TITLE: Taxi and Private Hire Licensing - Inclusive Service Plan

Committee: Licensing Committee

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Issue

1. To consider the adoption of a Taxi and Private Hire licensing "Inclusive Service Plan", attached at **Appendix 1**. The Plan has been developed having regard to the Department for Transport's Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing Best Practice Guidance for Licensing Authorities in England and is intended to support the provision of safe, accessible and inclusive taxi and private hire vehicle services within the District.

Recommendations

2. Members are requested to consider and approve the Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Inclusive Service Plan attached at **Appendix 1**.

3. Members are further requested to authorise the Licensing Manager, in consultation with the Chair of Licensing Committee and the Director Legal and Monitoring Officer, to make minor amendments to the Plan where required to reflect changes in legislation, national guidance or operational practice, provided that such operational amendments do not materially alter the policy.

Background/Options

4. Taxis and private hire vehicles provide an important form of transport within the District. For some passengers, particularly disabled people, older people, those with mobility or sensory impairments and those who may experience difficulties accessing other forms of public transport, these services can provide an important means of independent travel.

5. The Department for Transport's Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing Best Practice Guidance for Licensing Authorities in England includes specific guidance relating to accessibility and supporting an inclusive service. The guidance encourages licensing authorities to develop an Inclusive Service Plan which considers the accessibility needs of passengers and the measures that can be taken locally to support inclusive taxi and private hire services.

6. The proposed Inclusive Service Plan has therefore been developed to provide a strategic framework through which the Council can identify and address barriers to accessing licensed taxi and private hire services.

7. The Plan recognises that accessibility is not limited to the availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles. Passengers may encounter a range of physical, sensory, communication, information and confidence barriers when accessing taxi and private hire services.

8. The Plan establishes five strategic objectives:
   a) Promote accessible transport services.
   b) Improve awareness and understanding.
   c) Promote equality and dignity.
   d) Improve communication and information.
   e) Promote continual improvement.

9. In support of these objectives, the Plan sets out the Council's expectations of licensed drivers, vehicle proprietors and private hire operators and addresses matters including wheelchair accessible vehicles, assistance dogs, complaints and enforcement, stakeholder engagement, monitoring and review.

10. The Plan is intended to complement the Council's existing Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Policy. It does not replace the detailed requirements and licence conditions contained within that Policy but provides an overarching framework for considering accessibility and inclusivity within the licensing service.

11. Members have the option to:
   a) approve the Inclusive Service Plan as presented;
   b) approve the Plan subject to amendments identified by the Committee; or
   c) determine not to adopt the Plan, giving reasons for that decision.

Arguments/Conclusions

12. The proposed Inclusive Service Plan provides the Council with a clear framework through which accessibility and inclusivity can be considered as part of the ongoing regulation and development of taxi and private hire services within the District.

13. Adoption of the Plan would demonstrate the Council's commitment to supporting accessible transport while establishing clear and proportionate expectations for the licensed trade.

14. Importantly, the Plan takes a broad approach to accessibility. While wheelchair accessibility remains an important consideration, the Plan recognises that passengers may experience a range of barriers arising from mobility, sensory or communication needs and other circumstances which can affect their ability to access transport services.

15. The Plan also provides a mechanism for monitoring progress. This includes consideration of wheelchair accessible vehicle provision, accessibility-related complaints, enforcement activity, stakeholder feedback and improvements made to service provision.

16. The proposed approach allows the Council to monitor local circumstances and respond to changes in legislation, national guidance and passenger needs without unnecessarily duplicating the detailed regulatory requirements contained within the Council's Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Policy.

17. Officers therefore consider that adoption of the Inclusive Service Plan represents a proportionate and appropriate approach to supporting accessible and inclusive taxi and private hire services within the District, and recommend that Members approve the Plan attached at Appendix 1.

Additional Implications Assessment

18.

Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Human Resources (HR) Implications
Yes	No	No
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	**Carbon Impact Assessment (CIA)**	**Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)**
No	No	No

Financial implications

19. The implementation of this Inclusive Service Plan will likely create an increase in workload for the department. The level of additional work is unknown at this time as there are no other Authorities with which to compare, however, it is envisaged that in the immediate implementation stage it will be possible to cover the additional work by adjusting existing workloads. Should the level of work increase beyond initial expectations, there are options available via discretionary fee reviews to ensure that the work can be covered from the licence fees received, and there is no burden placed on the wider Council's funds.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Inclusive Service Plan

Background documents

Department for Transport's Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing Best Practice Guidance for Licensing Authorities in England 2023