

Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services)	Date of Meeting:	Tuesday 27 February 2024
Subject:	Taxi Issues in Sefton		
Report of:	Assistant Director of Place (Highways and Public Protection)	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Portfolio:	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services		
Is this a Key Decision:	No	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

A report on wider taxi issues in Sefton including how hackney carriages could be further encouraged within the Sefton area.

Recommendation(s):

- (1) Note the contents of this report
- (2) Request that a further update report is brought back to this committee following completion of the 2024 unmet demand survey

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

To further consider methods to strengthen the hackney carriage fleet following a detailed survey.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)

None

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs - none

(B) Capital Costs - none

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets):

The cost of the service is wholly recovered from the ring-fenced Taxi Licensing Trade Account (Revenue Budget BD12).

Legal Implications:

The Town Police Clauses Act 1847 and The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 provide that a district council may set out criteria when undertaking their taxi and private hire licensing functions and may attach to the grant of a licence such conditions as they may consider reasonably necessary.

Equality Implications:

There are no equality implications.

Climate Emergency Implications:

The recommendations within this report will

Have a positive impact	N
Have a neutral impact	Y
Have a negative impact	N
The Author has undertaken the Climate Emergency training for report authors	Y

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable:

Facilitate confident and resilient communities:

Commission, broker and provide core services: Improve the quality of Council controlled services and comply with legal requirements.

Place – leadership and influencer:

Drivers of change and reform:

Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity:

Greater income for social investment:

Cleaner Greener:

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Head of Corporate Resources has been consulted (FD 7546/24) and any comments have been incorporated into the report. The Chief Legal & Democratic Officer (LD 7546/24) has been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

None

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following the meeting

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Appendices:

None

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

1. Introduction/Background

1.1 At the meeting held on 12 September 2023, the following question was raised;

“Whilst considering the Cabinet Member Update, Sir Ron asked about encouraging black cabs in the Southport area. The Cabinet Member (Cllr. Lappin) suggested receiving a report back on wider taxi issues and the Committee agreed that:-

the Principal Officer, Licensing, be requested to submit a report on wider taxi issues in Sefton, including how black hackney cabs could be encouraged within the Sefton area, to a future meeting of the Committee”

1.2 The existing numerical restriction applied to hackney carriage vehicle licences has stood since 1986 when the limit was set at 271. Vehicle licences are issued under the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 as amended by the Transport Act 1985. The Council has discretion to limit the number of hackney carriage vehicles it chooses to licence for the purpose of controlling their numbers.

1.3 Current legislation states the only reason on which an application for a hackney carriage licence can be refused is that the Council is satisfied that there is no significant demand for hackney carriage services which is not being met. This

means that the Council is satisfied there are enough licensed hackney carriages to serve the public without issuing any more.

- 1.4 Following a Crown Court decision (29 February 2000) to uphold an appeal by a Sefton private hire driver for the issue of hackney carriage licences the Council agreed to carry out a hackney carriage demand survey in 2000/2001 and subsequently at intervals of 4 – 5 years, (Minute 58, 27 March 2000).
- 1.5 The last study was carried out in 2019 and found the following;

“The overall conclusion is that there is no evidence of council rank-based unmet demand that is significant and that the strong view of the Trade is that the limit should be retained and can be supported”

The report can be found here: <http://smbc-modgov-03/documents/s94190/Enc.%201%20for%20Hackney%20Carriage%20Unmet%20Demand%20Survey%202019.pdf>

2. Current Numbers

- 2.1 Sefton currently has 236 active hackney carriage vehicles and 266 licensed drivers – 35 vehicle licences are currently ‘on hold’ with the Council. In March 2020, the Council had 271 active hackney carriage vehicles with 330 licensed drivers. 119 drivers have a Southport address with the remainder being based in South Sefton or Liverpool City Region (LCR).
- 2.2 Since the 2020 pandemic, hackney carriage driver numbers have steadily reduced leading to vehicle owners being unable to find enough drivers to drive the 271 licensed vehicles.

3 Reasons for Decline

- 3.1 Vehicle owners have cited potential barriers to attracting more drivers such as rising costs, fall in trade and the requirement to sit a street knowledge test.
- 3.2 In 2021, the Council removed the requirement for an extra street knowledge test for hackney carriage drivers in order to obtain a licence but it appears to have had little impact on numbers. Rising costs of fuel and insurance have also been highlighted as a potential reason for decline.
- 3.3 Vehicle owners have indicated that there has been a shift away from night time working and more to day shifts by many drivers due to a perceived decline in demand for late night journeys in South Sefton. Many hackney drivers now accept journeys via private hire operators which will likely mean that they could be working anywhere in the LCR and not within Sefton.
- 3.4 Despite a recent rise in hackney carriage tariffs (October 2023) which are regulated by the Council, private hire operator fares are unregulated and many drivers are finding income via this method more attractive especially when fare ‘multipliers’ are applied during busy periods.

4 Unmet Demand Survey

- 4.1 The 2019 report concluded that the restricted number of 271 vehicles should be maintained and that there was no significant 'unmet demand' in Sefton and stated the following:

"Overall service to the public in Sefton has deteriorated in the period since the last survey. Matters appear worse in Bootle than in Southport. However, the overall service is generally appreciated, and overall there has been less reduction in rank-based demand than in most other places, just 5% compared to much higher reductions over shorter periods in other licensing areas. This suggests there are some very positive elements to the local trade. Usage levels are also very high despite the concerns – which may well account for the deterioration in service given the same number of vehicles operating. The overall conclusion is that there is no evidence of council rank-based unmet demand that is significant and that the strong view of the Trade that the limit should be retained can be supported."

- 4.2 The next survey is due to be carried out later this year and will conduct a wide ranging consultation across drivers, vehicle owners, users, business owners and trade representatives and carry out detailed surveys of rank activity across the borough. This would be an ideal opportunity to better shape the scope and range of the survey to properly understand and address any issues concerning the hackney carriage trade.

5 Conclusion

- 5.1 There has clearly been a decline in active vehicles and the number of licensed drivers. Although discussions with vehicle owners and drivers have suggested some of the reasons for this, the upcoming unmet demand survey would seem like an ideal opportunity to examine in more detail issues affecting the hackney carriage trade and look for solutions to declining numbers.