



AGENDA ITEM: 9

Report for:	Licensing and Health & Safety Enforcement Committee
Date of meeting:	26 January 2016
PART:	I
If Part II, reason:	-

Title of report:	Electric vehicles as taxis
Contact:	Ross Hill – Licensing Team Leader, Legal Governance
Purpose of report:	To propose a limited relaxation of vehicle licensing standards to enable a trial of electric vehicles as hackney carriages
Recommendations	<p>1.To allow the release of a maximum of 6 new hackney carriage vehicle licences ('plates'), to permit the use of pure electric vehicles, range-extended electric vehicles or plug-in hybrid electric vehicles only. All such licences would be subject to an additional condition that the licensed vehicle may be substituted by a pure electric vehicle, range-extended electric vehicle or plug-in hybrid electric vehicle only, subject to the relevant vehicle change procedures being completed.</p> <p>2.To disapply paragraph 2(a)(ii) and 2(b)(ii) of the Council's 'vehicle standards for hackney carriages, and 'vehicle standards for private hire vehicles' in respect of any application to licence a pure electric vehicle, a range-extended electric vehicle, or a plug-in hybrid electric vehicle as a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle.</p>
Corporate objectives:	<p>Safe and Clean Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the creation of a high quality, low carbon environment • Maintain a clean and safe environment <p>Dacorum Delivers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputation and profile delivery
Implications:	<p><u>Financial / Value for Money / Risk / Community Impact / Health And Safety</u></p> <p>None identified</p>
Consultees:	None. The proposal is for a small-scale trial of the use of electric vehicles as taxis, if successful then full consultation will be carried out prior to any decision to permanently amend the standards.

Background papers:	Vehicle pre-licensing standards: Hackney carriages Private hire vehicles
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	<p>Pure electric vehicle (PEV) – a vehicle powered solely by an electric motor powered from a bank of rechargeable batteries.</p> <p>Range-extended electric vehicle (REEV) – an electric vehicle with a built-in conventional engine (usually petrol), which is used to recharge the batteries while the vehicle is in motion.</p> <p>Plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV) – a conventional-fuel engine is supplemented by an electric motor powered by pre-charged batteries. At lower speeds, the batteries are recharged by the conventional motor.</p>

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. Dacorum has licensed a wide variety of vehicles for use in the borough as hackney carriages and private hire vehicles (referred to jointly herein as ‘taxis’). At the time of writing, there are a total of 414 vehicles so licensed – 229 hackney carriages (of which 41 are wheelchair-accessible), and 185 private hire vehicles.
- 1.2. Prior to being licensed as a hackney carriage or a private hire vehicle, any vehicle must satisfy a range of criteria relating to size, construction and power as set by the Council (linked above under ‘[background papers](#)’). The vehicle must also complete a combined MOT and compliance test at the Council’s selected testing station. The standards require that any new hackney carriage vehicle licence (i.e. not replacing an existing saloon car or MPV) must relate to a wheelchair-accessible vehicle.
- 1.3. In the last couple of years there has been a marked increase in the availability of electric-powered vehicles, with a range of pure electric and range-extended/plug-in hybrid electric vehicles now on the market which would be suitable for taxi use. Despite this, the vast majority of Dacorum’s taxis remain on traditional fuels – 411 of the licensed vehicles use either diesel (374) or petrol (37). The remaining 3 vehicles are all petrol/electric hybrid (Toyota Prius), belonging to an accident-management company.
- 1.4. There are currently no pure electric vehicles, range-extended electric vehicles, nor plug-in hybrid electric vehicles in use as taxis in Dacorum. A small number of LPG-powered vehicles have been licensed as taxis previously, but have since been replaced with conventional-fuel vehicles.

2. PROPOSAL

- 2.1. Officers have been approached by a company specialising in the promotion of electric vehicles, with regards the possibility of launching a trial scheme in Dacorum to encourage their uptake and use as taxis. This follows similar trial schemes run in Watford and St Albans. In those schemes, the company has obtained licences for a small number of electric vehicles and rented them to licensed drivers for a short period, allowing the drivers to use the vehicles in a professional capacity before making a decision on whether to purchase one of their own.

- 2.2. Separately, officers have also been approached directly by a small number of licensed drivers enquiring about the possibility of licensing electric vehicles for use as taxis. As electric vehicles remain a relatively new technology, there is understandably some uncertainty and trepidation among the trade about committing to such a purchase without having been able to 'live with' the product in advance.
- 2.3. At the present time, the vehicle licensing standards adopted by the Council require any new vehicle being licensed as a hackney carriage to be wheelchair-accessible (unless replacing a currently-licensed non-accessible vehicle). As most electric vehicles currently on the market are not wheelchair-accessible (although accessible versions of certain vehicles are currently in development and trial) this means that our standards would preclude the licensing of many electric vehicles as hackney carriages.
- 2.4. The standards would not prevent the licensing of EVs as private hire vehicles, as there is no equivalent limitation on vehicles of that type. However, both sets of standards refer to engine capacities, which are not applicable to electric vehicles motors.
- 2.5. Vehicle charging infrastructure around Dacorum may prove to be one of the biggest hurdles to widespread use of electric vehicles as taxis. While vehicles can be charged overnight using a domestic power supply, offering a range of around 80 to 120 miles (vehicle dependent), there are only a limited number of charging points at which vehicles could be recharged – currently four in Hemel Hempstead, and one each in Berkhamsted and Tring¹. All of these are the medium-power 'fast charging points', which can take around 3-4 hours to charge a battery pack. Currently, there are no high-power 'rapid charging points' available in Dacorum, which can deliver an 80% charge in around 30 minutes.
- 2.6. To enable a small-scale trial of electric vehicles, allowing taxi drivers to sample the technology and test the viability of extended use, it is proposed that the Council's standards be relaxed to allow the licensing of a small number of restricted 'electric vehicle' hackney carriage licences. These would be issued on a first-come first-served basis, and would be restricted to use by electric vehicles only – if a vehicle needed to be replaced, it would have to be by a similar electric vehicle and not by a conventional-fuel vehicle.
- 2.7. It is also proposed to relax the standards to disapply the engine capacity criteria, for any other application relating to an electric vehicle. This will allow any applicant to licence an electric vehicle either as a private hire vehicle, or as a hackney carriage on a so-called 'golden plate' (replacing an existing non-accessible licensed hackney carriage).
- 2.8. The reason for the introduction of the wheelchair-accessible requirement was to ensure a reasonable proportion of hackney carriages were available to carry disabled passengers, and one of the key aspects of the trial (and the main reason why a more widespread relaxation is not being proposed at this time) will be to monitor and limit the impact on the number of wheelchair-accessible taxis in use in the borough. The Committee will be aware that concerns over the availability of such taxis have previously been expressed by the County Council, as reported at a previous meeting.

¹ See <https://www.zap-map.com/location-search/> for locations.

2.9. If approved, officers will monitor the introduction and use of the electric vehicle licences, and report periodically to the Committee on progress and status.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To allow the release of a maximum of 6 new hackney carriage vehicle licences ('plates'), to permit the use of pure electric vehicles, range-extended electric vehicles or plug-in hybrid electric vehicles only. All such licences would be subject to an additional condition that the licensed vehicle may be substituted by a pure electric vehicle, range-extended electric vehicle or plug-in hybrid electric vehicle only, subject to the relevant vehicle change procedures being completed.

3.2. To disapply paragraph 2(a)(ii) and 2(b)(ii) of the Council's 'vehicle standards for hackney carriages', and 'vehicle standards for private hire vehicles' in respect of any application to licence a pure electric vehicle, a range-extended electric vehicle, or a plug-in hybrid electric vehicle as a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle.