

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILLICENSING COMMITTEE14 May 2024Report by Clerk to the Licensing CommitteeWHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VEHICLE POLICY**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To report to committee on the response to the consultation regarding potential changes to the Council's current wheelchair accessible vehicle policy and to recommend proposed changes to the policy following such responses.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. That the Committee:-
 - (a) notes the proposals to:
 - (i) amend the current policy in respect of wheelchair accessible vehicles to require all new applications for taxi or private hire car licences (and any subsequent substitutions) to relate to vehicles which are wheelchair accessible;
 - (ii) recommend that no fee is charged for new applications for WAVs;
 - (iii) instruct the Chief Officer Legal and Procurement to report Committee's recommendation regarding proposed fees for WAV applications to Cabinet for final decision;
 - (iv) require all vehicles identified as replacements in a substitution request and which are capable of carrying more than 4 passengers to be wheelchair accessible;
 - (v) approve the definition of wheelchair accessible vehicles as outlined in this report ;
 - (vi) adopt the amended policy for an initial trial period of 18 months and to thereafter review its practical effect at that time.
 - (b) invites representatives of the various stakeholders providing responses to the consultation to attend the Licensing Committee of 11 June 2024, if they so wish, to express their views and answer any questions the Committee may have and adjourns determination of these proposals until said meeting.

BACKGROUND

3. In April 2021, as a result of the financial impacts of the Covid pandemic upon members of the taxi trade, East Renfrewshire Council Licensing Committee agreed to relax its previous policy whereby all applications for the grant of new taxi and private hire car licences required to be submitted in respect of vehicles which were wheelchair accessible (WAV's). From that juncture, only new taxi car applications required to meet this criteria. The Committee at that time also determined to review the position once experience of the new regime had been gained.
4. Following a decision of the Licensing Committee in December 2023 a consultation with relevant stakeholders was undertaken to ingather views regarding the availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles within East Renfrewshire and any suggestions regarding changes to the existing policy. Responses were received in the period January to March and suggested amendments to policy were thereafter formulated based on the views received.

REPORT

5. There is no statutory definition of the term "wheelchair accessible vehicle." At present, East Renfrewshire views the term as describing a vehicle, whether a taxi or private hire vehicle, which is of a size capable of accommodating a wheelchair user (in their wheelchair) and at least one other passenger, provides a safe means of both entry and egress from the vehicle and has an appropriate means of securing the wheelchair whilst in transit. At the time of the decision to relax restrictions in 2021 the number of wheelchair accessible vehicles operating under East Renfrewshire licences numbered 40. As at today's date this number has dropped dramatically both as a result of lapsed licences and drivers replacing wheelchair accessible vehicles with vehicles which did not provide that facility at the time of licence renewal. Recent investigation suggests that there are only 4 such vehicles currently licensed, all of which are private hire cars. The total number of vehicles licensed currently stands at 429 (40 taxis and 389 private hire cars).
6. It should be recognised that taxi and private hire drivers are self employed and the Council has no control over their schedules or hours of work. In essence, this means that any imposed criteria regarding wheelchair accessibility will not guarantee that any particular number of such vehicles will be on the road or available to book at any given time. It is however self-evident that the greater the number of such licensed vehicles, the more likely their availability to wheelchair users.

7. Responses to the consultation were received from MyDisability Plus, East Renfrewshire Disability Action (ERDA), Include Me 2, Eastwood Mearns Taxis and the East Ren branch of the Scottish Private Hire Association (SPHA). Copies of those responses are attached as Appendices 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively. Despite specific requests to stakeholders for statistical information regarding the volume of calls over the preceding 6 months requesting WAVs only Thornliebank Cars replied to advise that no such requests had been received in that timeframe. In summary, responses from disability rights groups highlighted personal experiences of disabled users and their families indicative of the fact that they often struggled to organise WAVs for scheduled trips, particularly those coinciding with school run times, due to vehicles being utilised to transport pupils. Users also highlighted that they had been deterred from making bookings due to historic difficulties in obtaining appropriate transportation. It was also suggested that drivers of WAVs were reluctant to undertake short journeys due to the disproportionate time required to assist the customer in entering and exiting the vehicle. Some users also noted that vehicles classed as WAVs were in fact unable to accommodate larger motorised wheelchairs. Comments were also received regarding the high costs of using such vehicles. MyDisabilityPlus focussed to a large extent on what they viewed as defects with the last change to policy in 2021. They did however highlight a number of recommendations reflecting a desire for the Council to lobby government to create a national policy in this regard, a requirement for drivers to undergo training in equality/neurodiversity issues and a further survey to determine the market, geographical need and type of vehicle required to accommodate the range of wheelchairs currently available.
8. The taxi and private hire trade generally commented on the economic burden licence applicants would face in obtaining vehicles which met the relevant criteria, noting that the price of new vehicles of this type was in the region of £70,000. They suggested the need to ensure that any changes to policy were both proportionate and reflective of the local demand for such vehicles, which they did not believe to be high. They also noted the potential that any requirement to make all vehicles wheelchair accessible may have unintended consequences for elderly taxi users who may struggle to get into such vehicles given their typical high chassis levels. They further cautioned that a demand for wheelchair accessibility in new applications could have the effect of deterring applications and shrinking the taxi/private hire fleet to a size which did not provide a reasonable service to all East Renfrewshire users.
9. There is no doubt that the disabled community are currently disadvantaged by the reduction in licensed WAVs in East Renfrewshire since 2021. The existing number of 4 vehicles is considered to be insufficient to accommodate the potential demand from within the area, particularly given the variability in driver hours and particular stresses at certain times of the day. Whilst demand appears to have been fairly low it is acknowledged that this may be a result of prior negative experiences in booking WAVs which deterred further attempts

to do so. On this basis, it is recommended that steps are taken to boost the number of licensed WAVs to enhance their potential availability.

10. The high financial cost of obtaining or converting to an appropriate vehicle is also recognised, as is the difficult financial climate currently facing drivers. On this basis it is recommended that the mechanism to increase the number of such vehicles does not impact on existing licence holders but is rather focussed on new licence applicants in the first instance. As such, it is suggested that all new applications for Taxi and Private Hire Car Licences received after a date of the Committee's choosing will require to relate to vehicles meeting the definition of a WAV as adopted by the Council. Any substitutions for such vehicles will also require to be WAVs.
11. As highlighted in trade responses to the consultation, there is potential for such a requirement to see a reduction in new applications, effectively shrinking the potential supply of cars generally without creating any additional WAV capacity. In order to mitigate this to some degree it is suggested that as an enticement to encourage applicants, initial applications for WAV licences are processed for no fee. A fee would remain chargeable for any renewals thereafter although Committee may wish to consider whether that renewal fee should also be discounted to some extent. It should be noted that final decisions regarding charging for services are subject to cabinet decision but would follow upon a Committee recommendation.
12. It is further suggested that any application to substitute a vehicle capable of carrying over 4 passengers (plus driver) on to a pre-existing licence to replace a smaller car must be in respect of a WAV.
13. The Council's current description of a WAV is set out in paragraph 5 of this report. It is suggested that the Committee endorses this definition for the purposes of the revised policy. While consideration has been given to the potential adoption of an approved vehicle list, it is felt that such a level of prescription is unnecessary, financially restrictive to applicants and resource intensive to maintain and update given the frequent entry of new models into the market. Officers will undertake further inquiry to establish relevant dimensions for wheelchair models (including motorised models) and licences will only be granted if vehicles are confirmed as capable of accommodating these sizes at pre-grant inspection. Committee may wish to instruct the Chief Officer Legal and Procurement to revisit this exercise on an annual basis and delegate to him the authority to change any size requirements to take account of changes in technology and/or wheelchair design.
14. At present WAV vehicles are subject to different criteria regarding the maximum age limit at first licensing and the age at which they cease to be suitable as licensed vehicles (7 and 12 years respectively, as opposed to 5

and 10 years for non WAVs). It is considered that this extended lifespan goes some way to offsetting the higher purchase costs of such vehicles. Officers are of the view that such age limits remain appropriate and that no change should be made to these requirements.

15. It is difficult to predict the impact the suggested changes to the policy will have in practice. In this regard, it is considered sensible to set an initial short trial period and to revisit the number of WAVs licensed at the end of that period to assess whether there has been a sufficient increase in their availability. A period of 18 months is considered appropriate in this regard. A further report outlining the results would be brought back to Committee at that time.
16. The consultation responses clearly highlight the strength of feeling relevant stakeholders hold in regard to this matter. It is recommended that Committee takes time to digest the responses, considers the recommendations proposed and invites those providing views to the next scheduled Committee to speak directly to Committee members and answer any questions members may have regarding the issues they have raised.
17. Any policy decision made by the Council which is likely to affect individuals with protected characteristics under the Equalities legislation should be screened and assessed for its impact prior to the policy being determined. An impact assessment has been completed in respect of the recommended policy amendments and is attached as Appendix 6.
18. Members will note that the consultation responses extended beyond the topic of WAVs and also address more general issues relating to the carriage of disabled passengers including driver awareness of neurodiversity, assistance animals, assistance to passengers and general customer service. While these issues are beyond the scope of this report, it is intended to bring a further report to Committee in respect of these matters in the coming months for consideration. The response of MyDisabilityPlus also recommends lobbying of national government to prompt a consistent national policy on WAVs and the potential purchase of an East Renfrewshire WAV. It is suggested that Committee authorises the Chief Officer to refer these matters to the Council's Strategic Services for consideration.

RECOMMENDATIONS

19. That the Committee:-
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- licences (and any subsequent substitutions) to relate to vehicles which are wheelchair accessible;
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(b) invites representatives of the various stakeholders providing responses to the consultation to attend the Licensing Committee of 11 June 2024 , if they so wish, to express their views and answer any questions the Committee may have and adjourns determination of these proposals until said meeting.

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Consultation on the review of Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles policy in East Renfrewshire

Submission by Mydisabilityplus.com

1) Introduction

1.1 Would like to thank Councillors for their support and who have fought to bring this matter up for review.

1.2 It is however regrettable that officers have not learnt the lessons and feedback of the last review regarding consultation. Expecting mydisabilityplus a volunteer organisation and the to produce detailed evidence and study within three weeks is unrealistic. Its not something that full time council officers could achieve never mind volunteer community groups. However, we have achieved what we have despite this restricted time limited window framework. We believe that we have been able to make a case for change with some credible options following our approach of simple, minimum investment for maximum outcome, measurable results going forward.

1.3 If the committee wish me to give oral evidence happy to do so especially if further information comes to light.

1.4 As requested before which was refused it would be helpful if the council produced some guidance notes on format to outreach and make the procedure more accessible friendly.

2) Background

2.1 The wheelchair accessible policy was developed by the licensing Committee the then Convenor Councillor Tommy Reilly . Its purpose was to improve the number of wheelchair accessible taxis which at the time stood at 1.

2.2 The policy was met with fierce opposition from the licenced cab industry. A policy was worked out and agreed. This did make a difference to accessible taxis from 1 to 41.

3) Last review March 2021 - suspension of the policy for a year

3.1 In February 2021 by chance, it was found out that there was a review of this policy. Disability groups were excluded from the consultation and report completed by council officers in December 2020.

3.2 I was invited to give presentations on behalf of people with a disability by the then Convenor Councillor Convert. Disabled people with no council support were expected to produce credible evidence in a timescale that council officers could not achieve and faced criticism.

3.3 It was clear from comments made by councillors and officers that there was prejudice and attempts to discredit disability representation that was not right.

- Cllr Miller at the time is responded saying 'things had changed since Banana man ran up and down Fenwick Road'.

- The council officer made inappropriate comments that disabled people were unreasonable.

- It was also highlighted a deficiency in the policy that wheelchairs didn't fit in taxis. This has become more of a problem with many more choices on types of motorised options.

3.4 I warned the committee that pursuing a suspension without an equality impact assessment would be unsafe. The council legal officer offered to postpone a decision to the next meeting to ensure one to be completed. Against legal advice and without a competent equality impact assessment the decision was taken to suspend the policy for a year. East Renfrewshire becoming the first and only known council to restrict disabled access for economic reasons.

3.5 This suspension was promised to be reviewed after one year in March 2022. This review never took place.

3.6 With no safeguards put in place to protect the number of accessible taxis or end the suspension when a level was reached People with a disability watched the number of accessible taxis drop to 21 to single figure back to the level of ten years ago.

3.7 There is no evidence to support in the disabled community confidence that council officers have credibility to manage this policy effectively made worse due to staff sickness.

3.8 We have seen a success of 41 disappear to 21 two years ago to just 4.

3.9 We have no credible evidence of policing of this policy if there has been flouting of the rules. It is not clear that new taxis working in East Renfrewshire are being registered correctly to avoid the policy. It's not clear why East Renfrewshire residents can have a Glasgow license plate. It maybe helpful to explain for clarity how East Renfrewshire residents have vehicles registered in Glasgow and who needs to register in East Renfrewshire.

3.10 It's important that the current committee are aware when reviewing this that they are looking at flawed records of the previous review. We tried to through the complaints procedure to correct this but was rejected.

4) Concerns on the format of the last review

4.1 That all council meetings whether made public or not should be recorded for education and training purposes to correct identified errors can be resolved quickly.

4.2 There are no support notes to help and assist witnesses to understand the processes. The minutes remain inaccurate stating that an equality impact assessment was carried out when it was not.

4.3 The minutes' incorrectly stated Cllr Cunningham was at the meeting when she was not.

4.4 The minutes inaccurately show Cllr O'Kane was not present when in fact he was present.

4.5 There is no confidence by the disabled community in the council approach and handling of the 2021 review.

5) Who we have consulted with

5.1 We contacted all local parliamentarians only one MSP to date has responded that they have not received correspondence from local people. One East Renfrewshire MSP declined to reply as he said mydisabilityplus has an address on its website on the Eastwood side he was prevented from giving information on the Barrhead needs.

5.2 We are grateful to the support of Neil Bibby MSP who is looking into an update of Scottish Government Transport strategy which expired in 2022.

5.3 We have worked and given submissions to the UK Transport Select Committee review on Accessible travel.

5.4 We have reached out to the licensed cab industry and trade bodies to improve the marketing of WAV.

5.5 We have reached out disability campaigners in other areas

5.6 We have asked Jamie Reid Head of Strategic Services if this review document can be published in braille and easy read format to outreach and make it more accessible.

5.7 We have reached out to Scottish Care, which represents local care facilities and face challenges and complications when the right vehicle is not available and staff implications for hospital appointments etc.

5.8 Inclusive Equality Network to identify intersectional issues

6) Recommendations and Summary

6.1 The current WAV policy is scrapped.

6.2 There is no evidence currently it is fit for purpose.

6.3 There is no evidence of this policy being effectively policed many times we have contacted officer no response due to staff sickness.

6.4 There is no recognition in the current policy that times and technology has changed introducing more choice.

6.5 The responsibility for local authorities trying to develop a policy in isolation is at best challenging and emphasis should be on developing a national consistent framework that avoids the current postcode lottery that currently exists.

6.6 The policy as indicated at the last review simply has caused a divide between people with a disability and the industry which should not have occurred or exist.

6.7 Support mydisabilityplus representation to Scottish Ministers that this policy must be developed nationally through the next update of the Transport Strategy document.

6.8 Support mydisabilityplus to promote accessible travel through our helpline linking users with availability of taxis from all sources.

6.9 There is disappointment with licensed cabs when wheelchairs can't fit in because there are now such a wide range of wheelchair shapes and sizes. It's even more frustrating when it's only a matter of a centimetre.

6.10 We are aware of licenced drivers refusing access because of the presence of accessibility dogs unaware of their legal status. They may refuse access on health and safety grounds however many are not aware of training of accessibility dogs.

6.11 There is a training and neurodiversity awareness training that needs to be reviewed and made mandatory for all drivers to encourage better education and awareness.

6.12 If the licensing committee does believe it has a role and wants to restore confidence that the council can assist then the suggestion are the following:

6.13 ERC support the request by mydisabilityplus that there is mandatory training for all drivers run by or supported by mydisabilityplus to ensure better education and understanding of neurodiversity and protected equality issues.

6.14 That a designated East Renfrewshire vehicle funded by SG, SPT with additional support from disability organisations and charities is purchased. Mydisabilityplus could monitor to ensure East Renfrewshire residents have benefit.

6.15 Support mydisabilityplus to keep people with a disability travel accessible for larger wheelchairs such as Motability options.

6.16 Support or fund a credible survey to determine the size of the market, geographical need and type of vehicle required.

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1. Taxi drivers sometimes assume Amber can't pay herself - and say to her - 'get your mum to pay'. Amber has her own bank card and can pay herself - taxi drivers are all different - some are very good and some are poor. It's not fair on Amber she can do it herself
2. Taxis also need to be inclusive in their practice for non wheelchair users.
3. I use a wheelchair and I have a neuromuscular condition. There's been a few times I've wanted to go into Silverburn and I tried to pre-book an accessible taxi locally like not a black taxi, and they said they wouldn't have them available because of the school run which is 5 days a week, morning and afternoon. That was years ago but it put me right off and I never bothered trying again. I've got my own car but someone has to drive me. I literally don't know how many taxis they've got but it's obviously not enough. They need them for children but I need them too for quick journeys where there isn't a lot of parking. Glasgow town has even less disabled parking than ever, some of it taken away for outdoor space during COVID. I have voluntary work I like to do in Glasgow, it would be a lot easier if I could get a taxi in, but it starts in the morning and ends at night.
4. My sister has Alzheimer's disease. She is only 58. I know that one of her carers has had issues taking Kathleen out in taxis. She uses Eastwood Mearns. There have been several occasions when the driver has been rude, grumpy and impatient. My sister can take a while to get in and out of taxis and this seems to cause many problems.
5. Just a quick feedback from a carer of two elderly parents with Alzheimer's and mobility issues. My father in law stopped driving four years ago, my mother in law stopped voluntarily last year assuming she would get taxis everywhere instead. The reality has been that she hasn't got a taxi anywhere in 6 months apart from once. They sent a large 7 seater which she struggled to climb into and my father in law would not be able to access. Drivers often do not have time to support those with poor mobility to exit their house safely or enter the car. Previous taxi use has been in a normal saloon car which my father in law struggles with and often doesn't have room for his Walker/zimmer. If both of them wish to use a taxi we would need to be very specific and have one with easy access and room for two walkers, and I know most taxi companies don't have these or they are tied up in school run. They wouldn't think to request an easy access car so booking a taxi would have to be done by myself.
6. My husband is a wheelchair user, following an accident 4 years ago that left him paralysed from the shoulders down. We have great difficulty in getting him out, due to the fact that there are no longer any wheelchair accessible taxis in the area (private taxis). Even going to a hospital appointment is challenging, so we have been using the 'Driving Miss Daisy' service, who are wonderful, however they are understandably far more expensive. I've had discussion with Spinal Injuries Scotland re this subject, as it is not only the local area that has this issue, but is widespread throughout.

Another point to note is that generally speaking, the taxis could also only take manual wheelchairs. There was not enough height for us to use my husband's electric power wheelchair, which if we could, would give him greater freedom once at our destination, not to mention greater comfort (and I would not have to push).

7. Personally I have experienced extreme difficulties trying to get local taxi-cabs organised for my elderly mum who lives in a nursing home in Newton Mearns and is permanently in a specialist wheelchair from which she cannot be transferred into a car seat.

Mum needs a specialist taxi adapted to accommodate wheelchairs. These are large vehicles having (removable) ramp access and internal space to turn a wheelchair around inside, as well as having specialist wheelchair locking means.

Not many of these are about locally and I could not find one firm who would agree to a once a week regular pick up & drop off which would enable me to take Mum out once a week.

No local firm could guarantee specialist taxis at all, never mind "on time" for Xmas, New Year, family funerals, Mum's 90th birthday etc.

I had to set up a private account for Mum with a Glasgow-based black cab firm to ensure both the correct type of vehicle & priority status for our future bookings. I live in Newton Mearns about 1.5 miles from Mum's Care Home & it costs £85 return for each trip on Xmas, New Year, meal on Boxing Day, my daughter's 16th birthday & Mum's 90th birthday. £30 on each booking was to guarantee the pick up & return times. Taxis being on time are essential as mum is disabled and needs personal care help before leaving the nursing home and again on her return.

I've been quoted £100 for a round trip to The Avenue as "it's not worth the driver taking another booking if you'll want to be picked up again within 2hrs".

I have no choice but to pay these charges because otherwise my mum wouldn't get out of her nursing home.

I accept that specialist taxis cost more, but surely there ought to be something more reasonably priced for people who have no alternative option.

I used to use MyBus for both my parents, when they still lived at their own home, but cannot do so now because no guarantees on pick up or return times mean mum risks missing a personal care window which would cause her anxiety and distress.

I don't know what the solution is, but absent more local accessible taxis, and the facility to pre-book them, I have no option but to continue using the expensive service I've had to put in place.

8 it is very difficult to get a taxi suitable for wheelchairs in East Ren
You cannot normally book in advance as they don't know when drivers with accessible cabs are working.

We have stopped trying to book a taxi as 3 or 4 times they have not turned up, and we are so disappointed when we then have to cancel an arrangement.

My husband has MS and we don't get out a lot, but we cannot make arrangements as Taxis are so unreliable.

They are not really willing to do short runs as wheelchair users cannot get in and out quickly, so they prefer not to bother with us, which is totally frustrating!!!

9. My wife had a mild stroke in December 2023 and then broke her left whilst in hospital I was not able to drive for 6 months in 2023 so we used Eastwood Mearns taxis during that period. The drivers were usually helpful with my wife's Days 3 wheeler to get her in Taxis weren't cheap but they did provide a service



Include Me 2 Club

Published by [redacted] · 7 February at 17:26 · [location icon]



Hi Folks we've been asked by East Renfrewshire Council as a local organisation to give some feedback on accessible and wheelchair access taxis in the authority area.

They are currently undertaking a review of the situation and needs to better inform licensing and allocations. They specifically asked about the situation of guide or assistance dogs, as there seems to be a distinct lack or issue around this area also.

- 👉 Do you use taxis?
- 👉 Is there available taxis for you to use?
- 👉 What would you suggest?
- 👉 Have you encountered any barriers to taxis?

Let us know in ten comments below or message or email us at info@includeme2club.org.uk with your thoughts and feedback so we can pass them along to the committee.



See insights and ads

Boost post

👍❤️ 13

15 comments 6 shares

Comments



[REDACTED] is the only wheelchair taxi driver im aware of, drives for arthulie and has his own school run to deal with, he's a busy man especially cause so many people depend on him.

◆Top fan

[REDACTED]

There is a critical lack of specialist wheelchair taxis, specifically taxis large enough to accommodate a wheelchair with someone in it & accessing via a ramp. I had to set up a private account with a black cab firm in Glasgow to guarantee taxis to get my 90 year old Mum to/from her Nursing home to my house for Christmas, New Year, & other family celebrations. No local firms could guarantee taxis. No local firms in Clarkston or Newton Mearns would take a "regular" weekly booking to/from The Avenue etc., for her either. Have seen a post about Arthurlie Taxis & will try them. If I had the money I'd get an adapted vehicle.

◆Top fan

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I have multiple sclerosis (and a few others) I use Arthurlie Taxis daily they have a few cars and the drivers are amazing. I never have any bother they are always very accommodating

[REDACTED]

I have to travel every day with an emotional support dog, on a contract to get my kids to school. We have had to point out it's in the order multiple times and also had a driver cancel more than once. We have had multiple drivers, most are fine, but we can't get a specific driver or time even though both my kids are autistic and the routine would really help

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] sometimes it is down to people / drivers having allergies not only because they don't like dogs

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I appreciate that, however they don't read the brief as I am clear with them that I need to take the dog and because there isn't a clear box they don't know cause they don't scroll down on their phones

[REDACTED]

I am a taxi controller and yeah ur right sometimes the drivers don't have time to read as they usually get a job when there on a job accept it then forget there is a note on the job we always advise to call rather than use the app as we have a wee code we put on the job and they see it straight away we don't see it when an app job comes in hence reason we say to call in I work for Renfrewshire cabs and we have dog hire cars specifically to take animals so we can always check when you phone if there is any available if they have jobs sometimes we even ask the driver while your on phone hard though to predict how many will be on they don't have specific shifts all self employed so up to them when they work it is soooo hard same goes for wheelchair and people carriers

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] yes I had the contract organised as its a school run, so they should have been able to tick that box when it was set up on the phone then. As I also told them it was two vulnerable children with autism also. The problem I have is that whether or not they have a way to communicate better with drivers would be good. I've been doing this every day for 3 weeks and still regularly get surprised drivers

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I find that strange tbh all of our school hire drivers as pre assigned so as the children have a regular driver and we always have a 2nd on standby

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] it's not done through council as its only temporary but yeah it's frustrating

[REDACTED]

I know from being a carer, they're very limited. 1 or 2 available cars at the most I think. It's also the bigger taxis so it incurs an extra charge (not 100% sure if it's still the case, but definitely used to be).

A lot of drivers also don't offer any help due to health and safety which can be a little difficult too.

Definitely not the easiest way to get around!

[REDACTED]


Hi I am a support worker in east Renfrewshire Barrhead I only know of one taxi that is wheelchair accessible and that is with Arthurlie taxi company ... due to the lack of availability we have to pre plan a day out instead of just phoning a taxi and being able to travel



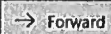

[REDACTED]

There is wheelchair accessible taxis but not many 3 max last I used, one of them is so small can only carry one passenger with the wheelchair user aswell, I found I was imprisoned in barrhead due to this fact as I don't drive (apps were so difficult to attend) and with public was lack of knowledge from drivers realising was a wheelchair and not a buggy as the young kids wheelchairs look very similar to a buggy, more big accessible taxis is needed due to fact public transport in east renfrewshire is not dependent on either late or no shows at all with many bus services here, I've put people off moving to barrhead with this fact because u can't get in and out of barrhead at night unless you drive or freeze to death waiting on a bus every hr at night if coming from glasgow :-)

Email Received

Accessible Taxi Availability

 To IM2C Info

 Reply  Reply All  Forward  

Thu 22/02/2024 14:10

Dear includeme2 club

I saw your recent Facebook post on accessible taxi availability within the East Renfrewshire area. My daughter currently resides in supported accommodation in Neilston serviced by the McFarlane Trust. As a wheelchair user, she is regularly unable to secure a taxi and has missed out on several organised events due to this. She has less difficulty accessing a taxi for the return journey.



EASTWOOD MEARNNS

Riverbank House, 28 Field Road, Busby, Glasgow G76 8SE
Tel: 0141 644 5353 | Email: office@eastwoodmearns.com
www.eastwoodmearns.co.uk

Brian Kilpatrick

11 Mar. 24

East Renfrewshire Council

Re - Wheelchair accessible vehicles.

Hi Brian

Eastwood Mearns Taxis have been servicing the East Renfrewshire public for over 30 years.

Pre covid we had over 200 Taxi and Private hire vehicles, of which we had 5% wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAV). These (WAV) would have cost the drivers several thousand pound to have them converted. If a WAV was booked the customer would have been charged fare + 50%, this would cover the driver's added expenditure. The customer would have been given a government disabled travel allowance to cover the extra 50%. This worked for all concerned. At that time, we had only a few customers per week.

A disabled action group complained that the 50% extra charge was discriminating against disabled people. I must remind you that these customers were given a disabled travel allowance.

We as a company removed the extra charge. Over a period of a few years the drivers who had the disabled vehicles removed the equipment they had installed as covering these hires was now not financially viable. All drivers are self-employed and work extremely hard to make a living wage for themselves and their families.

Due to the disabled action groups complaints, which was around about 2019, East Renfrewshire council changed its policy on the granting of new Private Hire car licences. All new cars had to be wheelchair accessible vehicles. This policy was in place for over 3 years. In that period, we as a company did not start any new licensed vehicle. Prior to this policy we could have started over 10 new licensed vehicles per year.

The Taxi/private Hire industry has been decimated over the last 6 years. This was due to the ER policy change and Covid.

At present we have 140 Taxi and Private Hire vehicles, down 70 from pre Covid (50%). We employ 20 local people in our office.

Since the ER council reverted its Granting of Taxi and Private Hire car Licences for vehicles without wheelchair accessibility, we have seen an increase in new cars starting for our company.

The people of ER council are not receiving the service levels that they once did. This is due to the lack of licensed cars available.

We as a company service all people where we can, able bodied and disabled. As we stand today there are no vehicles fitted with wheelchair access. The cost to put a vehicle with wheelchair access is not feasible for the drivers. They must make a living and they must consider how much they have to invest to make their books balance.

If the ER Council change the licensing policy for new Private/Taxi cars to help solve the transport issue with wheelchair accessibility this will have a disastrous effect on our industry. The last time they changed the policy to try to help the issue it had no effect, quite the opposite, it made the situation worse. The disabled action group that complained about the extra charge only managed to make the wheelchair situation worse.

New drivers will not be able to financially afford to join our industry, there will be no growth. The companies will suffer, the people of ER council will not get the service they need.

Thousands of people use and rely on Eastwood Mearns Taxis, schools, local businesses, disabled people, and the general public.

We must emphasise that we cover many wheelchair hires if the wheelchair folds. We also cover many other people that have disabilities and rely on our service. Sometimes when you try to help solve issues you make the situation worse for the people concerned. You can also create a situation where all other people that use the service are let down.

The taxi/Private hire industry is in turmoil just now. We are still slowly recovering from Covid and the previous licencing changes.

I think all parties involved in Taxi/private hire licencing, drivers, dispatch companies, licencing department, yourself as the enforcement officer, police and any other parties that have an interest in Taxi/private hire transport should have an input in our industry.

Over the last 6 years we have given the people of ER as good a service as we possibly can, through very trying times. Covid and the lack of new granted car licences has damaged the company. Any further licencing restrictions will have a devastating effect on all, the company, drivers and customers.

Yours truly,

Paul Macdonald

Director

Response to East Renfrewshire Council's Consultation on Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Policy

East Ren SPHA <eastrenfrewshire@spha.scot>

Mon 04/03/2024 21:06

To: Kilpatrick, Brian <brian.kilpatrick@eastrenfrewshire.gov.uk>

External email

Contains topics of a financial nature

! This email shows signs of impersonation >

Dear Mr Kilpatrick,

Please accept my apologies for our late response to the Council's Consultation on the Wheelchair Accessible Policy.

The Scottish Private Hire Association (SPHA) appreciates the commitment towards enhancing accessibility within the community. However, we urge the council to carefully consider the ramifications should it mandate for all taxi and private hire vehicles to be wheelchair accessible.

It is crucial to acknowledge that not all individuals with disabilities rely on wheelchairs; many elderly and disabled persons require low rider vehicles like saloons for transportation. A one-size-fits-all approach to accessibility may not adequately cater to the diverse needs of our community.

Furthermore, we have engaged with local operators who have highlighted that the demand for wheelchair-accessible vehicles in the region is notably low. The financial burden of acquiring new or second-hand wheelchair accessible vehicles is substantial, particularly amidst the current cost of living crisis, making it unfeasible for many drivers.

Following consultations with our members, we suggest that the council considers incentivising drivers to invest in wheelchair accessible vehicles by offering free license fees for a wheelchair accessible license. However, it is worth noting that while this may alleviate some financial strain, drivers will still face significant costs associated with purchasing and maintaining such vehicles.

We advocate for a balanced approach that considers both accessibility needs and the financial constraints faced by drivers, ensuring that any decision made is proportionate and reflective of the actual demand in the region.

Yours sincerely,

John Paul Duffy
East Renfrewshire Branch Chair



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