



Leicester  
City Council

Minute Extract

Minutes of the Meeting of the  
ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Held: WEDNESDAY, 6 SEPTEMBER 2006 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Connelly - Chair  
Councillor Henry – Focus Team Spokesperson  
Councillor Mrs. Maw – Conservative Spokesperson

Councillor Hall

Councillor Karim

Councillor Shelton

\* \* \* \* \*

**13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were asked to declare any interests they may have in the business on the agenda and/or indicate that Section 106 applied to them.

Councillor Henry declared a non-prejudicial interest in item 6 on the agenda, "Revised Conditions of Fitness for Hackney Carriages", as she was Chair of the Licensing Committee.

**18. REVISED CONDITIONS OF FITNESS FOR HACKNEY CARRIAGES**

The Corporate Director, Regeneration and Culture, submitted a report which sought approval of revised Conditions of Fitness for Hackney Carriages following the completion of the review programme approved by Cabinet on 9 January 2006.

The Committee invited Dee Martin from the Leicestershire Centre for Integrated Living (LCIL) to the table to take part in the discussion.

Liz Eccles from the Consultants, Halcrow, gave a presentation on the aims, method and findings of the consultation. She explained that the Trade, public, manufacturers and interested stakeholders had been consulted and outlined main points which had arisen from these consultations. It was reported that stakeholders generally expressed the cautious opinion that a variety of vehicles should be licensed, as long as they were fully fit for purpose; Trade members felt that they needed choice in types of vehicle, although there was some difference of opinion on how best to identify hackney carriages; manufacturers were generally satisfied with the revised conditions, apart from a difference in opinion on the removal of the turning circle requirement and some had

concerns about the door width and the steep ramp for the E7. The results of the roadshow were explained and a video was shown of a person in a wheelchair trying the four vehicles on show. The roadshow identified high satisfaction with all vehicles, with slight differences in opinion on space and visibility.

Officers reported that the two contentious issues with the revised conditions were the turning circle and floor height. They expressed the opinion that a restriction on turning circle was unnecessary in Leicester and the restriction limited the types of hackney carriages available. Department for Transport draft guidance stated that it was best practice to licence as wide a range of vehicles as possible. It was recognised that reducing restriction on floor height would reduce accessibility to some users, particularly ambulant disabled people, but the roadshow had shown that people had little difficulty in accessing the affected vehicles. It was also stated that the roadshow had highlighted that there was not one single vehicle that suited everyone. Any restriction would limit choice.

With regard to recognisability of hackney carriages, the options were outlined on the basis of the consultation. The public, manufacturers and trade members all had differing views on the matter. Copies of a letter from an operator expressing a concern with the proposal that Hackney Carriages be coloured black was circulated together with the officer letter in response. The officers' recommendation of a uniform colour of black was because this was the traditional colour for the vehicles.

Dee Martin from LCIL outlined the organisation's concerns with regard to the lack of consultation with themselves and Age Concern, technical information being sent and not received, the Committee being asked to make a decision without all the facts in front of them and the style of consultation not being inclusive. The following points were also made: an increase of floor height would be a backward step in accessibility and would cause problems for some users and be a health and safety risk for drivers; longer ramps would have adverse consequences with parking and accessing the vehicle; and channel ramps would be unsuitable. In response to the video it was stated that the person testing the vehicles was using a sports wheelchair and would therefore be considered an independent user, this is, a person who did not require assistance, but who still needed assistance getting into the vehicles. Comments from the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee were also read out concerning the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, which amends existing legislation and includes measures to give disabled people the right to challenge transport operators to improve their service. It was requested that the report be amended to include further comments from disabled and elderly users, and to take into account the DDA 2005 legislation, which comes into effect on 4 December 2006.

Officers stated that both Age Concern and LCIL had been notified of the consultation and there had been a significant proportion of elderly people at the roadshow; they had also had the opportunity to submit comments by alternative methods. The Department for Transport research document, "Ergonomic

Requirements for Accessible Taxis” had not been produced at the time of the roadshow. Officers had discussed the document with the Department for Transport, who had advised that it did not represent official policy or a recommendation for local authorities, it was instead a summary of some research that had been undertaken on behalf of the Department. Officers pointed out that there were no vehicles in production that met the proposals arising from the research.

Members considered the impact of licensing new vehicles on all users, including disabled and tall people; issues regarding recognisability and safety, and implications for private vehicles together with implications for visually impaired users; the cost issues for drivers and the likelihood of there being a variety of vehicles in operation from which people could choose; the feasibility of a drop-down step; and potential problems with a longer ramp in congested areas. Members also discussed the need for revising the conditions before disability legislation came into force, and officers replied that the legislation had been awaited for a long time and was not likely to be available in the near future, necessitating that the Council revise the conditions sooner.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Committee recommends to Cabinet that they take into account further the comments and information provided by LCIL and Age Concern when considering the report.