankly a waste of time.

Medical examination (see 'policy driver 9)

A medical examination by a GP from the surgery the applicant is registered at and a DVLA Group 2 standard of medical fitness for professional drivers will be required.

47 (45%)	Strongly agree
41 (39%)	Tend to agree
8 (8%)	Neither agree nor disagree
3 (3%)	Tend to disagree
4 (4%)	Strongly disagree
1 (1%)	Don't know

9 (100%)

- Yes that is needed as some drivers who are extremely overweight are unable to assist in putting wheelchair in the boot & have been asked to use a different taxi. Also noticed that he

stays in the car when even elderly passengers have to put in & take their own luggage out of the boot

- Absolutely agree with this because a few weeks ago in Oxford I witnessed an elderly taxi driver having driven into a bollard in the middle of Turl Street one of the witnesses said the man was far too old to be driving the taxi she obviously knew him and definitely drivers should have examinations which may also combat them being over weight as well.
- Should be for some of the DVLA [?] 2, that the examination can be carried out by any registered medical practitioner.
- They're only driving a cab. Medical fitness to drive a vehicle of that type should be required, which is covered under the laws of obtaining & holding a current driving license anyway.
- You do this already
- An initial medical is an absolute must, but is it necessary to repeat the check every three years if the medical practitioner does not identify a medical issue? Surely the responsibility of informing the Licensing Team of any changes to their medical status falls to the driver, who would have agreed to this at the time of application? If the driver was to fail to advise of any such changes, an immediate suspension could be placed upon the driver while an investigation is carried out.
- I was driven home from the railway station today, 17/06/12, by a driver who needed my assistance to put my suitcase in the boot and take it out. I manage my case and I am disabled, missing my right arm!
- Again I have said 21-45 years of age for same medical to drive HGV or PSV. 3 years for taxi excessive waste of money. Again individual's money not council.
- Should not be 3 years. Too regular.

Duration of licences (see 'policy private hire operator 12)

Private hire operators' licences will be granted for a three-year period subject to the power to grant a licence for a shorter period if required.

40 (39%)	Strongly agree
35 (34%)	Tend to agree
18 (17%)	Neither agree nor disagree
5 (5%)	Tend to disagree
3 (3%)	Strongly disagree
2 (2%)	Don't know

6 (100%)

- There should be a way you can stop licences faster when a problem arises. The company could have scores on the doors ratings like with food establishments.
- There are far too many unregistered private hire drivers in and around the Oxford and Thame area that it's scary for women.
- 3 years is fine but feel there should be some sort of inspection of driver & vehicle - say between 6 monthly/1 yearly periods.
- This period should be shorter to flag problems quickly.
- Three years is a long time; I would hope that checks can still take place during the period of licence validity.
- Again extra up front costs on small business in austere times. Worked well for decades on 1 year.

New or changed policies for Vale of White Horse

Hackney carriage roof signs (see 'policy vehicle 12')

Introduce requirements to standardise roof box signs.

38 (35%)	Strongly agree
25 (23%)	Tend to agree
17 (16%)	Neither agree nor disagree
12 (11%)	Tend to disagree
15 (14%)	Strongly disagree
1 (1%)	Don't know

10 (100%)

- Because of the prevalence of unregistered vehicles in and around Oxford it's often difficult to know (especially if you have had a few too many drinks) which is the correct vehicle to hail.
- Most roof lights are basically the same, maybe a better way to go would be to (1) Ban half size roof lights. (2) specify the colour i.e. Front: White Rear: Red No yellow Signs (3) purpose built Taxis have built in lights that only show to the front
- There is no need for a change to present policy
- Require standard Hackney Carriage or Licensed Private Hire plaques - but forcing standard roof boxed is going too far and making the council appear authoritarian when in fact you should be promoting business & making it easy for taxi's to become compliant & licensed.
- Our cabs have integral roof signs
- Providing different licensing officer change things i.e. Nigel Haverson wanting phone number on back but policy saying its up to firms
- This would incur added expense for the sake of SODC operators. They are out of line and should comply if necessary.
- Standardisation would be an advantage, making correctly licensed vehicles easily identifiable. However, it would be an advantage to be able to clearly read the company name upon the sign at a distance, which can often be difficult on vehicles in both Districts.
- Some operators currently appear unprofessional.
- Should also insist on door signs remaining but cost £42 blatant rip off by council. Previously £10 can be reproduced for £6.00. Council is a not for profit organisation. Transparency required.

Advertising on licensed vehicles (see 'policy vehicle 13')

Advertising on licensed vehicles will be permitted.

32 (30%)	Strongly agree
27 (25%)	Tend to agree
27 (25%)	Neither agree nor disagree
10 (9%)	Tend to disagree
12 (11%)	Strongly disagree
0 (0%)	Don't know

* Three people responded to a different option that 'advertising the proprietor or operator's business will be permitted'. One responded 'tend to agree' and two 'neither agree nor disagree'. These results are excluded from those above.

6 (100%)

- I know that a lot of vehicles are sponsored and this helps cover the taxi costs to individual drivers; however providing the adverts are tasteful and not for lap dancing clubs I am quite happy for them to be sponsored.

- I cannot see a problem with advertising on taxis. Other areas of the UK already permit it - there are ads on the side of taxis in Oxford, for example.
- Agree, if requests for advertising is assessed by Licensing Officer to ensure that no inappropriate advertising is permitted
- This will make vehicles look unprofessional, and make towns within which vehicles wait look untidy.
- As long as it's done within set parameters and is therefore aesthetically pleasing
- If the advertisement revenue is used to improve the taxis themselves and not put in a 'pot' of council funding

Plate exemption (see 'policy vehicle 15')

Introduce requirements for how private hire vehicles which have been granted an exemption from permanently displaying their licence plate will display their licence.

40 (37%)	Strongly agree
24 (22%)	Tend to agree
27 (25%)	Neither agree nor disagree
1 (1%)	Tend to disagree
13 (12%)	Strongly disagree
2 (2%)	Don't know

10 (100%)

- Why grant plate exemptions in the first place?
- All licences should be displayed there shouldn't be any reason for an exemption. As the passenger needs to see to check validity if in doubt
- All licence plates should be displayed
- Do not grant exemption from permanently displaying licence plate.
- Why would they not permanently display their license?
- If a vehicle is licensed it should display its plate. There should be no exceptions
- All licensed vehicles should clearly display who and what they are to the public. There is no excuse not to.
- All cabs should permanently display licences. I have seen a lot of abuse in the West Midlands of this and it shows a very unprofessional appearance to users of the service. With the high amount of overseas visitors to Oxfordshire this would be harming to our reputation.
- And no exemptions should be granted for Hackney Carriage vehicles. 1976 Misc. Prov. Act states not allowable.
- No exemption for Hackney Carriage should be considered.

Applications (see 'policy private hire operator 3')

Applications for a private hire operator's licence must be accompanied by a business plan setting out how the operator intends running the business. Applications also have to be accompanied by two references; one must be from a previous employer, the other from a professional person, e.g. an accountant or solicitor, as evidence that the applicant is capable of keeping adequate records.

28 (26%)	Strongly agree
30 (28%)	Tend to agree
25 (23%)	Neither agree nor disagree
5 (5%)	Tend to disagree
16 (15%)	Strongly disagree
4 (4%)	Don't know

8 (100%)

- Agree with the references. not with the business plan requirement.

- Are there definitions on what needs to be included on 'how to run a business'?
- It is essential to avoid the need for excessive bureaucracy - this smacks of "jobs for the boys" within the councils
- Anything to discourage illegal drivers and encourage more local people setting up businesses would be great
- the council has no bearing on the way the business is conducted , as long as it is run in accordance with the councils rules, and if a plan is set for the council, will it further provide support as this is more a (nosy) rule rather than a helpful one
- A council has no right to apply such rules. This is supposed to be a free democracy.
- Not within remit of council to dictate how someone should run their business.
- Who would be assessing the business plan, and how would they be qualified to do this? What criteria would be set out for the business plan? This appears to be a very vague and generic statement.

Other issues of interest

Maximum age of vehicles (see 'policy vehicle 8')

The councils are considering introducing a maximum age for licensed vehicles to reduce emissions, improve safety and raise the overall standards of the vehicles. We are keen to hear your views about whether a maximum should be introduced and if appropriate, what this should be.

Which of the following three options do you prefer? (Please tick ONE box only)

27 (24%)	Option 1 - Maximum age of vehicle when first licensed is 5 Years and 7 years for specialist wheelchair adapted vehicles
40 (35%)	Option 2 - As above, but in addition no vehicles older than 10 years, or 12 years for wheel chair adapted vehicles, will be licensed
42 (37%)	Option 3 - No age restriction, no change from existing policies
1 (1%)	None of these
3 (3%)	Don't know

Please tell us why you prefer the option you have chosen.

69 (100%)

- Safety, road worthiness and 5/7 years is a good length of time considering the mileage over this time and the fact the drivers will tend to 'thrash' a company car.
- Safety in a collision
- Taxi vehicles should be safe and reliable and an age limit for vehicles will help ensure this.
- As long as the vehicle is compliant I do not see what an additional limit on age adds. Historic cars are also popular taxis in many places.
- A new car is expensive as long as it is safe and roadworthy age should not matter
- Test on merit
- Modern vehicles, even with the enhanced mileage a taxi is likely to undertake, should be able to last 10/12 years with proper maintenance and inspection (as coaches and busses do). Some regard must be given to the capital costs of running a taxi business and a shorter period for renewal could add a significant burden.
- Vehicles will have very high mileage after 10 -12 years and even with regular servicing will be more subject to breakdown with inconvenience to passengers.
- Safety & reliability is paramount
- Reliability
- Surely vehicles which are not so old are safer on the road
- Some of the Vargas taxis which are wheelchair adapted seem so old & poorly maintained that they are more like "boneshakers" on wheels

- Safety. Some taxis are in quite poor condition. It would also be good if they could display details of their last vehicle test.
- It is nonsense to bar a compliant vehicle which is otherwise in good condition on the grounds of age alone. The reduction in emissions achieved by moving up to a more modern vehicle is vastly outweighed by the environmental cost of using that vehicle to replace one which is older but in good condition
- If a vehicle is tested 3 times a year and its in a good all round condition why should drivers have to spend out buying newer vehicles when there is not the work there to warrant the amount spent on the vehicles
- Safety Reasons.
- Reduction of emissions especially in Oxford is incredibly important and this can only be achieved by using modern more adapted vehicles, also more modern vehicles are more likely to be adapted for wheelchair use.
- In the case of contract private hire wheelchair access vehicles, these vehicles work an average of 3 hours a day, 5 days a week and 38 weeks per year. They therefore are relatively low mileage (approx. 15000 miles per year) compared to normal taxis which can do up to 70000 and more. They are subject to 3 m.o.t. inspections per year and therefore kept in good working condition, this includes paintwork being to a good standard. In the case of V.O.S.A , they will continue to license any bus or coach without age restrictions as long as it meets the required test standards, and these type`s of vehicles as you realize do a huge amount of miles per year. We feel that there is no need for an age restriction or at least extend age to 10 and 15 years respectively.
- Quality and safety of vehicles should be keep to a higher level
- Safety and smartness
- Demonstrates a commitment by the owner.
- Safety
- Comfort, reliability, safety features
- Vehicles older than 5 years when first registered are not necessarily any safer, of higher standard or capable of lower emissions. The specification of the vehicle determines those factors. In addition, a vehicle 10 years old is not necessarily a bad, heavily emitting or unsafe vehicle - again the specification of that vehicle determines those criteria. In our business we may wish to register a Bentley for private hire, and it could well be 6 years old when first registered with VWHDC...does this make it an unsuitable vehicle for the work we would have for it? No. I strongly believe that imposing such regulation, across the board, with regard to age of vehicles, does not take into account the specific nature of our business and imposes tighter financial regulation which would most likely cause many operators to stick with older cars for longer - in so doing reversing the desire to achieve higher standards. During tough financial times the unnecessary additional restrictions, however well intentioned, is not welcomed, nor necessary.
- If the vehicle has been well maintained inside & out. Has undergone its regular compliance tests. I do not think the age matters. To replace a vehicle every 5 years would be very expensive. In my personal situation I have 2 x 8 seater vehicles that as long as the licence is in place I can operate them, BUT should I have to renew them due to their age my tilt seat is not approved by the Vale.
- A well maintained older vehicle is no more unsafe than a newer vehicle. Quote from The Department of Transport Best Practice (Section 32 Age Limits). It is perfectly possible for an older vehicle to be in good condition. So the setting of an age limit beyond which local authority will not licence vehicles may be arbitrary and inappropriate. But greater frequency of testing may be appropriate for older vehicles.
- Once a taxi has been used for a number of years with high mileage and ware and tear it should not be available of the carriage of passengers.
- Not all persons can afford new vehicles, this also provides better equal opportunity's for all prospective drivers as long as an approved test has been issued for the vehicle
- Because it suits both if my vehicles

- If there is no restriction some operators will use vehicles indefinitely
- as long as the vehicle passes an MOT test that should be fine
- MOST PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES ARE TOWARDS THE TOP END CARS LIKE BMW 7 MERCEDES S CLASS AUDI A8 WHICH MEANS THE OUTLAY IN THE FIRST PLACE IS MUCH HIGHER THAN IN A NORMAL CAR SO I THINK THE FIRST TIME LICENSED SHOULD BE OLDER SAY ABOUT 7 YEARS .
- Because there is not enough work to earn enough money to buy new cars. New cars are very expensive. This will result in a lot of the taxi drivers leaving which will result in high unemployment which will not be good for the economy.
- It is sensible
- All vehicles need to be in good condition and road-worthy. Their age is irrelevant.
- It is important vehicles are safe for purpose and wheelchair users, in particular, are safe and the vehicle can support a wheelchair.
- Keeping better vehicles for hire
- Freedom of choice. The cars are tested frequently and in this economic climate you would put small businesses under financial pressure if new vehicles need replacement
- Gives a chance for everybody to work
- Not broken, don't change it works ok
- Ability to pass MOT inspection is key. Age and mileage do not determine road worthiness. Businesses do not need the burden (cost) of changing/acquiring new fleet based on an anniversary.
- Unnecessary restriction on trade, if a vehicle has been certified as mechanically fit, then the age of the vehicle should not be [???
- Five and seven yrs are too low
- I think it's the safest
- After 5 years most vehicles need to be changed
- Smaller firms don't do the mileage that the larger firms do. Also known some newer high mileage cars being in worse condition than ones years older.
- Environmental concerns
- Could be v. heavy usage plus weight of w/chairs-person being transported will/could cause extreme wear & tear on safety precautions plus vehicle
- A ten year old vehicle is old enough & if looked after is still good enough for taxi, private hire. No older than 10 years.
- No other form of transport is subjected to any age restriction. The taxi trade does not produce the levels of revenue to carry such a burden. Consumer costs would need to increase dramatically.
- If testing is done as it should be and proprietors maintain their vehicles as they should, there is no need for age restriction. The extra cost in age restriction would put a lot of operators under great financial strain.
- British suitable vehicles difficult to obtain
- The council require MOTs every six months anyway, plus they require a compliance certificate so I do not see an age limit is required.
- But what age would vehicle be able to renew until? Why the increased age for WAV? Are they not capable of carrying out the same amount of mileage as a non WAV? Is a WAV safer than any other vehicle? If setting a maximum age for new applications, it is necessary to set a maximum age for renewals or the whole practice is pointless.
- So long as vehicles are safe, and are regularly certified as such, I see no reason to restrict ages of vehicles. Cars are substantially better engineered than in times gone by.
- There are a number of old bangers which are not suitable for use as taxis. I feel that anyone making a living from taxis should invest in modern vehicles.
- Maximum age of vehicle when first licensed should be 7 years. No vehicles older than 12 years old to be licensed
- Sets a standard but gives a generous leeway.

- To ensure the safest vehicles possible for transporting passengers, with special care facilities for the disabled.
- I can see a lot of the proposed requirements, if enforced, will mean expense and taxi companies passing on the bulk of this expense to customers. A well maintained slightly older vehicle seems a reasonable compromise in avoiding further cost.
- I think the newer vehicle is easier to check and keep safety standards higher.
- Provides more reliable vehicles for public.
- Higher mileage vehicles tend to have more problems.
- Environmental reasons
- To give all business a [?]
- Taxis deteriorate in quality very quickly.
- This isn't a prohibitive proposal to a serious operator.
- Absolute must. Will improve standards of service to public. This council going to do it.

Hackney carriage tariff (see ‘policy tariff 1’)

The tariff is a maximum figure that hackney carriage drivers can charge based on a range of factors including time of day or night and special occasions such as bank holidays.

South Oxfordshire is now the only council in England without a hackney carriage tariff and the council is considering introducing one. The Vale would like to consider the option of removing the tariff.

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither/ Nor	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Introduction of tariff for South Oxfordshire	41 (42%)	18 (18%)	5 (5%)	6 (6%)	27 (27%)	2 (2%)
Remove the tariff for Vale of White Horse*	25 (27%)	7 (8%)	12 (13%)	12 (13%)	33 (36%)	2 (2%)

* Three people responded to different option to ‘continue to have a tariff for Vale of White Horse’. One responded ‘strongly agree’, one ‘tend to disagree’ and one ‘strongly disagree’. These results are excluded from those above.

If you have any comments about introducing a tariff in South Oxfordshire or removing the tariff in Vale of White Horse please write in.

34 (100%)

- The cost can be very expensive. Didcot railway station to Ladygrove prices can vary from £6 to £20 for a max 3 mile trip. Again this depends on the driver and their honesty. Foreign national drivers seem to think they can charge the high end prices.
- Operators should be free to introduce their own tariff and inform licensing team
- During regatta and similar events the cost of the same journey can rise from £20 to £70. This must be stopped.
- Saves variation and being taken for a different sort of ride
- Within the limits of complying with the regulations, operators should be allowed to compete on price
- There definitely should be a maximum charge, the highest taxi fares I have ever paid must be in the SODC area (basically a complete rip off because its rural), also there is a problem that if I miss my last bus back from Oxford at 11pm then a taxi home could easily cost 40 or 50 pounds for a 15 mile journey.
- I have been ripped off so many times by drivers charging extortionate amounts for very short distances - once £18 for a 2 mile journey at night!
- I believe there should be a Tariff but set by the owners NOT by the council
- Protection for the consumer from being over charged.
- All meters should display the same tariff
- There should be no tariff in South Oxfordshire because there is no way enough work at the taxi ranks and the stations. All the work that is in this area is all private hire so all the prices

are agreed by the passenger before the journey. So there is no need to introduce a tariff system.

- People should know the maximum they can be legally charged and what the charges relate to.
- The council should not interfere in a businesses ability to decide it's pricing to customers, it should remain a free market.
- It is [?] that South Oxfordshire does not have a Hackney Carriage tariff, thus, a tariff should be introduced, as a metered tariff provides visual [??] for the customer that they are being charged correctly and reasonably.
- Don't know why Vale has one and what went into consideration but if it is just to be uniform with rest of country it is NO GOOD Reading has a different policy to all England concerning bus lane so should the rest follow?
- I agree with what Pryor's propose. Also SODC are not the only council in England without a hackney carriage tariff
- I agree with Pryor's suggestion on tariff control
- If there are no guide lines on charge the public can be very easily exploited - even more so the vulnerable & they use these vehicles frequently.
- Every taxi should start & finish on the same tariff. In the Vale there are taxis with different tariffs.
- Council tariffs are a farce and do not benefit the public, Market forces decide pricing.
- No other type of business is controlled by a council as to what they may charge.
- Prices have risen sharply in recent years and months, due to underhand operators taking advantage of vulnerable people, and pushing existing operators out of established working areas.
- It seems incongruous that the only council in England without a tariff should like to introduce one and their neighbour should like to consider removing theirs. It should be a requirement to have a tariff.
- All hackney carriages should be fitted with a taxi meter of approved specification. All operators should declare to the Council the tariff that the meter is set to. Operators can only amend their tariff with one month's notice to the council. Each taxi must display their tariff on a tariff card that is clearly visible to the passenger.
- Taxi tariff should be set by the council All Hackney Carriages must have a meter.
- Removal of VoWH tariffs would leave customers open to financial abuse.
- I do not believe taxi companies are transparent with the information they give on booking. It should not be up to a private customer to state that they are a private and not a corporate customer (e.g. when using a company phone of which the operator recognises the number) and so incur a surprisingly higher cost than indicated by the operator when in the cab. Operators should also not be allowed to drop a private booking quite openly because a more lucrative company booking has come up. First come, first served, should be the rule in the taxi world, too!
- The current tariff adopted by Pryor's & associated Didcot taxis works well.
- See Pryor's Car response on separate email.
- Market forces will decide.
- Why do the local authority think they should interfere in businesses? Do they set the price of beer in pubs that they licence?
- I fully agree with the proposal made by Pryor's Cars.
- Keep telling council we are private businesses with individual overheads. Either set the tariff to cover employers needs those of us who run from commercial premises and not to suit one man bands from home or get rid of tariff. We pay VAT don't forget.
- Council should not control increase in tariff if it remains.

Other comments

If you have any other comments about the draft policy please write in below.

25 (100%)

Are you responding mainly as....?

52 (46%)	resident
52 (46%)	taxi driver or company
1 (1%)	councillor
8 (7%)	on behalf of an organisation
1 (1%)	other

- All drivers should carry their CRB at all times. Too many dodgy companies seem to be operating without the correct insurance locally.
- Charge for services and licensing to recover costs. A tariff is just another tax on mobility.
- Having arranged NVQ training twice before and been let down I think SODC could introduce a council supported scheme to enable drivers to achieve this qualification. Many of our more senior drivers, with years of experience, should have 'Grandfather rights'
- The policy should, as far as is possible, be consistent with the conditions laid down in adjacent Council areas to assist taxi firms with several outlets in several Council areas.
- It would be nice to think that those setting policy were competent in the punctuation of written English, and in particular, the use of apostrophes.
- Vale of white horse have a very good wheelchair service for passengers to use. a NUMBER OF TAXI DRIVERS HAVE BOUGHT WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VEHICLES AT GREAT EXPENSE FOR PEOPLE NOT TO USE THEM AND NOT GET A CALL TO USE THEM. ALSO THERE SHOULD BE A NEW POLICY IN. AS IN LINE WITH OTHER COUNCILS CUSTOMERS SHOULD START USING THE QUEUE SYSTEM AS IN ALL OTHER TOWNS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.
- Regarding appendix H - enforcement, paragraph 4: "verbal" means expressed in words. If you wish to differentiate between a written and a spoken warning, "verbal" should be replaced by "oral".
- I have a friend who is a taxi driver. He takes a lot of abuse, especially late at night and more so at the weekend. With all this additional red tape that you are constraining the drivers/operators with, what are you doing to help keep them safe?
- You do not appear to have made provisions for women travelling alone in taxi's I have experienced some very strange incidents (particularly in Banbury) in which I have been asked if I was married, another in which a driver told me he was a Christian and started playing me a CD of his daughter after a trip to a studio to sing etc, another a very long time ago involved a driver asking if we wanted to hear him play his trumpet which he drove around with. There do not appear to be any options for requesting a female driver for female passengers or children etc.
- The suggested additions/amendments all make perfect sense and should enhance the safety and security of passengers raise the safety and quality levels of vehicles and the services supplied by the licensed drivers and operators and hopefully wheedle out the less professional operators and drivers
- Why are taxi fares so expensive in this area - when I visit friends in Cheshire taxis are so much cheaper and yet petrol is the same everywhere
- With regard to vehicle certification for disabled access. A minibus with 8 passenger max be accepted when a COIF has been issued for that vehicle also removing permanently a number of seats to reduce to 8. These larger vehicles are required to gain required floor space, some wheelchairs take the space of 4 passenger seats a vehicle with a COIF is certified by VOSA safe to carry a specified no of passengers in excess of 8 so must be safe

for up to 8. The current disability awareness course is completely inadequate with no content for wheelchair accommodation at all and is not worth the current fee enforced or lose your licence threat. Do not make retrospective changes to vehicle certification only those that applied at the time & are still within the time frame for 1st application to licence ie. not more than 5/7yrs old. Listen to operators you are not always correct as has been proven recently if you do not know ask VOSA not smaller unauthorised bodies who only put forward what they would like to see but do not understand the full picture of reality. Also licence a vehicle for private hire use ie 8 passenger max, whilst still being a PCV i.e. over 8 passengers access vehicles are very expensive and do not get the use that saloon cars do this would allow the vehicle to be driven by PH & PCV drivers the latter using a tacho as required by law. The vehicle can be MOT tested twice and hold certs from VOSA & local garage for PH use this is legal. In current difficult times this would cost you nothing but would help the operators to substantiate high purchase costs of vehicles because specialised vehicles could then gain more use rather than be restricted to the 8 passengers max. The tacho would be used as `out of scope` during PH duties and `in scope` for PCV work. By doing this the vehicle would be subject to 3 MOT`s per year regardless of its age (over 3yrs).

- Why does the Vale seem to be siding with South Oxfordshire policies
- A badly thought out document that introduces a whole new raft of measures which are not needed and can only add greatly to the operators costs and be of no real benefit to anybody (except the chosen five garages)
- I would also like to see fines introduced for taxis running their engines whilst waiting, for dropping cigarette ends all over the place, and for creating a noise nuisance with loud talk in residential areas.
- As you have most email address why don't you email us reminders if it wasn't for David Pryor chasing up who was going to meeting, wouldn't have been aware of it. Spoke to quite a few people since who didn't know but were able to attend the Vale one instead
- Too many vehicles & their drivers can be dirty and shabby & I do mean both. It is important that the public are able to get into a vehicle and feel that the owner has respect for themselves & their vehicles, this way the public should feel comfortable in that they too will be treated with respect.
- Many of the suggested changes are going to incur increase costs. The trade is already contracting since 2006. A survey such as this is not fair as its being offered to the public in a distorted format. The outcome will inevitably cause a further slump in trade, and will lead to increased cost to the consumer, and a reduced service as a consequence. The only gain is increased powers to the licensing office.
- Wheelchair accessible vehicles should allow passengers to travel in their wheelchair forward facing, this goes along with your statement that taxis do not have side facing seats for safety reasons. The wheelchair should be firmly fixed to the floor of the taxi and the wheelchair passenger should have the seat belt fitted, the same as other passengers. The other issue with not allowing rear loading vehicles is that in many areas there is not a sufficient kerb to deploy the ramp at a safe gradient for a side loading vehicle.
- There should be an online reporting form/telephone service for customers to report poor standards. Standards of driving have dropped substantially in recent years and months.
- Would be help full to make it easier for elderly people to have easy access to a vehicle, who are not in wheel chairs, my 74 year old dad with 2 hip replacements hurt his arm getting into a taxi because the front passenger door did not open wide enough, and he hurt his arm and shoulder trying to get in the car.
- Can it not be made mandatory for a 24 hour service, even if on a rota basis. In Wantage it is virtually impossible to get taxi after 11p.m. on weekdays and after midnight on weekends. you have to use Pryor's of Didcot or someone from Oxford.
- Recommended Tariff Charge
 Tariff 1: For up to 4 people between 07:00 and 22:59 charged at: First mile at £5.00 followed by £2.50 per each follow mile. Waiting time charged at £0.50 per minute.
 Tariff 2: For up to 4 people between 23:00 and 06:59 or for 5 or more people to be charged at: First mile at £7.00 followed by £3.00 per each follow mile. Waiting time

charged at £0.50 per minute. Tariff 3: Bank holiday rate charged at First mile at £8.00 followed by £4.00 per each follow mile. Waiting time charged at £0.50 per minute. Soiling Charge to be set at £80.00

- Why has the most critical question been hidden as number 20 in this questionnaire when it is number 1 in the policy document.
- It is about time that the council discussed at length with the trade any changes to policy etc and be led by the trade. We are the ones running our businesses and most of us know what will work. We have to work together and we must be allowed to make a profit.

Taxi driver or company

What type of taxi trade are you involved in?

43 (74%) Hackney carriage
15 (26%) Private hire

If responding on behalf of a company or association please give its name

27 (100%)

If responding on behalf of a company or association please tell us the role you are responding in

18 (100%)

Councillors

Are you responding as...?

0 (0%) county councillor
0 (0%) district councillor
1 (100%) parish councillor

Area you represent

0 (0%)

Organisations/ Other

Organisation you represent (if applicable)

8 (100%)

- MIGGS (Mobility Issues Group for Goring and Streatley)
- CardPOS Europe Ltd
- LUXICARS HIRE LTD
- Fugro GEOS Ltd
- Oxfordshire Unlimited
- South Oxfordshire Taxi Drivers Association
- Didcot Access Group
- Shrivenham Parish Council

Your role

8 (100%)

Are you male or female?

70 (71%) Male 29 (29%) Female

How old are you?

0 (0%)	Under 16
1 (1%)	16-24
9 (9%)	25-34
17 (16%)	35-44
30 (29%)	45-54
28 (28%)	55-64
16 (16%)	65+

Do you have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long term impact on your ability to carry out normal day to day activities?

i.e. poor hearing, poor sight (except if can be corrected by glasses), significant mobility impairment, mental health condition, learning disabilities, dyslexia, heart conditions, multiple sclerosis, HIV, diabetes, cancer, epilepsy

13 (13%)	Yes	87 (87%)	No
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What is your ethnic group?

86 (88%)	White - English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, British
0 (0%)	White - Irish
0 (0%)	White - Gypsy or Irish Traveller
3 (3%)	White - Any other white background
0 (0%)	Mixed - White & Black Caribbean
0 (0%)	Mixed - White & Black African
1 (1%)	Mixed - White & Asian
0 (0%)	Mixed - Any other mixed background
0 (0%)	Black or Black British - Caribbean
1 (1%)	Black or Black British - African
0 (0%)	Black or Black British - Any other Black background
1 (1%)	Asian or Asian British - Indian
1 (1%)	Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
0 (0%)	Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi
0 (0%)	Asian or Asian British - Chinese
1 (1%)	Asian or Asian British - Any other Asian background
0 (0%)	Arab
3 (3%)	Other ethnic group

(Please write in)

4 (100%)

EMAIL TELEPHONE AND ONLINE RESPONSES

Resident email (South)

Last year we asked a restaurant 2 miles from our home to call us a cab so we could leave. We had been dropped at the restaurant by a friend. The restaurant called us a mini cab they had used before. At the end of the 4 minute 2 mile journey the driver said that's £35 please – we were absolutely gob smacked to say the least. He said it was because he had had to come from Wallingford to pick us up in Britwell Salome to then take us to Watlington and he would then have to go back to Wallingford. We paid the fare and vowed never to use taxis again as in our area we just seem to get ripped off. Taxis should have standard or capped charges if they are licensed by the council and that would give consumers confidence that they could trust the service and that the fare would be reasonable. The charge should also be for the journey the customer requests...not additional miles the customer is not requesting to be carried. We live in an area with little public transport and no taxi firms.

Taxi driver email (South)

Below are points that I have responded to and provided my views or concerns on regarding the proposed changes

As a south Oxfordshire licensed Hackney carriage driver based from Henley I would like to express my views and put my points across on the proposed changes you will be consulting on over the coming weeks.

Regarding wheel chair accessible vehicles, I agree that there should be a number off vehicles in the area to cater for disabled citizens of each area in the borough, however this should be based on some research or a survey to asses the demand for such vehicles before anything is enforced, this should then be put forward to operators off each company to have a number off disabled vehicles as part off there fleet after it is known what demand there actually is for such service in the area.

- What type off offences will be considered as minor where penalty points will apply to drivers, you have to take into consideration that drivers who work late hours at weekends suffer abuse from drunk customers and at times they can be violent when in a group, refuse to pay for a service they have been provided with, run off without paying at all, what do you propose in terms off driver security and ensuring that a driver will receive his fare when a service has been provided to a customer. I would like to have further details on the types off offences you will consider for penalty points before you implement these.
- I strongly agree that each and every driver should be able to communicate with his or her customer in a good form off spoken English in order to be able to understand where the customer wishes to be taken to, he or she should be able to read sign posts along the journey, a ability to be able to read and write should apply to this in order to be able to fully communicate in a acceptable manner.
- Roof signs were recently changed in the South Oxfordshire borough and standardised, therefore I will be disappointed if I have to in the space off 2 years or so invest in another roof sign, I believe the current roof signs we use in the SODC borough are adequate and large enough with all necessary details displayed clearly.
- Making changes to the age off a vehicle before it can be considered for a hackney license needs to be considered carefully and has to be a fair procedure, I would propose that a vehicle

should not be more than 10 years old, for vehicles under 5 years there should only be 1 Mot test requirement per year, vehicles over 5 years should be Mot tested twice per year this is the current process at present, the only change is no vehicle should be above the age of 10 years. If every driver had to have a vehicle under 5 years off age this would seriously put a lot of drivers under financial strains and difficulties taking into consideration there are already high costs involved with having a vehicle fully licensed and insured with some drivers like my self only recently having changed my vehicle.

- I agree and will strongly recommend a standardised tariff card for all Hackney drivers from SODC (Not a meter as most of the ones currently used in the borough are tampered with and recently I have noticed that customers prefer to agree a price rather than travel in one fitted with a meter and end up paying excessive charges at the end of their journey from the rank in Hart street, these fixed rates need to be in line with inflation, taking into consideration that licensing costs from the council have risen considerably over the last few years for example a licensing plate cost was £75.00 today it is over £300.00, cost for drivers licenses have also gone up considerably, Fuel costs keep rising in the last year at a faster pace than normal, Insurance costs keep rising, Yet the minimum fares in Henley remains the same as they were 5 years ago, all the increases have had a significant affect on all drivers on top of this business has declined in particular the late night trade from the ranks, there is only one active rank in Henley at present on Hart Street a number of late night bars and clubs have been forced to close down it has affected the trade by at least 40% so I hope these fixed tariffs will be fair taking the above into consideration.

I am willing to propose a fixed standard minimum charge of at least £5.00 with an additional charge of at least £1.80 per mile thereafter before the hours of 24.00 and after these hours until 06.00am the minimum fare should be at least £7.00 with an additional charge of £2.30 per mile thereafter.

Below are some concerns or points I wish to raise and be considered for consultation or change in the next meeting:

- As stated above there is currently one active taxi rank in Henley, there is a genuine need for at least another rank if not two as the one on Hart Street tends to get really over loaded on the weekends with vehicles, at times making it difficult to find a space for drivers, private cars are left in the spaces on the rank making it even more difficult for drivers to park, there is scope for an additional rank on Bell Street or some where close to the fast food takeaways for weekends only between 10pm and 3am as there is no work from the station at all in the evenings, additional ranks must be considered and advertised clearly.

- In the last year a number of bars/clubs have been forced to close down this has had a knock on affect on trade for taxi drivers at weekends business late night has gone down by 40%, what is SODC doing in order to attract the public to come to Henley or to attract someone to take on these currently vacated and empty premises and turn them into attractions for night goers.

- With the 2012 Regatta approaching what are the councils plans on tackling unlicensed drivers or drivers licensed by other councils plying for illegal trade in Henley during the regatta, every year a huge number of drivers arrive from every corner during the regatta it makes it unfair on those that serve Henley 12 months off the year pay their fees insurances etc and during that week are unable to park on the rank for business, the rank during this busy period has been limited to 4-5 cars by the police and the council when the demand is for much more with only the station and Hart street, where are regular drivers from Henley supposed to go to for work. Is there a possibility to allow only SODC hackney taxis onto Hart street and divert normal traffic through a different route after certain hours for example from 10pm until 3am and extend the rank for more cars on Hart street from 5pm, please make some serious thoughts regarding this matter and help and work with those drivers that are licensed with you during this busy period.

I am an active member off the SODC Taxi drivers association; I will be sharing my thoughts and ideas in a meeting with all the members in our next general meeting,

The concerns highlighted above are shared by other drivers I work with in Henley in particular the rank issues and decline in business and the Regatta issues as above.

I would appreciate a response from you on all off the above points I have raised either in writing or by e-mail.

Resident comments by telephone (South)

Overall support penalty points scheme. As a driver he is regularly cut up, sees taxis doing three point turns in the road in the centre of Henley stopping traffic in both directions because they won't use the one way system. This relates to Hart St taxi rank in Henley.

Overall support the spoken English test. Frequently use taxis. Sometimes can't understand the taxi driver to give correct fare and they can't understand your directions.

In Henley, by the rail station, there are public toilet which are used regularly by taxi rank drivers. They park on lines and use the external drinking water tap to wash cars and car mats. Concerns are about hygiene, use of public facility being abused, limiting access by other people to toilets. On average there are between eight and ten cars with Asian drivers queuing there.

Wallingford Town Council email (South)

Wallingford Town Council has now had the opportunity of studying the above policy and is in general agreement with its aims. It would however take issue with Policy Vehicle 1 which deals with numbers.

As you may be aware, there are 5 spaces for taxis along the east side of our Town Hall. On many occasions we have seen more than a dozen taxis parked around the Market Place on double yellow lines obstructing not only the roads but the free passage of the buses which constantly use the area in front of the Town Hall.

Some of these taxis appear to originate from High Wycombe and the presence of taxis from outside of Wallingford is quite clearly exacerbating this situation and we would request that this "overcrowding" situation is addressed. We would suggest that this could be achieved in two ways:

- 1) Restrict the number of taxis permitted to ply for hire in Wallingford.
- 2) Any taxis found parked illegally and outside of the agreed taxi rank should be penalised with penalty points as laid down in Policy Enforcement 1 and 2.

This is an escalating problem in Wallingford and it is incorrect to state that there is no evidence of any difficulty arising from the policy of not limiting the number of hackney carriages that you licence. This matter has been brought to your attention by phone on numerous occasions in the recent past.

Shiplake Parish Council email (South)

Following our SPC meeting I am writing on behalf of council to add our support to the installation of fare meters in the local taxis as per the VOWH scheme

Taxi company/driver email (South)

As a taxi owner -driver, I do agree with Pryors suggestion on tariff control.

Kind Regards

Goldstar Taxi Didcot

Taxi company email (South)

Hills taxis support Pryors in response to setting your own fares.

Hills Taxis also believe there should be a separate tariff and licence for school drivers doing education transport runs. 80% of our staff only do school contracts working only during School term time. We carry a lot of special needs children with escorts that have been badged by Oxfordshire County Council.

SODC current licensing fees are slowly strangling our business due to your excessive licence fees. I have just licensed a school driver and it has cost in excess of £500 just to do school contracts. Your policy is going to effect how Hills Taxis can take on new contracts effecting special need children in the local area. It has got to the point where it is no longer profitable for us. If nothing gets sorted over this issue I am going to talk to the local press about how you took the 3 year licence to 1 year at the same cost and then 3 years ago took the 1 year licence to 3 and tripled the charges. This rip off is going to affect the service that we provide to the local community with special needs children. I agree that the drivers need licensing but if all you are doing is school runs and can prove the routes you are doing. You should not have to pay the exorbitant fees you are charging.

Regards

Hills Taxis

Taxi company email (South)

Whilst Pryors are generally very supportive of the overall policy document and its objectives, we:

- object strongly to the proposal regarding a Hackney Carriage Tariff proposals (question 20 of the Consultation questionnaire); and
- would like to comment on the proposals for a Joint Policy.

In the following sections, we set out our concerns about these two specific proposals and the effect we believe they will have on the public, as well as Taxi service providers. Additionally, in relation to the proposal for a Hackney Carriage Tariff for South Oxon, we put forward, what we believe to be, an alternative, which introduces the consumer protection the Council seeks, whilst also allowing the Taxi service providers to compete against each other and to continue to provide very high levels of service to customers.

Proposal to introduce Hackney Carriage Tariff control in South Oxon

Tariff control has been an option available to Councils since the 1847 Town Police Clause Act and most councils in England decided to 'set tariffs' when adopting the 1976 Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act.

This was normally linked to the restriction on the number of licenses issued, protecting the licence holders from free competition. South Oxon was one of a small number of councils that decided to allow taxi operators to decide on a price at which they wished to offer a service their clients required. Pryors feel that that policy has been justified by the competition and quality of service available in the District.

Contrary to the Council's draft policy statement, South Oxon is not the only Council in England choosing to not set a tariff. South Oxon is joined by:

Epping Forest
Maldon
North Cornwall
North Devon
South Norfolk
South Derbyshire
Rutland
Wealden

The policy document also is incorrect in stating that the tariff does not apply to pre-booked journeys. A Hackney Carriage vehicle would not be allowed to charge higher than the set tariff on any journey within the district. This would have a major effect on the service provided to rural villages in the District.

The current position in South Oxon allows Taxi service providers to set their own tariff; in doing this the provider is open to competition from all other providers and in most towns you can find a wide range of tariffs available, all that reflect the level of service offered by the provider. All the towns within the district now have far greater choice of supplier than a decade ago and competition is completely open.

This provides the public with choice on price and service level. It also allows the service provider the freedom to decide on the type and level of service that they choose to offer. This open market approach has seen higher levels of service and lower prices on offer in South Oxon than any neighbouring District.

Pryors have operated a high quality taxi and Private Hire company in Didcot since 1955. Our company has grown and prospered under a licensing regime that since the formation of South Oxfordshire District Council in the 1970s, whilst ensuring public safety, has always been willing to allow market forces and entrepreneurship to bring innovation, quality and competition to the Taxi trade in this area. This has for 40 years seen South Oxon not 'following the norm' but allowing what it feels is best for the District.

This has led to Pryors being one of many quality taxi service providers established in South Oxon, whose services are not only appreciated within this District but also by a large number of customers in neighbouring Districts who prefer to source South Oxon licensed suppliers in preference to their more local operators.

Whilst Pryors fully support the Council's efforts to ensure public safety we wish to state that it is our belief that allowing Taxi service providers to innovate and compete in a free market is even more crucial in achieving public safety than stringent, prescriptive policy.

If the council were to set the tariff, Pryors believe that the public would see a similar compression of the choice available in the service levels available that can be seen in other Districts and crucially;

- A dramatic reduction in availability of rural services
- Even fewer Wheelchair accessible vehicles offered
- Eradication of weekday late night services
- Almost non existent weekend day time on demand services
- A reduction in availability of larger multi seat vehicles (6,7,8)

Pryors accept the Council faces problems in one town in the District, caused by unscrupulous freelance drivers; and in an attempt to tackle that proportionately, whilst not constraining the benefits of competition in an open market, we have the following to put forward as an alternative to the current proposal, which could also be adopted by Vale as well as South Oxon.

Alternative proposal

Currently South Oxon has no requirement for a taxi to have a taximeter fitted and used. To the general public this is no longer an acceptable practice. A member of the public expects to see the fare accumulate on a taximeter when hailing a vehicle and any new policy would be correct to demand it.

Pryors feel a new policy should require the following;

- All hackney carriages should be fitted with a taxi meter of an approved specification
- All hailed bookings must be charged as per taximeter
- All service providers should declare to the Council the tariff that the meter is set to
- Service providers can only amend their tariff with one month's notice to the council
- Each taxi must display their tariff on a tariff card that is clearly visible to the passenger

This proposal is clearly practical because it matches almost exactly a proposal set out in the draft policy in regard to Private Hire vehicles with taximeters.

The public would benefit from genuine price/service competition but with the protection of only paying the legitimate price clearly displayed on the meter.

The service provider will be able to set a tariff that allows them to offer a range of services their customers wish to receive at a viable price.

And it would stop unscrupulous service providers inflating prices without notice, because the Council will be able to verify the correct fare applicable.

Adopting this policy in Vale is likely to see a much improved range of taxi services available to the public in that District.

Overall view of Joint Policy

Pryors can understand the desire and logic of, after merging licensing management, to have a 'joint statement of policy'. This makes practical sense on an officer level.

However for Council members and Taxi service providers it would set challenges.

Members will find themselves dealing with 'out of district' matters and may find themselves being asked to take decisions that are not in the interests of their own District to rectify a problem in the other district, that has no relevance to the district they represent.

Taxi service providers have established their business models and practices within guidelines they have been given over many years by consistent local policy. Radical changes in policy could lead to the need for major restructuring of an operators business to allow them to fit into the confinements created by a new policy.

Pryors feel that a more sensible approach would be for the two councils to adopt separate policies that have matching administrative procedures for both councils but allow for each council to maintain their own individual policies on subjects that are currently radically different between the councils. This would allow service providers to maintain well established, good business models and members to focus on matters relating to their own District without being compromised by issues concerning a neighbouring District.

However, generally Pryors find the policy well written and a very workable document. We have recently provided the Council with feedback from our Licensing Adviser who commends the officers for the way the document is set out and its clarity. Our adviser has made suggestions that will give the policy more clarity and less likely to be subjected to legal challenge.

Taxi company email (South)

Firstly please allow me to concur with the proposals and opinions put forward by Pryor's Taxis as regards tariffs and the creation of a joint authority over both SODC and the Vale. I believe Pryor's proposal does articulate my own feelings exactly. There are only a couple of small points I would like to comment upon.

1. Regarding setting a maximum age for vehicles I believe we should retain the present status of no restrictions. The DTI guidance clearly points out that an older vehicle may be in a perfectly safe and serviceable condition. I agree that provided an older vehicle is properly maintained, is presentable and clean inside and out and passes two MOT's per year that age is irrelevant. Please retain the current policy.

2. Finally as regards enforcement I firmly believe in same and have actively engaged with SODC officers regarding the issue of illegal, unlicensed drivers. As regards the proposed plan to establish a penalty points system I would like to caution Council officers to think hard about how such a scheme is operated. It may be difficult to determine the truth of allegations from the public without corroborating evidence. In this instance how will any such complaint be fairly dealt with? Fair to the complainant and fair to the driver. In any case all this may be academic as a very recent court case in Cardiff held that penalty point schemes may be regarded as unlawful. A final judgment is yet to be made but is it fair that a council should take on the role of judge, jury and executioner? I hope this proposal will be very carefully scrutinised and considered by SODC.

MacNaughton Executive Car Services

Thame Town Council email (South)

Following Thame Town Council Planning & Environment Committee meeting held on 29 May 2012, Thame Town Council resolved to support the Draft Taxi Licensing Policy proposed by South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils.

Oxford Mail comments posted in response to press release about consultation

Abberdon says...

Blimey, this is a can of worms isn't it?

How about taxi companies working 7 days a week, all year round, for a start?

And how about getting drivers to leave their seats to ring door bells, open car doors for the elderly,

use cars that fit wheel chairs, walking frames and shopping in too?
How about getting them all to drive a real 'taxi'?

07/04/12

wizardofox2 says...

A can of worms indeed! ever tried to get a cab on a Tuesday evening in Abingdon? never any on the rank and they wont come out if you ring them either. Why is Vargas on average 25% cheaper than the rest? even after midnight? Since doing away with the East St Helens rank, new ranks have popped up everywhere, in Broad St, Bath St and Queen St, however they're rarely used by taxis but because they're now classified as ranks they deny other motorists valuable parking slots. The newly created rank outside Barclays bank is a classic example, you can no longer use it as a quick stop for the cash point machine or to pick up a take away from the numerous businesses there and even with the extra length they now have, taxis still park all over the new pavement outside ASK. The Vale have issued too many licences so much so that owners just cherry pick when they want to work, there is even one owner who lives in Weymouth and travels up to Abingdon to work Friday/sat and Sunday then goes back to sunny Weymouth on Monday! the entire system needs a complete overhaul.

07/04/12

mickeybear says...

The Vale has some "previous" on the taxi front, and earned themselves the dubious distinction of getting slammed in a House of Lords committee report for having the virtually the highest fares and the lowest standards of any local authority. Interestingly, even the Hackney carriage owners' own professional body actually wrote in to denounce the example given by the Vale, and specifically highlighted the appalling record of aged taxis being allowed to remain on the road, despite their contribution to the air pollution problems that continue to blight the Town (which - as predicted - have got no better since the scheme was introduced, despite the lower emissions of most cars and other vehicles now on the roads), and complaining that the pricing structures operated by the Vale were distorting the market.

A big part of the problem was the excessive dominance of a particular fleet owner, who seemed able to convince councillors to go against common sense every time this matter came up for discussion.

My own suggestions would be as follows:

1. No owner allowed to hold more than 20% of licences issued;
2. Any vehicle over 5 years old to be required to pay a double fee;
3. No vehicle over 10 years old to be allowed to hold a licence;
4. Any vehicle found flouting the ban on sitting at the rank with an idling engine to have their licence removed after no more than two written warnings;
5. Full CRB checks on all drivers to be carried out. Any drivers found to have had convictions for offences of dishonesty or violence against the person to be deemed unfit to hold a licence;
6. Any driver who accumulates more than 9 penalty points to lose their licence;
7. Any driver found guilty of an offence carrying 6 or more penalty points to be required to inform the authority immediately, on pain of permanent exclusion from the register if found to have failed to do so within two weeks of the conviction (even if an appeal is lodged, when any ultimate decision on fitness should be stayed until the outcome of the appeal);
8. Any driver with a conviction for careless or dangerous driving to have their licence withdrawn immediately (if an appeal is lodged, the licence would be suspended until the outcome of the appeal);
9. A 50% reduction on the licence fee should be granted for vehicles with wheelchair access (this provision would not override the ban on vehicles over 10 years old);
10. The Licensing Committee should include three lay members, chosen by a publicly announced selection procedure. The votes of all three lay members against the grant of a licence should have suspensory effect, pending an appeal hearing

Taxi company email (Vale)

Findlay School Transport.

As I live on Hinksey Hill in Oxford I am obliged to have my company licensed through VWHDC which is fine.

My contracts, however are with the Integrated Transport Section of the Oxfordshire County Council to provide transport for disabled children in the around Oxford to attend the following Special schools:

John Watson – Wheatley
Cherwell School – Oxford
Kingfisher School – Abingdon

The vehicles are not used for any other work as private hire vehicles.

Our drivers and escorts are not obliged to travel anywhere in the VWHDC except for the Kingfisher run to and from Oxford.

Is there not a possibility that there could be a different category for companies like ourselves who have no wish to make ourselves available for other private hire work – perhaps issuing us with a different colour badge which would preclude us from other private hire work and only being licensed for the morning and evening work with the schools.

Perhaps the VWHDC could then consider whether it was absolutely necessary to charge mature people (whom I consider appropriate for the caring aspect of this work) for geography and financial tests as no money changes hands on our routes and it is unlikely that they will get lost when they travel the same route everyday.

Is the age of the car really relevant when they are tested every four months – more expense for hard pressed small businesses.

I consider the CRB an insult to my staff bearing in mind their character and their maturity but I know that this is out of your hands.

I would appreciate it if you would take the above views into consideration during your review.

Resident email (Vale)

My preference would be to have taxi's branded so that they all have the same colour scheme as in other towns I have visited. You can never be too careful in today's society, and with numerous firms popping up, it would give me more comfort that I am entering a fully licenced taxi and not just 'Joe Bloggs' setting up and taking custom from licensed firms.

I would also like to see taxi's prohibited from parking in the Market Place in Abingdon. We have such an historical town, but taxi's clutter the area, have no regard for others and I would like to see a rank that is removed from our historic town.

Taxi driver comments made via Twitter

- There isn't enough work in the town [Abingdon] for Wheelchair friendly taxis. I know that for a fact after laying out £26,000 for one
- How in earth can residents have any knowledge on the taxi trade

South Taxi Consultation 31 May 2012: Notes by Robert Draper as group facilitator

Penalty Points Scheme:

Concerns about subjectivity of some breaches esp:

driver appearance. Very relative from drivers missing the tie when wearing a suit through to dirty jeans and a tee shirt.

There should be more points for a late medical.

Break down breach 3 which combines general failure to notify changes offences on medical, address and convictions.

Vehicle age:

One operator would like older age limits on vehicles but gave no indication of ages envisaged. He felt that more frequent compliance checks were appropriate.

Tariff:

All operators felt that a fixed tariff disproportionately affected larger operators due to the impact of VAT.

One operator was keen to see tariffs set by individual operators and these listed on the council's website. No tariffs to be changed without a month's notice.

Vale Taxi Consultation 15 June 2012: Notes by Robert Draper as group facilitator

All comments generic unless specifically identified by operator

Penalty Points Scheme:

One operator expressed a general concern about the need for such a scheme above the existing enforcement activities.

Vehicle age:

Percy's Travel wanted the WAV acceptance limit to be extended to 10 years and the maximum age to be 15 years

Pryor's happy with 10 year maximum age limit as proposed.

WAV:

Operators suggested differentiating the conditions between hackney carriage and private hire vehicles.

Pryor's wanted clarification to ensure that ramps would be acceptable as there appears to be some contradiction in the policy.

Ancil Services would like to see the council accepting a certificate of fitness from VOSA as standard on PSV.

Compliance Testing:

Operators would like all centres checked with VOSA as part of the contract.

Look at allowing a rectification period to sort out minor faults rather than vehicles immediately being taken off the road following a failure.

CRB/Certificate of Good Conduct

Operators expressed some frustration at delays caused by obtaining a C of GC slowing up getting drivers recruited and through the licensing process.

Disability Access Panel 18 April 2012.

Notes by Rob Draper

West Berkshire DC have mandatory DAT training with a three year refresher. Training includes use of restraint systems in vehicles through practical demonstration. They have found that the modern, lightweight wheelchairs are not structurally rigid enough to provide adequate protection in the event of an accident.

There was request that all railway stations should hold a list of accessible vehicles to allow people to request a suitable vehicle from specific operators dependent upon their requirements.

Not all wheelchair accessible vehicles take all types of chair. The larger electric chairs can be an issue especially with smaller adapted vehicles.

Vale Disability Access Group 13 June 2012

Attended by Rob Draper

No comments were made directly by the group but a number of copies of the paper consultation document were handed out.