

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

**REPORT OF THE INTERIM ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF REGULATION
AND ENFORCEMENT
TO THE LICENSING AND PUBLIC PROTECTION COMMITTEE**

17 JULY 2019
ALL WARDS

**RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WORKING GROUP FOR AMMENDMENTS TO
PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE SIGNAGE**

1. Summary

- 1.1 In June 2018, the Licensing and Public Protection Committee considered the responses to the public consultation on private hire vehicle signage.
- 1.2 It was accepted there was no clear mandate for change, but an officer/member working group would be set up to look at some of the issues raised in the survey and consider if any changes were appropriate.
- 1.3 This report asks members to consider a number of recommendations for changes to the existing private hire vehicle signage requirements, which the working group considered to be of value to the public, the trade, or the licensing authority.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 Members should consider the recommendations made at 5.1 i. to vi. and decide if they should be incorporated into the policy for private hire vehicle signage.

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3.0 Background

- 3.1 The Licensing and Public Protection Committee compared the signage requirements in Birmingham with those of other cities forming the Core Cities Group and Transport for London at its meeting in April 2015. The meeting concluded Birmingham's requirements fell into the middle ground of those authorities choosing a highly visible livery for their private hire fleet and was not unreasonably excessive.
- 3.2 In December 2017, a public consultation was conducted to establish how the trade and public felt about the current signage requirements and to see if there were any areas identified as needing change.
- 3.3 The responses to that consultation were considered by the Licensing and Public Protection Committee at the June 2018 meeting, where it was agreed there was no mandate for significant change to the existing regime, but an officer member working group would look at some of the individual issues raised and see if smaller changes might usefully be incorporated into an amended policy.

4. Matters Considered

- 4.1 The colours used for the signage were considered, the current colour scheme was well supported in the survey and the contrasting colours work well for partially sighted passengers. Although Guide Dogs suggested black and white was a better contrast, RNIB pointed out that for people with progressive sight loss, yellow was usually the last colour to be lost, so black and yellow was actually preferable. On balance there does not appear to be a strong case for changing the colours.
- 4.2 The information on the rear plate was reviewed, the proprietor's name is currently required, but that person may well never drive a vehicle and the general misconception that the name on the plate is the driver's name can lead to confusion amongst the public and police alike. It was considered more appropriate to replace the proprietor's name with make and model instead, which would make it far harder to use a lost or stolen plate on a different vehicle. The sign is currently printed from the Sopra Licensing System, which is due for replacement in the short term, so it may not be possible to make this adjustment immediately, but it should be accommodated as soon as reasonably practical.
- 4.3 With regard to semi-permanent door signs, there was a majority in favour of scrapping them, but it was not as large as might have been expected, considering the high proportion of responses from the trade. Members originally introduced the signs, to prevent drivers anonymising their cars and many of the comments advocating scrapping the signs made it clear drivers wanted to anonymise their vehicles when they were not working. As understandable as that might be from a driver's point of view, it is not legal to

do so. Once licensed a vehicle remains licensed 24hrs a day and must display the required signage. The working group concluded the original reason for introduction still appears to be valid.

- 4.4 The suggestion the operator details should be incorporated in our door sign was not at all popular with the majority of respondents, although a smaller group identified primarily as licensed operators was supportive. The working group was not in favour of pursuing this option at this time. In reaching that conclusion it considered the effect of tying a driver to a single operator, as well as the impact on licensing which would become responsible for issuing operator door signs and providing replacement signs whenever a driver switched operators.
- 4.5 Displaying an operator door sign was considered a good idea by most respondents and allowing operators more freedom in their advertising was another suggestion with a majority in favour. The working group suggests the requirement for an operator door sign should be retained, but operators should be given more freedom to design their signs. Licensing requiring only that the words BE BOOKED, BE INSURED appear on the sign in a strongly contrasting colour, using 120 point Arial font. This prints at the equivalent of 30 mm height and is a simple, clear, easily read font. The rest of the sign should then be left to the discretion of the operator, excepting for a requirement not to devise a sign which resembles that of a rival operator in Birmingham or an adjacent borough.
- 4.6 It had been suggested the small windscreen sign could be replaced with a small hard plate fixed to the front of the vehicle. That suggestion was not well received and the working group also considered the existing sign, which is double sided, had the advantage because it provides information for a front seat passenger as well as to an observer outside the vehicle. Keeping the current sign was popular with respondents and far better supported than the alternative.
- 4.7 The question of allowing advertising on private hire vehicles was considered, but the working group was not comfortable introducing a blanket policy to allow it. Liveries and large advertisements as associated with hackney carriage vehicles would almost inevitably detract from the highly visible style of signage adopted in Birmingham; officers have struggled to find an authority where that style of advertising is allowed. The purpose of the signage on private hire vehicles is to make it clear they are licensed private hire vehicles and hi-light the need to book in advance. Advertising on vehicles could dilute that message and might lead members of the public to associate the vehicles with taxis, which are available for immediate hire. In addition, representatives of a group which incorporates West Midlands Police, local authorities and other organisations concerned with safeguarding issues, submitted a response expressing concern that advertising materials used on windows could obscure what is happening inside a vehicle and so might represent a safeguarding issue.

- 4.8 In response the working group decided to leave matters as they are presently, in that advertising is not generally allowed on a private hire vehicle, but any individual or organisation wishing to apply to place advertising on or in a private hire vehicle, is able to apply to the Committee for permission and each request will be considered on its merits. There have been two separate applications to place advertising on private hire vehicles, which have been agreed within the last ten years; however officers note neither was successful in the long term, one had ceased to operate almost immediately, without ever placing an advertisement and the other had done so within two years of obtaining permission.

5 Proposals

- 5.1 The working group makes the following proposals for consideration by the Licensing and Public Protection Committee:
- i. The current style, format and colour for private hire signage should be retained.
 - ii. The Proprietor's name should be removed from the rear plate and replaced with make and model as soon as the technology allows.
 - iii. Semi-permanent door signs should be retained, but should not be modified to incorporate operator details.
 - iv. Operator door signs should be required, but licensed operators should have more discretion to personalise signs as described at 4.5.
 - v. The double sided windscreen sign should be retained.
 - vi. Advertising should remain as now, not generally be allowed on private hire vehicles, but companies and individuals should be able to request permission of the Licensing and Public Protection Committee to place adverts on private hire vehicles and such requests will be considered on their individual merits.

6. Consultation

- 6.1 Consultation took place in December 2017 and was reported back to this Committee in June 2018.

7. Implications for Resources

- 7.1 The cost of licensing rear loading WAVs would be covered by licence fees as with any other licensed vehicle.

8. Implications for Policy Priorities

- 8.1 The contents of this report contribute to the protection, safety and welfare of residents and visitors to the City by ensuring that licensed private hire vehicles are required to display appropriate signage.

9. Public Sector Equality Duty

- 9.1 Responses were received from groups representing those most likely to be affected by the colours used for signage, partially sighted persons and those opinions informed the recommendations made above.

INTERIM ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF REGULATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Background Papers: Nil