

<b>Report title</b>	<b>2024 Annual Report on Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing</b>
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<b>Department</b>	Environmental Services
<b>Exempt?</b>	No
<b>Exemption type</b>	Not applicable

**Purpose of report:**

- **For information**

**Synopsis of report:**

**To present the 2024 Annual Report on matters relating to Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing and its operation within Runnymede**

**1. Context and background of report**

- 1.1 The Licensing Section is responsible for administering and enforcing the Hackney Carriage (HC) and Private Hire (PH) licensing regimes in Runnymede. This report is to enable the Committee to be appraised of developments over the past year and gives an overview of the work undertaken by the Licensing Section.
- 1.2 The annual report includes statistical data from the Council’s licensing records. To have some commonality with other reports, unless otherwise stated, the data covers the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

**2. Report and, where applicable, options considered and recommended**

- 2.1 Detail is included in relation to the following items;
  - Statistics
  - Suspensions / refusals
  - Knowledge test
  - Communications
  - Enforcement and complaints
  - Fees and fares
  - New legislation and guidance
  - Conditions and requirements
  - Future Developments
  - Staffing arrangements

## Statistics

- 2.2 A chart showing detailed statistical information on the numbers of drivers, vehicles and operators licensed by Runnymede since 2012 is shown at **Appendix A**. As at 1 April 2024 there has been a 5.4% increase in HC and PH Drivers since the previous financial year, and a 2.5% decrease in the total number of Vehicles.
- 2.3 Members will note the number of licensed drivers and vehicles has declined since records began in 2012, with significant decreases during the Covid pandemic. It does though appear that the decline has now slowed and we are observing a levelling out in numbers. There are still more drivers licensed than vehicles and it is likely that as drivers with no vehicles come to the expiry of their current HC or PHV licence they will not renew it, so we do expect driver number to reach near parity with vehicles over the next few years. The changes in regulations, online app booking systems and the influx of out of area drivers and vehicles into Runnymede have all contributed to this decline. Operators continue to report a high demand for their services. However, driver shortages are challenging, but are a nationwide problem and not unique to one area. Many drivers have not returned to the trade post pandemic, those who were of an age where they could retire have decided to do so and some drivers have moved on to other jobs.
- 2.4 Runnymede amended the vehicle age policy in 2014 by introducing 'no age limit' along with more stringent standards concerning the condition of the vehicle. The charts below are produced to show age and mileage statistics of taxis and private hire vehicles in Runnymede as of 31 March 2024.

Chart 1- Mileage of vehicles

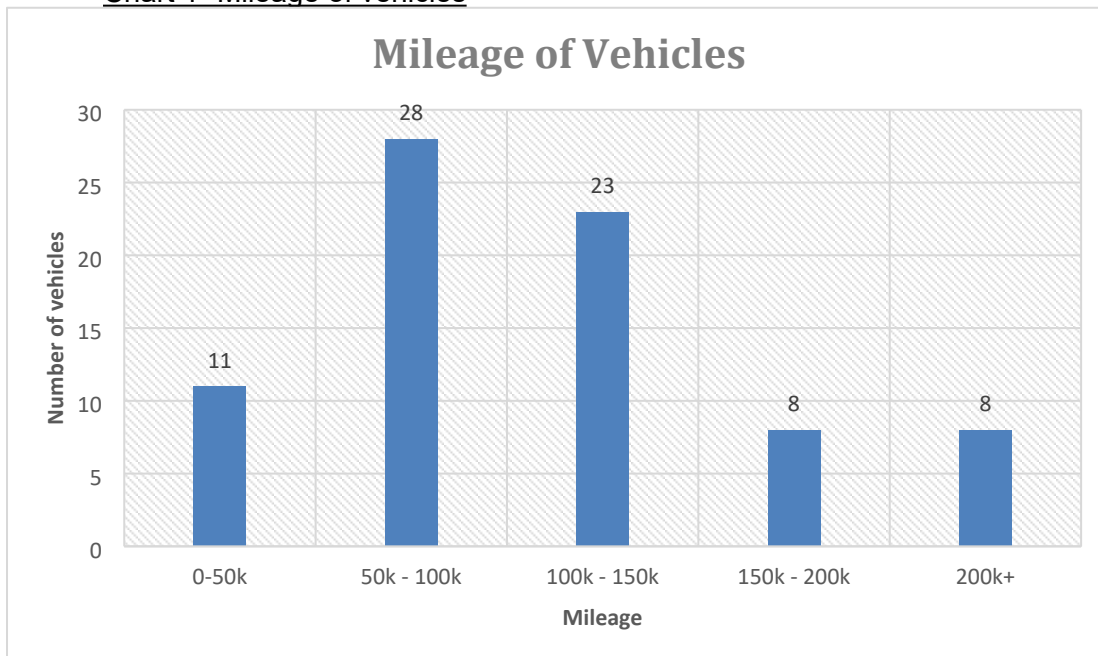
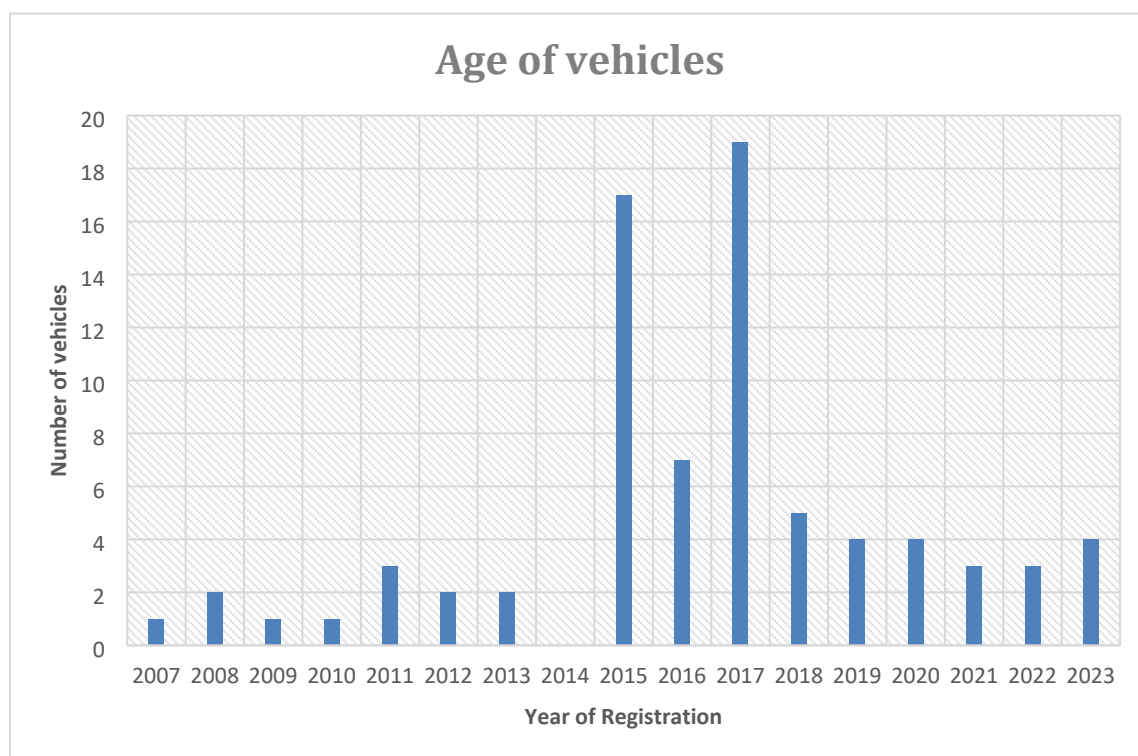


Chart 2 – Ages of vehicles



2.5 In light of the challenge to reduce vehicle emissions and the introduction of the Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) in London and its proposed introduction elsewhere, chart 3 (below), has been produced to demonstrate the number of HC and PH vehicles licensed in Runnymede meeting the various Euro engine emission standards. These define acceptable limits for exhaust emissions of new light duty vehicles sold in EU and EEA (European Economic Area) member states and are designed to become more stringent over time.

Chart 3 – Vehicle emission standards

Vehicle newly registered from	Emission standard	Number licensed
1 January 2006	Euro 4	5
1 January 2011	Euro 5	15
1 September 2015	Euro 6	57

NB: 1 vehicle – unknown

Suspensions, refusals and revocations

2.6 The Licensing Section assists drivers in keeping track of their documentation by sending them a reminder letter or email 4 - 8 weeks prior to the expiry of their medical, DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check, DVLA driving licence check and HC/PH drivers and vehicle licence renewals. Councils are not obliged to remind drivers of these dates but it is a routine, well-practiced procedure, which assists in the smooth running of the licensing regime. This is often followed by a phone call or text to ensure drivers are taking steps to ensure they supply the required documentation and applications on time.

2.7 There were no suspensions, refusals or revocations in this financial year.

### Knowledge test

- 2.8 All new Driver applicants are required to pass the Runnymede hackney carriage or private hire knowledge test, and all Operators are required to pass a test on the conditions and requirements of operators.
- 2.9 The knowledge test is scheduled once a month and the fee is payable for the first Test and any subsequent resits. The test is in English and in written form although we do make provision for those with difficulty reading or writing. A maximum of six applicants may take the test at the same time.
- 2.10 The current test comprises four parts:
- Part 1- conditions and regulations;
  - Part 2 - numeracy test;
  - Part 3 – topographical test;
  - Part 4 – route test for hackney carriage driver applicants only.
- 2.11 To maintain relevance, the knowledge test's content is updated at regular intervals to consider new legislation or conditions, as well as new developments within the borough.
- 2.12 It is important to ensure the knowledge test is at the right level to demonstrate applicants have sufficient local knowledge and that it has not become a barrier preventing new driver applications. It is reviewed regularly and changes are made to update it with the newest information following road layout/name changes, or the structure of questions.
- 2.13 All those who apply to do the knowledge test receive a study guide to assist them in preparing for the topographical test (part 3). This test is a simple test of the applicant's knowledge of the local area. This comprises of 60 questions which ask for the street name and town of locations or prominent landmarks. In demonstrating they know where these key locations are, we can be confident that the driver has an appropriate level of knowledge about Runnymede.

### Communications

- 2.14 Over the past year we have continued to communicate with the trade as much as possible. Our methods of communication and further improvements aimed at reducing costs are described below.
- 2.15 Officers produce a regular newsletter which contains details of events, latest developments in the trade and new legislation. This is emailed to all drivers and operators and placed on Council's web site where there is a page specifically for hackney carriage and private hire news. All drivers and operators have been made aware of the existence of this webpage and encouraged to view it.
- 2.16 Drivers are asked to supply us with their email address; this is the best way to communicate with them and vice versa. We can send group or individual emails to All drivers and all operators as necessary.
- 2.17 As referred to in section 2.6 above, reminder emails are sent to drivers with the necessary information for licence renewal, medical checks, DBS checks, tax

conditionality checks and vehicle MOT's etc. We also use texts for general messages. Texting costs approximately 0.1p per text and we can send a text to individuals or groups. This is most useful for making drivers aware of urgent matters and can be used to send additional reminders if necessary. The use of email notification also keeps costs down and this is reflected in the licensing fees.

- 2.18 Forums where drivers and operators can exchange views with the Licensing Section were re-introduced in October 2013, although these were put on hold during the pandemic. These are held approximately three times per year, with the most recent being held on 25 October 2023. The next forum for this financial year will be held on 14 June, with further forums due to be held during October 2024 and February 2025.
- 2.19 Despite encouragement, attendance at forums is very low, however those who do attend raise some very valid points and give us some useful feedback which is always very welcome.

#### Enforcement and complaints

- 2.20 The Licensing Section becomes involved in enforcement activity where necessary.
- 2.21 Transport for London Enforcement Officers have supported us in previous years and joined us for enforcement days in both June and July 2023. The focus was mainly on TfL licensed vehicles working in the Egham and Virginia Water areas. The operation carried out in July was organised for when Ascot races were being held. A further joint enforcement operation took place in June 2024.
- 2.22 A total of 6 complaints have been received about Runnymede drivers and operators in the last financial year (7 were received for 2022-2023). Details of these are provided below:

<b>Month received</b>	<b>Issue</b>	<b>Action taken</b>
May 2023 – via passengers family's complaint to Surrey Council Council/Surrey Police.	Alleged incident with PH Driver on School run in March 2023.	Full investigation and interview under caution carried out by RBC. Committee Hearing July 2023 - insufficient evidence to suspend or revoke the driver's licence.
June 2023 – member of the public.	Competency of PH driver regarding directions and lack of assistance provided to customers.	Informal action.
November 2023 – member of the public.	Speaking inappropriately to a female passenger.	Informal action with Driver.
January 2024 – 2x members of the public (two separate complaints).	Overcharging (change over in private hire operator/company).	Informal action with PH operator.
February 2024 – anonymous.	Driver plying for hire without a licence.	Informal action with licensed PH driver.

- 2.23 Previously there was no scope to recover enforcement costs through taxi licensing fees. Councils can now recover costs of investigating complaints about drivers licenced by that Council only. Fees cannot be recovered in relation to any

Investigation into drivers licensed by other Councils or drivers who are unlicensed. Officers are recording the amount of time spent on any investigation so that any additional costs can be recovered through the fee structure.

- 2.24 Enforcement activity takes a considerable amount of Officer time and it must be done correctly and meet evidential standards. The Licensing Section must balance the other licensing priorities against enforcement activity to ensure we deliver a service to drivers and operators which does not delay their applications.

#### Licensing Fees and Fares

- 2.25 Fees and hackney carriage fares are reviewed annually in November of each year. Following the review in 2023 changes were made to fees for the period 2024/2025. The fees are shown at Appendix B.
- 2.26 In March 2024 the Committee's approval was sought to increase the taxi fare tariffs, following a survey of the trade in late 2023, which were in favour of a review. The fares had not been increased since June 2022. Following the public consultation on the proposed new tariffs, where no objections were raised, the changes came into effect from Monday 8 April 2024. Subsequently, all drivers have submitted calibration certificates to confirm that their meters have been re-calibrated to the new rates accordingly. The current fares are shown at Appendix C.
- 2.27 The fee setting process includes a comprehensive breakdown of fees for each licensing process. In setting the fees we have been transparent in our approach and made all reports and details of the fee setting process available.
- 2.28 It is essential that fee setting for taxi and private hire licensing reflects the true cost of administering / determining applications.
- 2.29 Fee setting will take place again later this year; a report will be presented to this Committee in November 2024.
- 2.30 Over the last few years there has been a reduction in the number of drivers and vehicles which has had a significant impact on the income from taxi licensing. As at 31 March 2024, we have 48% fewer drivers and 52% fewer vehicles than we did 5 years ago. This equates to a significant loss of income in licence fees.

#### New and proposed Legislation and Guidance

- 2.31 In 2020 the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards were published and many of these were subsequently included in our Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy in January 2021.
- 2.32 An updated Department for Transport Best Practice Guidance for taxi and private hire vehicles was published in November 2023. The content will be considered this year in conjunction with the review of our taxi policy which is due for renewal on 31 March 2025. Members should expect a consultation on this around September 2024.
- 2.33 The National Register of Taxi Licence Revocations and Refusals (NR3) has been available since 2018. NR3 was developed and promoted to improve public safety and confidence in taxi and PHV licensing. The benefits of sharing this data were widely acknowledged and the Department for Transport has recognised the value of NR3, using legislation to mandate its use.

- 2.34 In March 2022, the Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Act 2022 received Royal Assent. Statutory Guidance was then published in May 2022. From 7 April 2023, the Act placed new duties on PHV licensing authorities in England. The Act contains provisions that **require** licensing authorities to record information relating to drivers' licensing histories (refusals, revocations or suspensions) on the new NR3 National Register. Furthermore, before a licensing authority in England decides whether to grant or renew a driver licence, it **must** search the Register for any entry relating to the applicant. A licensing authority must not base its decision solely on an entry on the database. Every application must be considered on its own merits.
- 2.35 The simple objective of the new NR3 National Register is to ensure that licensing authorities can take properly informed decisions on whether an applicant is 'fit and proper' in the knowledge that another licensing authority has previously reached a negative view on the same applicant. The NR3 Register provides a mechanism for licensing authorities to establish whether an individual has had a licence refused, revoked or suspended and identifies the licensing authority that took the action.
- 2.36 The new Register is maintained by the National Anti-Fraud Network (NAFN).

#### Conditions and requirements

- 2.37 Runnymede's existing hackney carriage and private hire licensing policy was adopted by the Council on 2 March 2021. To date, the policy has proved itself to be of great assistance as it has eliminated many of the grey areas around taxi and private hire licensing. This policy is valid until 31 March 2025.
- 2.38 In April 2018 the online training program concerning of the mandatory training for drivers and operators on safeguarding and recognising child sexual exploitation was made available to the trade. This is a Surrey wide initiative supported by all Surrey Districts and Councils, including Surrey County Council.
- 2.39 Drivers must, as per our policy, subscribe to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) update service (at a cost of £13 a year). This allows licensing staff to simply check the status of a driver's DBS online, with their written permission. This makes for a simpler cost saving service with little inconvenience for the driver.
- 2.40 In June 2022, the Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Disabled Persons) Act 2022 took effect in England, Scotland and Wales. It amended the Equality Act 2010 by introducing new and amended existing duties for local authorities and taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) drivers and operators alike. It is a condition of driver licensing in Runnymede that drivers and operators take an online course to avail themselves of their duties and responsibilities.
- 2.41 One of the benefits enjoyed by the trade in Runnymede is that we do not have an age limit on vehicles. This of course allows those older, but good condition vehicles to be licensed. However, we do expect vehicles to be in a safe condition and have a licensing condition in place where if a vehicle has MOT advisories on any tyre, brake, steering, or suspension matters that vehicle will not be licensed until the defects have been remedied.

### Hackney Carriage Ranks

2.42 To date, the following ranks have been appointed for hackney carriages within the Borough of Runnymede;

- Virginia Water Station Approach 2 (adjoining the public car park)
- Egham Railway Station 6 (Egham station car park)
- Chertsey Railway Station 2 (Chertsey station car park)
- Addlestone Station 2 (Addlestone station car park)
- Thorpe Park 3 (public car park)

In addition to these ranks, designated drop of and pick up points are available at some supermarkets and the Addlestone One development.

2.43 Previous attempts to introduce new ranks in Egham have not been successful due to lack of support from local business, the public and the trade. We are aware of the need for additional ranks, particularly in Egham town centre.

2.44 The ranks at railway stations are situated on land belonging to South Western Railway (SWR) who charge for their use. The Council has a contract with SWR which allows the Council to rent the ranks at a very favourable rate. We are fortunate in that the fees charged for these ranks are substantially lower than elsewhere - only one other station in the entire SWR region has a similar arrangement.

2.45 South West Railway are going to take back the control, supervision and contract arrangements for the station ranks from 1 January 2025 onwards. This means that the Council will no longer be involved in the contract arrangements with SWR and that drivers would have their own individual contract with SWR, as they do in most other areas. In March 2024, the Committee approved the contractual changes with South Western Railway.

2.46 The trade have been informed about the changes via the Taxi Licensing Newsletter that was sent out in February 2024, and will continue to be updated regularly by the Service as matters progress. A Taxi forum will be held on 14 June 2024, when Officers will be present in person to answer any queries raised by the trade.

2.47 South West Railway (SWR) have reviewed their fees for this calendar year 2024, and they are increasing them from £5,000 to £6,600. The cost of these bays is paid initially by the Council who then recoup the cost via vehicle fees the following year, so the trade always pay a year in arrears.

2.48 This year's fees were set in November 2023 and came into effect on 1 April 2024. The HC vehicle fee for 2024 reflects the amount charged to each vehicle licence to recover the £5,000 the Council paid to SWR for use of the bays in 2023, approx. £106 per vehicle. Similarly next year, in 2025 the vehicle fees will reflect the amount charged to each vehicle licence to recover the £6,600 the Council have pay to SWR for use of the bays in 2024, approx. £144 per vehicle.

### Staffing of the Licensing Section

2.49 The section's current staffing consists of;



- One full time Senior Licensing Officer who also has responsibility for applications for all Taxi licensing, The Licensing Act 2003, the Gambling Act 2005, Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013 and Pavement Licensing.
- One part time Taxi Licensing Officer post (working 12.5 hours a week).
- One full time Licensing Administrator who has responsibility for administering Taxi licensing, the Licensing Act 2003, the Gambling Act 2005, Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013 and Pavement Licensing.

2.50 The Taxi Licensing Officer's post comprises 25 hours a week. This historically has been shared by two officers. However, one half of this post (12.5 hours) has remained vacant since August 2020. With a decrease in the number of drivers and vehicles there is less income, and not filling this vacancy makes savings for the Service. It should be noted that whilst we currently have a very experienced officer in post who is able to discharge the duties of the post efficiently and effectively, the service may need to review staffing arrangements to ensure we have a succession plan and can maintain a resilient service for future years.

#### Future Developments

2.51 Although some way in the future, this Committee should be aware of the Government's Levelling up White Paper dated 2 February 2022. Page 179 states:

*'The UK Government will also explore transferring control of taxi and private hire vehicle licensing to both combined authorities and upper-tier authorities. Taxis and private hire vehicles are a key part of local transport systems, so this would allow LTAs to fully integrate these modes into their Local Transport Plans'.*

2.52 The Government has published a public consultation on the potential tax impacts (VAT) of recent High Court judgments on transport legislation. This consultation invites views on potential government interventions that could help to mitigate any undue adverse effects on the PHV sector and its passengers. The consultation is open until 8 August 2024. Further information is available at: [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-the-vat-treatment-of-private-hire-vehicles](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-the-vat-treatment-of-private-hire-vehicles).

### **3. Policy framework implications**

Not applicable

### **4. Resource implications/Value for Money**

Not applicable

### **5. Legal implications**

Not applicable

### **6. Equality implications**

Not applicable

### **7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**

Not applicable

**8. Risk Implications**

Not applicable

**9. Other implications**

Not applicable

**10. Timetable for Implementation**

Not applicable

**11. Conclusions**

11.1 Drivers and Operators have faced many challenges over the last few years and many have left the trade which creates challenges for the Council and those who remain in the trade. It does appear that the number of drivers and vehicles has stabilised over the last calendar year.

**12. Background papers**

- Runnymede Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy  
<https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/downloads/file/572/hackney-carriage-and-private-hire-licensing-policy>
- Levelling up the United Kingdom White Paper  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>
- Statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-standards>
- DfT Taxi and private hire vehicle licensing: best practice  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-licensing-best-practice-guidance>
- Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Act 2022  
[https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/14/contents/enacted?mc\\_cid=c527961f4e&mc\\_eid=16b748b104](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2022/14/contents/enacted?mc_cid=c527961f4e&mc_eid=16b748b104)

**13. Appendices**

- Appendix A: Chart showing the numbers of drivers, vehicles and operators licensed by Runnymede since 2012
- Appendix B: Taxi and Hackney Carriage fees for the period 2024/2025
- Appendix C: Table of Hackney Carriage Fares (April 2024)