

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE LEADERSHIP TEAM'S REPORT TO PUBLIC PROTECTION COMMITTEE

19 August 2025

Report Title: Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Policy 2026-2030

Submitted by: Service Director – Regulatory Services & Licensing Lead Officer

Portfolios: Finance, Town Centres & Growth

Ward(s) affected: All

<u>Purpose of the Report</u>	<u>Key Decision</u>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
To notify the Committee of the proposed Taxi Licensing Policy following external consultation.			
<u>Recommendation</u> That Committee: 1. Agree the proposed policy document; and 2. Approve that the policy document takes effect from 1st January 2026			
<u>Reasons</u> <p>The current taxi licensing policy was first introduced in November 2019 following a wholesale review of the previous policy, which underwent an extensive consultation in 2018-2019. The policy has been amended on several occasions since that date to reflect legislative changes and statutory guidance, and following review of specific provisions that were no longer deemed necessary. In 2021 the policy was issued with a 5-year period and a review date of 2025. The Government released updated Best Practice Guidance in November 2023, and this proposed policy has been drafted having regard to that guidance.</p>			

1. Background

- 1.1** The Council's current Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Policy was implemented on 1st November 2019. The policy included a widescale reform of the Council Taxi licensing policy and procedures. Since its implementation the policy has been reviewed and amended on six occasions as detailed in the Committee report dated 29th October 2024.
- 1.2** The current policy end date is 2025 and as such is due for review.
- 1.3** At the Committee meeting on 29th October 2024 Members determined to consult on the proposed policy for a period of 12 weeks.
- 1.4** At the Committee meeting on 30th January 2025 Members determined to consult on proposed amendments to the Suitability Guidance for a period of 4 weeks.

2. Issues

- 2.1** The Council's primary and overriding priority when considering taxi licensing is to protect the public. To achieve this the Council have a comprehensive and cohesive policy that has been through numerous consultations and the scrutiny of the Public Protection Committee. The policy reflects the Council's position on eligibility, suitability and the requirements of those in the taxi trade or wishing to enter it.
- 2.2** Having regard to the updated Department for Transport Best Practice Guidance (DfT BPG) from 2023, the responses received during the consultation periods, and following discussions with neighbouring local licensing authorities, officers have drafted an amended policy document which is attached as **Appendix A**.
- 2.3** There were a large number of proposed amendments in the draft document that came before Committee on 29th October 2024. The vast majority related to typographical amendments and clarifications, removal of duplicated or inconsistent sections, removal of application criteria that can be sourced elsewhere and the updating of out-of-date information such as web URLs. The Council did not receive any comments during the consultation to these amendments and as such Officers have implemented these changes into the proposed document at Appendix A and amended section numbers where appropriate.
- 2.4** There were also a number of significant amendments proposed which were:
1. Vehicle Criteria – amending from a maximum age policy and vehicle body type for licensing of vehicles to an emissions and fuel type criteria, providing a timescale for when the Council will cease to licence certain vehicles due to their use of internal combustion engines;
 2. Reinstating Grandfather rights for Hackney Carriage Vehicles when transferred between proprietors;
 3. Removal of vehicle door livery;
 4. Removal of Suitability Guidelines appendix from the policy and treat as a separate document;
 5. Removal of requirement for licence holders to sign an acceptance of receipt of licence code of conduct and/or conditions;
 6. Amendment to the Knowledge Test from requiring an application to achieve 75% in each section, to them requiring to achieve 75% overall.
- 2.5** The Council did not receive any comments in relation to points 2, 4, 5 or 6. As such Officers have implemented the changes for 2, 5 and 6 into the proposed document at Appendix A. Upon reflection, Officers have determined that it is more beneficial to retain the Suitability Guidelines within the policy document itself to allow for one comprehensive and cohesive policy document instead of two. A copy of the amended summary of changes document is attached as **Appendix B**.
- 2.6** During the four-week consultation period in respect of updating the Suitability Guidelines the Council received two responses, detailed at section 2.7 of the report. As such, Officers have reinstated the Suitability Guidelines into the proposed policy document, to include Chapter 4 of the updated Institute of Licensing document.
- 2.7** Two responses were received as part of the Suitability Guidelines consultation, one from a licensed driver and one from another local authority. The licensed driver made a single comment suggesting that the guidelines were there to make it harder for people to work in the trade. The local authority officer's comments were around two provisions they wanted to highlight and suggested that the Council should adopt the Guidelines in part and have our own version. They highlighted that it would be mandatory for applicants with a history of drug possession offences to have undertaken drug testing, and there was a concern about a disparity between the

offences of violence and possessing a firearm. A copy of the comments can be seen in the summary of responses document attached as **Appendix C**.

2.7 The Council received twenty-two responses to the policy consultation from:

- 19 x licensed drivers, vehicle proprietors and operators;
- 1 x Alderman of the Council;
- 1 x Guide Dogs; and
- 1 x Staffordshire County Council School Transport Team.

A summary of the responses is attached as **Appendix D**.

2.8 The licence holders' responses can be further summarised as such:

Proposal:	Comments:
1. To remove door livery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 17 responses re: door livery; - 8 responses in favour of retaining livery (to assist customers, public safety and advertising) - 6 responses in favour of removing livery (unnecessary due to technology and looks messy) - 3 responses that door livery damages paintwork (no further details provided)
2. To amend vehicle criteria to be based on emissions/carbon neutrality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 13 responses specific to proposal; - 7 responses were negative or concerned about the proposal (primarily concerned about lack of infrastructure, suggests the phasing should be delayed and the cost implications) - 6 responses were positive (good for the environment, it makes sense, moving to hybrids is good)
3. Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In relation to Executive private hire vehicles – could have a small internal disc/plate similar to in London; - Fees are too high; - Should scrap 6 month tests for older vehicles; - Don't like needing an MOT and a Council test.

2.9 The policy proposal to remove door livery was in line with section 8.12 of the DfT BPG document which stated that “*..licensing authorities should seek to differentiate the profile of private hire vehicles [from Hackney Carriages (sic)] as these can only be legally engaged through a booking with a licensed operator*” and “*... should not impose a livery requirement on private hire vehicles. The more distinctive a private hire vehicle is made to appear, the greater the chance that this might be confused with a taxi..... Licensing authorities' private hire vehicle signage requirements should be limited to the authority licence plate or disc and a “pre-booked only” door sign.*”

This approach enables passengers to be given the clear and consistent message that you should only get in a vehicle that ‘has a taxi sign on the roof’ unless you have pre-booked a private hire vehicle and have received information from the operator to identify it.”

The current policy provides that both hackney carriage and private hire vehicles should display an additional door sticker that denotes what type of vehicle it is, and that all private hire vehicles must display the door livery of the operator/s they work for.

During recent compliance operations Officers have firsthand found identifying private hire vehicles, that do not display door livery, to be difficult. Vehicles licensed by Local Authorities, that do not require door livery quite often also do not need to display a licence plate on the front of the vehicle either. These issues combined make the vehicles almost 'invisible' as licensed vehicles which present a real risk to the public who are not aware of how to ensure the vehicle they are getting into is correctly licensed.

Having liaised with our colleagues at Stoke City Council (Stoke CC) throughout the process, and who also originally intended to remove door livery requirements, we are in agreement that removing door livery would be a detrimental step to passenger safety and public confidence in identifying licensed vehicles. Stoke CC had their policy approved by Cabinet on 22nd July 2025 which included retaining the provisions around door livery requirements.

Officers have taken into account the consultation responses received, summarised at section 2.8 of the report and attached as Appendix D, Officers' experiences during compliance operations and Stoke CC having determined to retain door livery, and are now proposing to retain our current policy provisions.

- 2.10** The policy proposal to amend the vehicle criteria to be based on the emissions levels and fuel type of vehicles stems from the updated DfT BPG which states at section 8.4:

"Licensing authorities should not impose age limits for the licensing of vehicles instead they should consider more targeted requirements to meet their policy objectives on emissions, safety rating and increasing wheelchair accessible provision where this is low."

Officers have discussed this proposal with colleagues at Stoke-on-Trent City Council (Stoke CC) who were also consulting on this element in their taxi policy at the same time. Stoke CC received a number of responses in relation to this aspect of their consultation which were broadly supportive. Due to the length of consultation, and consideration of responses, several amendments from the original proposal have been made. Primarily the phasing out of Euro 4 and 5 vehicles is proposed to begin in April 2026 instead of 2025, that wheelchair accessible vehicles will be permitted to stay on the fleet for an extra one or two years dependant on their Euro standard, and the cessation of licensing new ICE vehicles will start in April 2028 instead of 2027.

The new proposal is that:

- 1) From 01 April 2026 the Council will not accept any applications for Euro 4 or 5 standard vehicles. Unless the vehicle is already licensed with the Council AND is wheelchair accessible, in which case we will accept renewal applications until 31 March 2027.
- 2) From 01 April 2026 all new vehicle applications that are powered solely by Internal Combustion Engines (ICE) must be Euro 6 Emissions Compliant.
- 3) From 01 April 2028 the Council will not accept new applications for vehicles which are powered solely by ICE. This will not affect the renewal of ICE vehicles already licensed by the Council. Further, it will not affect the new to licensing or renewal licensing of electric vehicles, hybrid vehicles or those using hydrogen fuel.
- 4) From 01 April 2030 the Council will not accept applications to renew existing ICE vehicles that are Euro 6 compliant. Unless the vehicle is already licensed with

the Council AND is wheelchair accessible, in which case we will accept renewal applications until 31 March 2031. This will not affect electric vehicles, hybrid vehicles or those using hydrogen fuel.

5) On 31 March 2035, the Council will stop the licensing of hybrid vehicles and all vehicle that do not have Zero tailpipe emissions.

6) All vehicles over the age of 10 years will be subject to Council Safety inspections every 6 months. There is no maximum age for vehicles to be licensed. At 10 years old all vehicles will require a Council Vehicle Test prior to each renewal and at 6 monthly intervals.

Stoke CC had the emissions vehicle criteria approved by Cabinet on 22nd July 2025 and the policy as a whole will take effect from 1st September 2025. The one change that Stoke CC did make was to remove point (5) in relation to a cut-off for hybrid vehicles in 2035 as their opinion is that can be reviewed at their next policy consultation which at the very latest will be in 2030. Officers' view is that it is beneficial to retain this provision and may be reviewed at any time before the next policy consultation.

2.11 In relation to the other points raised by the licence holders during consultation the Officers' views are:

- In relation to Executive private hire vehicles – could have a small internal disc/plate similar to in London;
- Fees are too high;
- Should scrap 6 month tests for older vehicles;
- Don't like needing an MOT and a Council test

Proposal	Officer comments
1. Executive private hire vehicles – having a small internal disc/plate similar to in London.	This is unnecessary as the Council already issue a small internal plate for display and for Exec PHVs and issue an exemption notice that can be provided to any person who requires evidence of being licensed.
2. Fees are too high	Fees are not a policy matter. The correct time to comment on fees is during the annual fee setting consultation period.
3. No Additional tests for older vehicles	The Council have always had a policy to test vehicles over a certain age, twice per year. The legislation allows for a maximum of three times per year. Licensed vehicles carry out a large number of miles annually when compared to private vehicles and have a greater level of wear and tear which impacts on the safety of the vehicle. The mileage a vehicle has done, the higher the wear and tear and therefore requires additional tests at a standard higher than a normal MOT.
4. Removing multiple vehicle tests	It is accepted that having a normal MOT offers some confidence that a vehicle is in a mechanically 'fit' state, however it has long been the Officers' and Technicians' view that licensed vehicles that carry out more mileage

	<p>and have greater levels of wear and tear should also be subject to a test of a higher standard to ensure, as far as practicable, the safety of the travelling public. A MOT is the minimum standard that private vehicles must attain and not sufficient for licensed vehicles.</p> <p>N.B. This view is contrary to the provisions in the DfT BPG.</p>
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- 2.12** The response from the Alderman was in favour of retaining door livery for public safety reasons, and stated that even if you receive a text message with details of your pre-booked vehicle it can still be difficult to locate it, especially if it is dark. A copy of the response is included within Appendix D.
- 2.13** The response from Guide Dogs provided information about the use of Guide Dogs, the difficulties users face, how important they are to maintain independence and stated that 58% of users have experienced being refused access by a licensed vehicle. A copy of the full response is attached as **Appendix E**.

Overall, the response was supportive and welcomed many of the points that the Council have already included within the policy. However, they also recommended that the certain areas, detailed in brief below, could be strengthened to further ensure that Guide Dogs users are treated fairly and licensed driver and operators meet their statutory obligations.

Proposal:	Officer comments:
1. That Appendix I – Private Hire Operator licence conditions should include reference to their legal obligations under Equality Act 2010	The Policy already has this for drivers in the code of conduct so it is sensible and appropriate to have the same provisions in these conditions.
2. It is recommended that the policy makes clear that drivers not stopping when they see a guide dog still constitutes the offence of refusing access.	It is sensible and appropriate to make this clear within the policy.
3. The policy should be amended to reflect that the relevant provisions of Equality Act 2010 have now been widened to all disabled passengers and not just those with assistance dogs or that require mobility assistance.	It is sensible and appropriate to make this clear within the policy.
4. The policy, or elsewhere, should include information about what is considered within the Disability Equality Training section of driver training to provide assurance to disabled persons	It is sensible and appropriate to make this clear within the policy and/or website.
5. It is recommended that the Council operate a zero-tolerance approach to offences under the Equality Act 2010, with a view to prosecution.	It is sensible and appropriate to make this clear within the policy, however Officers will have to make decisions having regard to the Corporate Enforcement Policy.
6. It is recommended that the Council work with assistance dog owners to ensure compliance using various means which may include test purchases.	It is a sensible and appropriate recommendation however Officers opinion is that it does not necessarily need to be included within the policy. Officers have already made enquiries

	with a view to carrying out test purchases with volunteer assistance dog users.
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Officers have amended the proposed policy taking into account the recommendations (1) to (5) detailed in the table above.

- 2.14** The response from Staffordshire County Council School Transport Team (Staffs CC) consisted primarily of comparisons between the proposed policy and their contractual terms and agreements, rather than any recommendations or views on the proposals. It remains a condition of their contracts that the companies standard livery is displayed in a prominent position, which is line with the proposal to retain door livery. A copy of the full response is attached as **Appendix F**.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1** Agree the proposed policy document at Appendix A; and
- 3.2** Approve that the policy document takes effect from 1st January 2026.

4. Reasons

- 4.1** The Council's taxi licensing policy is due to be reviewed in 2025. The publication of the Department for Transport's updated Best Practice Guidance and amended, or planned amendments from other local authorities whose licensees work in the area have been taken into account when drafting this proposal.

5. Options Considered

- 5.1** To not review the taxi licensing policy and simply extend the current provisions.
- 5.2** Alternatives to the proposed amendments have been considered but not included as it is felt that the proposals achieve the Council's duty to protect the public whilst updating the provisions.

6. Legal and Statutory Implications

- 6.1** The Council must have a comprehensive and cohesive policy that covers taxi licensing. There is no statutory requirement to adhere to the provisions of the DfT BPG but it is a significant change from the 2010 version and Officers' felt it was correct to review the policy against this guidance.

7. Equality Impact Assessment

- 7.1** None carried out to date.

8. Financial and Resource Implications

- 8.1** There will be resource implications during the implementation phase of the updated policy. These resources will be met by current staffing levels.
- 8.2** Applicants who do not meet the updated policy may challenge decisions and require additional Sub-Committee meetings to those currently planned. This would require additional resource on Officers, which would be met by current staffing levels, but also more time commitments on Members of the Committee and support staff from legal and democratic services.

9. Major Risks & Mitigation

9.1 None identified

10. UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG)

10.1



11. One Council

Please confirm that consideration has been given to the following programmes of work:

One Commercial Council: ☒

Taxi licensing operates on the basis that it is cost recovery at most, the Council is not permitted to make a profit on the income made through the service. Processes are continually being refined with a view to identifying efficiencies.

One Sustainable Council: ☒

The Licensing Department are actively reviewing how the taxi policy and administering the regime can be refined to be more sustainable and assist the Council in achieving it's net-zero goals. In due course we will be moving to issuing front and internal vehicle plates with no expiry so they will not need replacing every year and moving to a paperless licensing system.

One Digital Council: ☒

The Licensing team are currently involved in the build of a new case management system which will include a customer portal allowing self-service, and multiple APIs which will reduce the number of document checks required.

12. Key Decision Information

12.1 Not applicable

13. Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions

- 13.1 August 2019 – Licensing & Public Protection Committee
- 13.2 January 2021 – Licensing & Public Protection Committee
- 13.3 February 2022 - Licensing & Public Protection Committee
- 13.4 December 2023 - Licensing & Public Protection Committee
- 13.5 April 2024 - Licensing & Public Protection Committee
- 13.6 October 2024 - Licensing & Public Protection Committee
- 13.7 January 2025 - Licensing & Public Protection Committee

14. List of Appendices

- 14.1 Appendix A – Draft Proposed Taxi Licensing Policy 2026-2030 for consultation
- 14.2 Appendix B – Summary of changes in Draft Proposed Taxi Licensing Policy 2026-2030
- 14.3 Appendix C – Consultation responses re: Suitability Guidelines
- 14.4 Appendix D – Consultation responses re: proposed taxi licensing policy

14.5 Appendix E – Consultation response from Guide Dogs

14.6 Appendix F – Consultation response from Staffordshire County Council School Contracts Team

15. Background Papers

15.1 [Taxi Licensing Policy 2021-2025](#)

15.2 [Department for Transport Statutory Guidance for Taxi Licensing 2020](#)

15.3 [Department for Transport Best Practice Guidance 2023](#)