

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO LICENSING COMMITTEE

27 JANUARY 2017

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR OPERATIONAL AND PARTNERSHIP SERVICES

APPLICATION FOR THE FORD JOURNEY PLUS TO BE APPROVED AS A TYPE OF VEHICLE SUITABLE FOR USE AS A HACKNEY CARRIAGE IN BRIDGEND

1. Purpose of Report.

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to consider the suitability of a Ford Journey Plus to be licensed to carry six passengers as a Hackney Carriage in Bridgend. A similar vehicle will be available for inspection at the meeting.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1 The proposals are necessary to enable the Council to discharge its functions as a taxi licensing authority.

3. Background.

- 3.1 Under the current licence conditions for Hackney Carriages, vehicle seats must be of a minimum size to be considered suitable for licensing. This is to ensure that passengers can travel in safety and comfort. The following excerpt is from the current policy relating to vehicle specifications:

The vehicle must be of sufficient seating capacity to carry at least four and not more than eight passengers in addition to the driver. The seating capacity, head and knee room shall be as follows:-

(a) Height (Inside): From the top of the seat cushion to the lowest part must be not less than 30".

(b) Knee Space: The measurement between the front of the rear seat and the rear of the driver's seat be not less than 8" when the driver's seat is in a position for a driver of average height.

(c) Seat Width: The width of the back seat from the squab to the front edge must not be less than 17".

Condition (c) above does not apply to rear facing seats in Council approved purpose built vehicles.

(d) Rear Seat (Length): The length of the rear seat measured in a straight line over the majority of its length be such as to allow adequate seating accommodation to the extend of at least 16" per person.

4. Current situation / proposal.

- 4.1 A request has been made by Mr Byron Davies for the licensing authority to consider the Ford Journey Plus as a type of vehicle suitable for use as a hackney carriage in Bridgend CBC. Mr Davies has not made an application but wishes to order a custom made vehicle to replace an existing vehicle. He has advised that there is a four month build process for this type of vehicle.
- 4.2 The Ford Journey Plus is a purpose built hackney carriage, converted by Cab Direct. The vehicle is marketed as being capable of accommodating a driver, four seated passengers and a wheelchair passenger. Alternatively, without a wheelchair passenger, there are two 'tip and turn' foldaway seats in the rear that would allow the vehicle to carry six seated passengers alongside the driver.
- 4.3 The vehicle was inspected by a Licensing Enforcement Officer and was found not to be suitable to be licensed in its present form as it did not meet the dimensions as specified in the hackney carriage vehicle specifications policy. The two rear 'tip and turn' foldaway seats did not comply with the vehicle specifications policy as the rear seat width was 15.5 inches and as such below the required 17 inches.
- 4.4 A photograph available from the Cab Direct website of the two rear foldaway seats is attached at Appendix A. It is considered that these two foldaway seats do not provide sufficient safety and comfort to passengers. In addition, although not covered by current policy guidelines, officers have reservations about the leg position and comfort for some passengers sitting in the rear foldaway seats as a ridge runs in front of the seats forming a "well" between these rear seats.
- 4.5 Following the outcome of the vehicle inspection, Mr Davies was advised that the vehicle did not meet the minimum specification but could be licensed for fewer passengers, but has now formally requested that the vehicle be considered by the licensing authority to carry six passengers. A copy of Mr Davies' letter is attached at Appendix B.
- 4.6 Mr Davies states that the rationale behind this request being that Bridgend CBC already licences the Vauxhall Zafira and Fiat Doblo which have smaller rear seats than the Ford Journey Plus. Furthermore, Torfaen, Bristol and Portsmouth permit the Ford Journey Plus to be licensed to carry six passengers. However, these authorities may have determined that different minimum specifications apply to either hackney carriage or private hire vehicle licensing.
- 4.7 Current vehicle policy only specifies the total number of passengers a vehicle is licensed to carry and does not specify the individual seats in the vehicle that can be used. Therefore, if a wheelchair is not being used, the council cannot impose a condition that would stop one foldaway seat being used by a passenger.
- 4.8 If the vehicle is approved to carry five passengers, this would allow the vehicle to carry four seated passengers and a wheelchair passenger. However, when no wheelchair passenger is present, this may result in one of the foldaway seats being used to carry a fifth seated passenger.

- 4.9 The presence of two foldaway seats that cannot be used by passengers may cause confusion for the public if the driver is required to refuse a journey from passengers who wish to use the rear seats.
- 4.10 Officers would be satisfied that the vehicle be plated for the carriage of five passengers, four in the fixed suitable seats as identified in the Policy and a wheelchair passenger. As the vehicle is being purpose built and has not as yet been ordered, it would seem appropriate to have the two rear foldaway seats excluded from the specification.
- 4.11 The reason for the minimum standards that appear within the policy are to ensure that regardless of the distance the vehicle is required to travel for any booking, fare paying passengers will be provided with a suitably comfortable journey. If the application is granted, Members cannot restrict the type of work undertaken with the vehicle, or impose a maximum distance the vehicle can travel for any one fare.
- 4.12 Should Members be minded to endorse this type of vehicle as suitable for licensing, applicants will need to provide a safety certificate in relation to the alterations made following manufacture and the DVLA's V5 document will need to show the correct configurations in relation to seats, prior to the vehicle being licensed.
- 4.13 Members are also requested to consider the suitability of this type of vehicle for private hire use.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules.

- 5.1 None

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 There are no equality implications arising from this report. The configuration of this vehicle would allow for wheelchair accessibility.

7. Financial Implications.

- 7.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

8. Recommendation.

- 8.1 Having considered the above information and inspection, Members are requested to consider:
- (i) Rejecting the request for the Ford Journey Plus to be licensed to carry six passengers in its current form with the two foldaway seats present in the vehicle but authorise that licences be issued for 5 passengers.
 - (ii) Determine whether the decision should also apply to private hire vehicle licensing.

P A Jolley
Corporate Director Operational and Partnership Services

Date – report send out

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Background documents

Ford Journey – Cab Direct taxi sales brochure

**Tip & turn seats available in the
Plus model for even more
carrying capacity.**

