

**2022 Annual Report On Hackney Carriage And Private Hire Licensing
(Environmental Services, Robert Smith)**

Synopsis of report:

To present the 2022 Annual Report on matters relating to Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing and its operation within Runnymede.

Recommendation(s):

None. This report is for information only.

1. Context of report

- 1.1 The Licensing Section is responsible for administering and enforcing the Hackney Carriage (HC) and Private Hire (PH) licensing regime 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. In order to have some commonality with other reports, unless otherwise stated, the data covers the period 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022.

2. Report

- 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 is shown at Appendix 'A'. This illustrates the numbers licensed since 2012 for comparison and clearly shows the decline in driver and vehicle numbers over recent years.
- 2.3 Members will note the number of licensed drivers and vehicles has declined over the past 5 years and more recently the speed of the decline has increased since 2017. 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. More recently the pandemic has affected the trade with reduced number of customers, the taxi trade country wide has been hit particularly hard by the pandemic and driver shortages are

commonplace. Many drivers who were of an age where they could retire have decided to do so and some drivers have moved on to other more secure jobs.

2.4 Members will recall that 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 at 31 March 2022.

Chart 1- mileage of vehicles

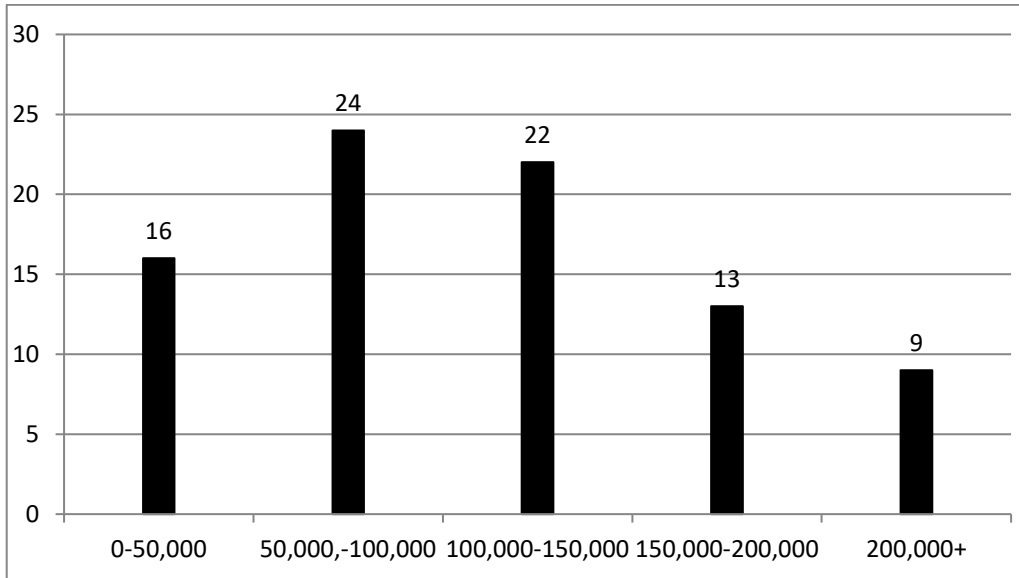
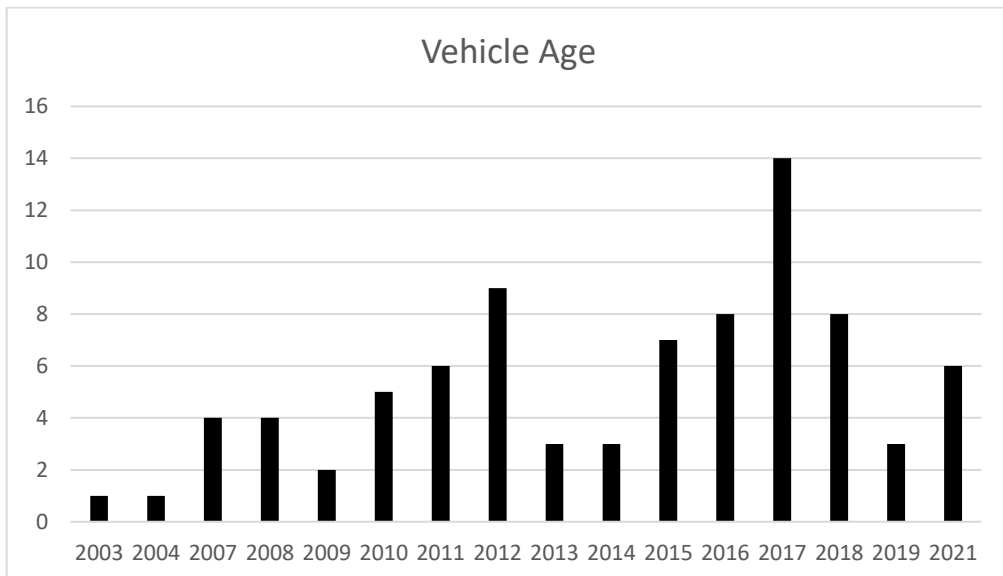


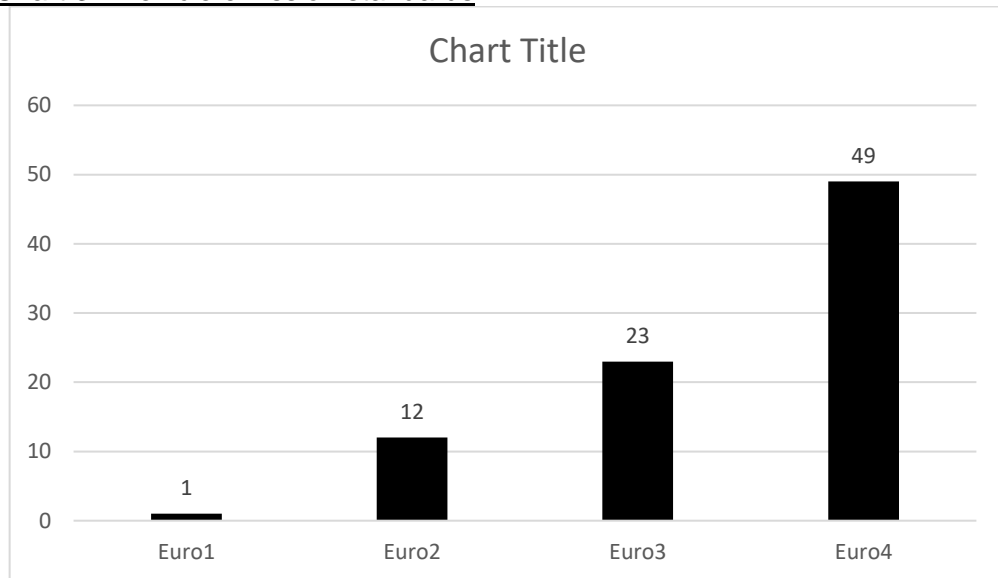
Chart 2 - ages of vehicles

(the number of vehicles is shown on each bar and the scale on the left).



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 4, below, has been produced to demonstrate the number of HC and PH vehicles licensed in Runnymede meeting the various Euro engine emission standards.

Chart 3 – vehicle emission standards



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 6 to 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 documentation and applications on time.
- 2.7 There were no suspensions, refusals or revocations in this 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 carried out once a month and the fee is payable for the first test and any subsequent resits. The test is 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 was brought into operation in January 2014 and comprises three parts: part 1- conditions and regulations which also includes a numeracy test, part 2 - topographical and part 3 – a 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.
- 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 2). This part comprises 60

questions which ask for the street name and town. In demonstrating they know where these key locations are, we can be confident that the driver has attained the required 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 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 have been written to and asked to supply us with their e-mail address; it is now possible to send group or individual e-mails to all drivers and all operators. We continue to encourage drivers to supply their up to date e-mail addresses on application forms.
- 2.17 As referred to in section 2.8, 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 as a matter of course and can be used to send an additional reminder 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, these are held three times per calendar year although these were put on hold during the pandemic, they have now resumed with the most recent on being held on 2 March 2022. Dates for the remaining two forums for this calendar year will be announced in due course.
- 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. In general, only minor infringements are usually identified and the activity is normally concentrated around Egham.
- 2.21 Transport for London Enforcement Officers have supported us in previous years and last joined us for enforcement days in April 2019. Post Covid regulations we will be asking them to join us again.
- 2.22 Two complaints have been received about Runnymede drivers in the last financial year. Both were from the public. A list of these is produced below.
- public x 1 - behaviour of driver – unsupported complaint advice given to driver and complainant

- public x 1 – manner of driving, insufficient evidence no further action taken.
- 2.23 One full investigation was carried out regarding licensing offences by unlicensed individuals by Runnymede in the last year. An investigation was conducted following a complaint from a member of the public about a driver's behaviour. The driver concerned was identified and interviewed under caution. Officers were unable to take any further action due to lack of evidence.
- 2.24 Previously there was no scope to recover enforcement costs through taxi licensing fees. A recent case has clarified this matter and it has now been stated that Councils can 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 diligently recording the amount of time spent on any investigation so that any additional costs can be recovered through the fee structure from 2023 onwards. For example, the complaint mentioned at 2.26 took 14hrs 10 minutes of officer time.
- 2.25 It must be emphasised that enforcement activity does take a considerable amount time and of course it must be done correctly and must 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

- 2.26 Fees and hackney carriage fares are reviewed annually in November of each year. Following review in 2021 changes were made to fees for the period 2022/2023. The fees are shown at Appendix 'B'.
- 2.27 Hackney carriage fares were last increased in June 2014. A consultation exercise took place in summer 2021 to ascertain views regarding a change to fares. The trade response did not indicate any great desire that fares increase and this Committee decided in November 2021 that fares remain as they are with a view to being able to review these again should circumstances dictate. Following recent increases in inflation the fares the trade were surveyed and a report on fares including the current fare card is elsewhere on this agenda.
- 2.28 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.
- 2.29 It is essential that fee setting for taxi and private hire licensing reflects the true cost of administering / determining applications.
- 2.30 Fee setting will take place again later this year; a report will be presented to this Committee in November 2022.
- 2.31 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 off 31 March 2022 we have 122 fewer drivers and 124 fewer vehicles than we did 5 years ago on 31 March 2017. This equates to an income loss of £48,556,185 from drivers (this is split over a three-year period as licences are valid for three years) and £33712 from vehicles per year

(vehicle licences only being valid for one year) a total of £51,717 per year after considering the driver licence fee being split over three years (all figures are approximate).

New and proposed Legislation and Guidance

- 2.32 In 2020 we saw the publication of Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards and the subsequent inclusion of many of these in our Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy in January 2021.
- 2.33 The Department for Transport has now updated its best practice guidance for taxi and private hire vehicles. This is currently being consulted upon and is detailed elsewhere in this agenda.
- 2.34 The Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Safeguarding and Road Safety) Act 2022 received Royal Assent on 31 March 2022. The Act places new duties on taxi and private hire vehicle (PHV) licensing authorities in England:
- 2.35 From 31 May 2022, if any licensing authority in England has certain safeguarding or road safety concerns about a driver licensed by another authority, they must provide relevant information to the authority that issued the licence (see section 5). Any English licensing authority provided with such information must consider whether to suspend or revoke the driver's licence as a result of that information (see section 6). It is expected that further guidance on these requirements will be provided before 31 May 2022.
- 2.36 In due course, the Act will also require licensing authorities in England to input, into a central database, instances where the authority has refused, suspended, or revoked a taxi or PHV driver's licence because of certain safeguarding or road safety concerns: Before a licensing authority in England decides whether to grant or renew a driver licence, it will be required to search the database for any entry relating to the applicant. If there is a relevant entry, the authority will be required to contact the recording authority to request the relevant information. The decision-making licensing authority will then be required to have regard to the information provided when making their decision.

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. It was given as free training to existing drivers and operators and it is part of the new licence application process; new applicants must pay £18 to take the training. As of 31 March 2022, all drivers and operators who are licensed in Runnymede had completed the training.
- 2.39 Drivers must now, 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 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 good condition vehicles to be licensed. However, we do expect vehicles to be in a good 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.

Hackney Carriage Ranks

- 2.41 To date, the following ranks have been appointed for hackney carriages within the Borough of Runnymede: -

Virginia Water Station Approach	2 - (adjoining 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 - Car park

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

- 2.42 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.
- 2.43 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.
- 2.44 At all other railway stations bar 2, SWR have contracts with individual hackney carriage proprietors and charge each of them between £600 and £1,200 per year for use of the ranks at one station.
- 2.45 SWR charges per calendar year. In the calendar year 2021 Runnymede Council was charged £5,000 (exc Vat) in total for all ten station car park bays, this amounts to £500 per bay. SWR have invoiced the Council for the calendar year 2022, although this cannot be paid until the lease agreement has been accepted and signed.
- 2.46 SWR have the railway franchise until March 2023. The position regarding the railway station ranks from April 2023 is unclear but as soon as the new franchise is known we will seek clarification on continuance of the current arrangement.
- 2.47 For individual hackney carriage proprietors in Runnymede this equated to approximately £106 for each vehicle per year in 2021. This is recovered through the hackney carriage vehicle licence fee and accounts for the difference in fees between hackney carriage and private hire vehicles.

Staffing of the Licensing Section

- 2.48 The Section's current staffing consists of: -

- One full time Senior Licensing Officer who also has responsibility for applications in regard to all taxi licensing, The Licensing Act 2003, the Gambling Act 2005 and Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013.
- 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 and Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013.

- 2.49 The administrative staffing component for all licensing functions is one full time administration post. This is a key position in licensing and one that requires staff with considerable knowledge, common sense, skill and ability.
- 2.50 The Taxi Licensing Officer's post comprises 25 hours a week. This had been shared by two officers. However, owing to retirement one half of this post (12.5hours) has remained vacant since August 2020. With a falling number of drivers and vehicles there is less income and we must take reasonable steps to make savings where we can.

Future Developments

- 2.51 As stated above, the Department for Transport's best practice guidance for taxi and private hire vehicles is currently being consulted upon and the definitive version may be subject of a further report to this Committee.

- 2.52 Although some way off, the Committee will be interested to learn 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'.

This may require some consideration and be the subject of future reports.

- 2.53 The Taxis and Private Hire Vehicles (Disabled Persons) Bill is nearing the final stage of its route through Parliament. In due course a report will come to this Committee regarding mandatory disability training for drivers.

3. Conclusions

- 3.1 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.

(For Information)

Background papers

Runnymede Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy
<https://www.runnymede.gov.uk/article/14534/-Hackney-Carriage-and-Private-Hire-Licensing-Policy>

Levelling up White Paper - the United Kingdom
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>

Statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards

[Statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/standards/statutory-taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-standards)

Taxi and private hire vehicle best practice guidance

[Taxi and private hire vehicle best practice guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-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