

Consultation on Taxi and Private Hire Car Licensing Requirements

Renfrewshire Council wishes to seek your views as to what requirements vehicles should have to meet to be licensed as taxis and private hire cars.

The Council has launched a public consultation on possible changes to the Council's current requirements in relation to these vehicles.

The Council, as the licensing authority, requires to be satisfied that a vehicle to be used as a taxi or private hire car is suitable in type, size and design for use as a taxi or private hire car, as the case may be, and is safe for that use.

It can therefore decide on the suitability of vehicles and develop a policy in this regard. The Council's existing standards for taxis and private hire cars, subject to a change to the private hire car vehicle age limit and the removal of the previous requirement for a minimum engine size for a private hire car, were agreed in 1998, to take effect in 2002, and included requirements on wheelchair accessibility, particularly in relation to taxis.

The Council's current requirements are set out in the Council's standard conditions for taxis and private hire cars. These conditions are in the following terms:

Taxis (Condition 22)

"The holder of a taxi licence shall use as a taxi only custom built taxis or any other vehicle of a type which has received the prior approval of the Licensing Authority. All vehicles licensed as taxis shall:-

(i) be coloured white;

(ii) be wheelchair accessible and either custom built taxis or alternatively multi person vehicles (MPVs) of a type approved by the Licensing Authority;

(iii) be less than 8 years from the date of the first registration of the vehicle where that vehicle is wheelchair accessible and should otherwise be less than 7 years old. Vehicles shall be taken out of service and replaced when they become 8 years old/ 7 years old from the date of first registration respectively; and

(iv) be subject to 6 monthly inspections as from the time they are 5 years old from the date of first registration."

Private Hire Cars (Condition 1)

“The holder of a private hire car licence shall use as a private hire car, a four door saloon, a five door hatchback or estate vehicle with a minimum width across the back seat of 48 inches or alternatively a multi person vehicle (MPV) of a type approved by the Licensing Authority. All vehicles licensed as private hire cars shall be:

(i) any colour other than white; and

(ii) less than 7 years old from the date of first registration unless the vehicle is a multi person vehicle (MPV) and wheelchair accessible where that vehicle shall be less than 8 years old from the date of first registration. Vehicles shall be taken out of service and replaced when they become 7 years/ 8 years old from the date of first registration respectively;

(iii) be subject to 6 monthly inspections as from the time they are 5 years old from the date of first registration.”

Given developments since 2002, such as changes relating to the construction of vehicles generally, the availability of vehicles with more fuel-efficient engines and an increased awareness of accessibility issues (e.g., in relation to the needs of wheelchair users) the Council would welcome your views as to what changes, if any, should be made to the Council's existing specifications for licensed taxis and private hire cars in Renfrewshire.

Consultation Proposals in relation to Taxis

The Council's existing policy, which requires taxis (and MPVs used as private hire cars) to be wheelchair accessible, has resulted in approximately 97% of the taxi fleet in Renfrewshire being wheelchair accessible (a small number of exceptions to the policy having been granted to taxi licence holders, on grounds of disability). It is understood to be supported by the Renfrewshire Access Panel. However, the Council has also been advised of concerns in relation to the use of dual access ramps for wheelchair access into some vehicles and also in relation to the use of rear-loading taxis, in respect of which a passenger may be loaded from, and unloaded onto, a roadway rather than a pavement.

Further, since the introduction of the existing policy, the Council has become aware of progress in the development of more environmentally sustainable vehicles. There are now a number of fully electric or zero emissions vehicles available, including purpose built, wheelchair-accessible taxis, with the discontinuation of the diesel or petrol engine equivalent. As fully electric taxis have fewer serviceable parts than diesel or petrol engine vehicles, it may be considered that such vehicles are suitable for a longer licensed use. At present, only a small number of fully electric taxis are operating in Renfrewshire. This may be due to the cost of acquiring them, as the cost of fully electric vehicles is significantly higher than conventionally powered equivalents.

The Council is therefore seeking views from consultees on a proposed revised condition of licence for taxis. This is set out at Appendix 1 to this consultation paper. The proposed revised condition would introduce, for the first time, a maximum age (5 years, from the date of the vehicle's first registration) at which vehicles can be first licensed within Renfrewshire. Such an

entry requirement for licensed vehicles already exists in some other Council areas and would prevent a taxi licence holder seeking to license a vehicle in Renfrewshire once it no longer meets the age criteria applicable in another area where the vehicle was previously licensed.

The proposed revised condition would allow wheelchair accessible taxis currently licensed as taxis to remain in operation for a period of up to eight years. However, the Council has received representations on behalf of wheelchair users expressing concerns about the use of dual access ramps in the existing taxi fleet for wheelchair entry. These ramps preclude access by some wheelchairs due to the wheel width of those wheelchairs. The views of consultees are therefore sought as to whether all wheelchair accessible taxis should require to be equipped with a single solid wheelchair access ramp, as set out in the consultation questions at Appendix 3 ("the consultation questions"). It is also proposed that consultees' views are sought as to when any such change might be implemented. It would be possible to apply such a policy to all applications for renewal of taxi licences made following an agreed implementation date, as suggested in the consultation questions.

Similarly, the Council have been advised of concerns over the suitability of rear-loading vehicles as wheelchair-accessible taxis. These vehicles are likely to require wheelchair passengers to be loaded into the vehicle from, and unloaded to, a roadway rather than a pavement. When the current policy was introduced in 2002, the list of MPVs suitable as wheelchair-accessible taxis consisted of only a small number of vehicles, most of which were capable of carrying both a wheelchair passenger and other passengers (with associated luggage). Over time, the list of vehicles has been expanded significantly, which has allowed a variety of smaller, rear-loading vehicles to be licensed which, in addition to a wheelchair passenger, can carry only a limited number of passengers and amount of associated luggage.

The views of consultees are therefore sought as to whether rear-loading vehicles should continue to be licensed as wheelchair-accessible taxis (or wheelchair accessible MPVs for use as private hire cars) and, if so, when any change of policy, to prevent the licensing of such vehicles, might be introduced. This could be achieved, for example, by a requirement that any vehicle to be licensed in Renfrewshire as a taxi (or wheelchair-accessible MPV licensed for private hire use) for the first time, either by way of an application for a new licence or an application for a change of vehicle, must be side-loading, as suggested in the consultation questions. Views are also sought on a possible alternative approach, based on the number of passengers and amount of luggage which can be carried in addition to a wheelchair passenger, and, should such a change be agreed, and as to how any such change, if agreed, ought to be introduced.

Given that fully electric/zero emissions vehicles are likely to be suitable for use over a longer licensed period, the consultation proposal would allow taxi licence holders the opportunity to operate a vehicle meeting enhanced criteria over an extended licensed period (the proposed taxi condition at Appendix 1 suggests a period of 15 years). It is recommended that this would apply to purpose-built taxis which are fully electric, which facilitate side-loading for wheelchair passengers and which are equipped with a single, solid access ramp for wheelchairs. This approach would also allow licensed taxi operators to finance their vehicles over a longer period.

The views of consultees are sought as to whether any revised requirements would apply to all applications for new grant, change of vehicle or renewal made after a given implementation date, subject to possible exceptions (for example should a requirement for side-loading vehicles only be introduced, as set out above). In the consultation questions at Appendix 3 an implementation date of 1st March 2020 is suggested.

Consultation Proposals in relation to Private Hire Cars

The Council's current private hire car specification has applied since 2002, subject to changes to the vehicle age limit and the removal of a requirement for a minimum engine capacity (1600cc). The removal of the minimum engine capacity was agreed by the Council in 2017, allowing electric vehicles and hybrid vehicles with smaller, more fuel-efficient engines to be licensed. This requirement, and a requirement that the rear seat of licensed private hire cars in Renfrewshire be at least 48 inches wide, together meant that smaller cars, which might be considered by the Board to be unsuitable for private hire, were precluded from licensing at the time the policy was introduced.

Since the Council agreed its specification for private hire cars in 2002, there have however been significant developments in the power output and general construction of vehicles. In relation to power, higher outputs can now be achieved from smaller engines. As such, the engine capacity previously relied on by the Council may no longer be a reliable indicator of a vehicle's power. While an alternative measure of power to replace engine capacity could be considered, the various formulations of brake horse power or a power to weight ratio may be of limited assistance, particularly as the power of an engine is likely to reduce over a vehicle's lifetime.

Changes in vehicle design over the same period now mean that a number of small cars and medium cars (sometimes referred to as Euro segment B and C vehicles) can easily meet the Council's existing specification for private hire cars. Taking into account the removal of the requirement for a minimum engine capacity, your views would be welcomed on the suitability of vehicles to be licensed as private hire cars.

A proposed draft revised condition for private hire car licences is attached at Appendix 2 to this consultation paper. Similar to the proposals in relation to taxis, the proposed specification would introduce, for the first time, a maximum age (5 years from the date of the vehicle's first registration) at which vehicles may be first licensed within Renfrewshire, for similar reasons as set out above in relation to taxis.

The proposed revised specification would require a combination of vehicles having at least five designated seats (for a driver and four passengers) and a specified minimum luggage capacity (0.4 cubic metres, or 400 litres) with those seats up and the load cover fixed. These proposed criteria, taken together, would be likely to exclude some of the smaller vehicles currently licensed in Renfrewshire from continuing to operate. It is anticipated that, if the above proposed luggage capacity were to be agreed, it would be for applicants seeking to license a vehicle to provide evidence, when arranging their vehicle inspection, that their vehicle meets this requirement. This would likely require the manual for the vehicle proposed to be licensed to be produced. It is considered that, while the proposed luggage capacity requirement would preclude a number of smaller vehicles, it would leave open to licence holders options including some fully electric vehicles.

As stated above in relation to taxis, as fully electric/ zero emissions cars have fewer serviceable parts than diesel or petrol engine vehicles, it may be considered that such vehicles are suitable for a longer licensed use. As such, the proposed specification includes an exception to the normal age restriction which currently applies, to allow these vehicles to operate as private hire cars for up to 10 years from their first registration. This approach would also allow licensed private hire car operators to finance their vehicles over a longer period.

The views of consultees are sought on the proposed revised condition for private hire car licences at Appendix 2. Further, the views of consultees on possible additional requirements for wheelchair accessible MPVs to be licensed as private hire cars, and on implementation of any changes in this regard, are also sought. These proposed requirements relate to side-

loading capability and the provision of single wheelchair access ramps, as set out above in relation to taxis. Finally, views are also sought from consultees as to whether MPVs, which are currently considered unsuitable under the Council's current policy for use as private hire cars as they cannot accommodate wheelchair access, should now be allowed to be licensed, on the basis that they carry only four passengers. A change to this policy would remove the position that these vehicles cannot be licensed as a private hire car while other, similarly non wheelchair-accessible, vehicles can be licensed as private hire cars.

Views would be welcomed as to when any revised specification for private hire cars might be introduced. For example, should any new requirements apply to all applications for new grant, change of vehicle or renewal made after a given implementation date, subject to possible exceptions. The consultation questions suggest an implementation date of 1st March 2020. This would allow those whose licences fall due for renewal imminently after the introduction of the policy to obtain and source suitable vehicles, as required. In the event that the Council does not set an implementation schedule for any changes to policy which it may decide following consultation to introduce, vehicles which do not meet any new policy requirements will continue to operate until they attain the age of seven years from their date of first registration (or eight years, in the case of private hire cars which are wheelchair-accessible MPVs). The views of consultees are sought on the suggested changes and proposed implementation timetable, as set out in the consultation questions.

Conclusion

The views of consultees are sought on the proposed conditions at Appendices 1 and 2 to this consultation paper and in response to the consultation questions at Appendix 3. The consultation questions seek views on a number of issues, including whether the proposed conditions should be adopted, whether any additional requirements should be imposed, whether taxis and private hire cars should require to be tested by the Council twice a year from when they become three years old (currently this is required from when the vehicle becomes five years old), whether the current limit to the number of passengers allowed in licensed vehicles should be changed, and when any changes to policy, if agreed, should be introduced.

The consultation is now open and any responses should be submitted by **Tuesday 3rd December 2019** to ensure that any views are considered as part of the consultation exercise. Responses may be submitted by:-

email to licensing.cs@renfrewshire.gov.uk or to:

Head of Corporate Governance, Renfrewshire Council, Cotton Street, Paisley, PA1 1TT.

It is anticipated that responses to the consultation, or a summary of responses, will be reported to the Regulatory Functions Board and published.

Proposed New Taxi Licence Condition

“22. All vehicles licensed as taxis shall:-

Either

- (A) (i) be coloured white;
- (ii) be purpose-built taxis with European Whole Vehicle Type Approval and wheelchair accessible;
- (iii) be fully electric/ zero emissions vehicles;
- (iv) be side-loading for wheelchair access;
- (v) have a single, solid ramp for wheelchair accessibility;
- (vi) be less than five years old from the date of first registration when first licensed within Renfrewshire;
- (vii) be less than 15 years old from the date of the first registration of the vehicle. Vehicles shall be taken out of service and replaced when they become 15 years old from the date of first registration; and
- (viii) be subject to 6 monthly inspections as from the time they are 5 years old from the date of first registration

Or

- (B) (i) be coloured white;
- (ii) be wheelchair accessible and either purpose-built taxis or alternatively multi person vehicles (MPVs) of a type approved by the Licensing Authority;
- (iii) be less than five years old from the date of first registration when first licensed within Renfrewshire;
- (iv) be less than 8 years old from the date of the first registration of the vehicle where that vehicle is wheelchair accessible and should otherwise be less than 7 years old. Vehicles shall be taken out of service and replaced when they become 8 years old/ 7 years old from the date of first registration respectively; and
- (v) be subject to 6 monthly inspections as from the time they are 5 years old from the date of first registration.”

Proposed New Private Hire Car Licence Condition

- “1. The holder of a private hire car licence shall use as a private hire car, a four door saloon, a five door hatchback or estate vehicle, or alternatively a multi person vehicle (MPV) of a type approved by the Licensing Authority. All vehicles licensed as private hire cars shall:
- (i) be any colour other than white;
 - (ii) be less than five years old from the date of first registration when first licensed in Renfrewshire
 - (iii) subject to the exception below for fully electric/ zero emissions vehicles, be less than 7 years old from the date of first registration, unless the vehicle is a multi person vehicle (MPV) and wheelchair accessible where that vehicle shall be less than 8 years old from the date of first registration. Subject again to the exception below for fully electric/ zero emissions vehicles, vehicles shall be taken out of service and replaced when they become 7 years/ 8 years old from the date of first registration respectively;
 - (iv) have at least five designated seats (for driver and four passengers);
 - (v) have a luggage compartment with a minimum capacity of 0.4 cubic metres (400 litres) (with the seats up and the load cover fixed);
 - (vi) be subject to 6 monthly inspections as from the time they are 5 years old from the date of first registration.

Exception referred to above: Fully electric/ zero emissions vehicles licensed as private hire cars may be licensed until they are ten years old from the date of first registration. Such vehicles shall be taken out of service and replaced when they become 10 years old from their date of first registration.

Taxis

1. Do you support the proposed revised specification for taxis?
2. Do you support the introduction of a maximum age at which a taxi may first be licensed in Renfrewshire? If so, is the proposed 5 years a reasonable requirement? Please provide an explanation.
3. Should all taxis require to be equipped with a single, solid ramp for wheelchair access? Please give reasons for your answer.
4. Should this requirement affect all renewal applications made after a specified implementation date, as well as new licence and change of vehicle applications (where a vehicle is proposed to be licensed for the first time)? Please give reasons for your answer.
5. Would 1st March 2020 be a reasonable implementation date? Otherwise what do you think a reasonable date would be? Please give reasons for your answer.
6. Otherwise, please advise how you think any new requirements would best be implemented?
7. Should rear-loading vehicles be considered unsuitable to continue to be licensed as taxis? Please provide an explanation.
8. If so, should existing licensed rear-loading taxis be allowed to continue in service until the eighth anniversary of their first registration, with any change of policy only applying to those vehicles proposed for licensing in Renfrewshire for the first time? Please provide an explanation.
9. If you believe rear-loading vehicles should be allowed to be licensed, should minimum requirements be introduced as to how many passengers, and how much associated luggage, in addition to a wheelchair passenger, a licensed taxi is capable of carrying? Please specify what you think the requirements should be.
10. If so, should existing taxis affected by any change in policy be allowed to continue in service until the eighth anniversary of their first registration, with any change of policy only applying to those vehicles proposed for licensing in Renfrewshire for the first time? Please provide an explanation.
11. Do you agree that fully electric vehicles meeting the additional accessibility requirements set out in the proposed taxi specification should be allowed to be licensed for a longer period?
12. Do you agree that 15 years is a reasonable period over which these taxis should be licensed?
13. Should any other requirements be introduced to improve the accessibility of taxis for the travelling public (for example, minimum dimensions or particular features)?
14. Should the Council introduce a new requirement that taxis should be inspected at six monthly intervals once they attain the age of three years from their date of first registration? If this change were to be introduced, do you agree that the same requirements should apply to electric taxis?
15. Please provide any further information as to changes you think should be made to the Council's requirements for licensed taxis.

Private Hire Cars

1. Do you support the proposed revised specification for private hire cars?
2. Do you support the proposed introduction of a maximum age at which a private hire car may first be licensed in Renfrewshire?
3. Do you support the proposed requirement that vehicles have five designated seats (for driver and four passengers)?
4. If not, do you suggest an alternative requirement?
5. Do you support the proposal to introduce a minimum luggage compartment capacity?
6. If so, do you agree that 0.4 cubic metres (400 litres), with the seats up and the load cover fixed, is a reasonable requirement?
7. If not, do you have an alternative suggestion?
8. Should MPVs which are unable to accommodate wheelchairs be considered suitable for licensing, on the basis that they are allowed to carry no more than four passengers?
9. Do you agree that fully electric/ zero emissions vehicles should be allowed to be licensed over a longer period as private hire cars?
10. If so, do you agree that 10 years would be a reasonable period to license these vehicles?
11. If not, what period do you suggest?
12. Do you agree that any proposed changes should be introduced to apply to all future applications for new licences, renewals of licence and change of vehicle applications which are made after an agreed implementation date?
13. If so, would 1st March 2020 be a reasonable implementation date? If not, what date would you suggest?

Questions 14- 21 apply to the use of wheelchair accessible MPVs as private hire cars-

14. Should all wheelchair accessible MPVs to be used as private hire cars require to be equipped with a single, solid ramp for wheelchair access?
15. Should this requirement affect all renewal applications made after a specified implementation date, as well as new licence and change of vehicle applications (where a vehicle is proposed to be licensed for the first time)? Please give reasons for your answer.
16. Would 1st March 2020 be a reasonable implementation date? Otherwise what do you think a reasonable date would be? Please give reasons for your answer.
17. Otherwise, please advise how you think any new requirements would best be implemented?
18. Should rear-loading vehicles be considered unsuitable to continue to be licensed as wheelchair accessible MPVs used as private hire cars? Please provide an explanation.
19. If so, should existing licensed rear-loading, wheelchair-accessible MPVs be allowed to continue in service until the eighth anniversary of their first registration, with any change of policy only applying to those vehicles proposed for licensing as private hire cars in Renfrewshire for the first time? Please provide an explanation?
20. If you believe rear-loading wheelchair-accessible MPVs should be allowed to be licensed, should minimum requirements be introduced as to how many passengers, and how much associated luggage, in addition to a wheelchair passenger, a licensed vehicle is capable of carrying? Please specify what you think the requirements should be.
21. If so, should existing vehicles affected by any change in policy be allowed to continue in service until the eighth anniversary of their first registration, with any change of policy only applying to those vehicles proposed for licensing in Renfrewshire for the first time? Please provide an explanation.
22. Should the Council introduce a new requirement that private hire cars should be inspected at six monthly intervals once they attain the age of three years from their date of first registration? If this change were to be introduced, do you agree that the same requirements should apply to electric vehicles?

23. Do you have any other comments in relation to the Council's specification for licensed private hire cars?