

Subject:

Status: For Publication

Converted Vehicles licensed as Hackney Carriages/Private Hire –Single Vehicle Approval.

Report to: Licensing Committee

Date: 12th August 2008

Report of: Executive Director of Business

Portfolio

Holder: Regenerating and Promoting Rossendale

Key Decision: No

Forward Plan General Exception Special Urgency

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To outline the details and implications of obtaining a voluntary Single Vehicle Approval “Confirmation of Compliance” document from the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) and to recommend that modified vehicles with such a document be eligible to be licensed as a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle.

2. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

2.1 The matters discussed in this report impact directly on the following corporate priorities and associated corporate objective/s.

- Delivering Quality Services to Customers (Customers, Improvement)
- Promoting Rossendale as a cracking place to live and visit (Economy)
- Well Managed Council (Improvement, Community Network)

3. RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

3.1 There are no specific risk issues for members to consider arising from this report.

4. BACKGROUND AND OPTIONS

- 4.1 In 2007, problems were highlighted where vehicles that had started out as vans had been converted to 'minibuses' by the installation of windows and seats and had then been licensed as hackney carriages and private hire vehicles.
- 4.2 Examination of these vehicles revealed that most were unsafe, using second hand seats that were not of a sufficiently high standard and installing them in a manner that was crude and unsafe. There were also issues with the specification of windows, braking systems, suspension and tyres.
- 4.3 As a result, a report was brought to the Licensing Committee on 4th June 2007 and it was resolved that 'converted' vehicles would no longer be licensed by the Authority.
- 4.4 However, there is a process that would enable the standard of vehicles that have been modified to be assessed by the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) and, if suitable and safe, to receive a 'Confirmation of Compliance' document. That would then indicate to the Licensing Authority that the vehicle would be suitable and safe in design and construction to be licensed as a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle.
- 4.5 European Whole Vehicle Type Approval (EWVTA) covers all national and European type approval regulations for large scale manufacturers. To qualify, vehicles are put through stringent testing – including testing to destruction.
- 4.6 A vehicle which has up to 8 passenger seats is classified for the purposes of EWVTA as category M1. Most purpose built taxis, saloon cars and people carriers fall within this category. However, minibuses manufactured to carry more than 8 passengers are categorized as M2, which is a lower specification and goods vehicles have another, different, type approval.
- 4.7 Once a vehicle model has been assessed and given EWVTA, any modification to it would invalidate the type approval. So, for example, fitting seats in a goods vehicle or removing 4 seats from a 12-seater minibus and/or fitting wheelchair facilities would affect the vehicle.
- 4.8 VOSA offer the facility to have a modified vehicle assessed and checked on a voluntary basis for a fee. The test is known as Single Vehicle Approval and can only be applied to vehicles with 8 passenger seats or less. The scale of fees and the testing details are detailed at appendix 1 and the application form at Appendix 2.
- 4.9 The examination of the vehicle would be carried out at the VOSA testing station at Chadderton. The cost is currently £200 for a standard test.
- 4.10 It will be seen, for example, that to fit seating to a van, each seat will have to bear a serial number and conform to M1 standard. In addition, a certificate for each seat must be produced that shows the seat is of that standard and applies

to that particular seat. Second hand seats from old coaches and minibuses will be of M2 standard and would not pass.

- 4.11 Minibuses and any other vehicle converted for wheelchair access will also have to be tested unless they have been manufactured as such. The SVA test will test wheelchair anchorage points and access ramps and lifts.
- 4.12 There are also differences in braking systems between goods vehicles and passenger vehicles which would have to be altered and it is likely that all tyres would have to be changed from a goods vehicle as the tyre ratings are different.
- 4.13 In summary, buying a vehicle and altering it from its original specification in order that it can be used as a hackney or private hire vehicle is an expensive operation to accomplish safely. It should not be seen as a cheap option to buying a vehicle which has been designed and built by a large manufacturer to carry passengers safely. As well as any changes that would be necessary in specification of the vehicle, by definition the purchased vehicle would be second hand and subject to general wear and tear that may cause it to fail an SVA test.
- 4.14 However, the duty of the Licensing Authority is to ensure as far as possible the safety of the public traveling in licensed vehicles. It will be incumbent on the taxi trade to make the decision themselves whether to buy a vehicle, convert it and then subject it to an SVA testing regime.

COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS:

5. SECTION 151 OFFICER

- 5.1 There are no immediate financial implications for the Council arising from the report.

6. MONITORING OFFICER

- 6.1 As detailed in the report.

7. HEAD OF PEOPLE AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (ON BEHALF OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)

- 7.1 There are no specific HR implications.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 It would be safe to grant a hackney carriage or private hire Licence to a vehicle that had been altered from the manufacturer's original specification, providing that the vehicle had been subjected to a mechanical check by the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency and had received a 'Confirmation of Compliance' document.

9. RECOMMENDATION(S)

9.1 That the Committee amends the previous decision on Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles to the following:-

Vehicles will only be licensed as hackney carriage or private hire vehicles that have

- a) European Whole Body Type (M1) approval, Low Volume Vehicle Type Approval or Single Vehicle Type Approval (including a Certificate of Compliance issued by VOSA) as a minimum standard
- b) Is an existing vehicle on Rossendale Borough Council's hackney carriage and private hire register.

10. CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT

10.1 Vehicle and Operator Services Agency.

11. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is an Equality Impact Assessment required No
Is an Equality Impact Assessment attached No

12. BIODIVERSITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment required No
Is a Biodiversity Impact Assessment attached No

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Appendices	
Document	Appendix Number
Single Vehicle Approval Testing.	1
Application form for single vehicle approval	2