1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider a study into the provision of wheelchair accessible Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicles and to consider the options available to increase provision to the customer.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION/S

2.1 It is recommended that consultation takes place for one month requesting views on each of the recommendations and additional options in paragraphs 5.5 to 5.7 and on the potential ways to implement each recommendation before reporting back to the Licensing Committee to decide on the implementation of the recommendations.

3.0 RECOMMENDED REASON/S FOR DECISION/S

3.1 Wheelchair accessible vehicles (WAVs) are vital in allowing users to access crucial services and for them to live their lives as anyone else would. The Harrogate Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Study identifies a shortfall in provision of 18 WAV vehicles. It identifies this and other factors that are restricting the availability of WAV vehicles having an impact on the quality of life of wheelchair users.

4.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTION/S CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDED FOR REJECTION

4.1 All options are outlined in paragraphs 5.7 and 5.8. There are no other
identified alternatives.

5.0 THE REPORT

Background

5.1 In the Harrogate district, wheelchair users have been facing increasing difficulty obtaining the services of wheelchair accessible licensed vehicles. The difficulties have reportedly increased in recent years. The perceived reduced availability has coincided with reduced levels of provision of wheelchair accessible Private Hire vehicles in Harrogate.

The Harrogate Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Study

5.2 In October 2018 Vector Transport Consultancy were commissioned to carry a study into the provision of WAVs in the Harrogate district. The study was concluded at the end of 2019 with a final report being produced in January 2020.

5.3 The Harrogate Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Study can be found here https://www.harrogate.gov.uk/info/20085/taxis

5.4 The scope of the study and this report is limited to options associated with the function of regulating Hackney Carriage & Private Hire vehicles. Wheelchair users have also expressed views about bus, train and community transport provision in which North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) have an interest. It is proposed that NYCC be consulted on the findings of the study and any findings relating to their areas of work be reported to them for consideration.

The findings of the study

5.5 In summary, the study found that:

- In August 2018, there were 28 wheelchair accessible vehicles in the Harrogate district. 11 of the wheelchair accessible vehicles were Hackney Carriages and the remaining 17 vehicles were Private Hire vehicles. However, as of 14 February 2020 the numbers had reduced to 11 Hackney Carriage and 11 Private Hire vehicles.
- Many wheelchair users face difficulty in obtaining the services of suitably equipped WAV.
- The resultant lack of flexibility and freedom to travel has a significant impact on the quality of life for many people who are forced to use wheelchairs on a full time basis.
- There is a perception by many drivers that transporting wheelchair users in a wheelchair accessible vehicle takes additional time and leads to loss of earnings.
- Some members of the trade felt that wheelchair users are a special case and cannot be catered for without additional funding or other incentive to provide a WAV service.
The recommendations of the study

5.6 Section 7 of the study details the considerations made along with the feasibility and benefits / disbenefits of implementing the measures proposed. It concludes with a set of recommendations outlined in section 7.4

5.7 The recommendations put forward by the study are to:

- Increase the maximum vehicle size for Hackney Carriages to 5.2 metres, for vehicles which are WAVs.
- Introduce measures to encourage wheelchair users to try more providers when attempting to book a WAV, using the existing list of providers published by the Council.
- Introduce additional Hackney Carriage licences for dedicated WAVs. Additional licenses would be introduced in stages, until it is felt that there are sufficient to address the shortfall in provision of wheelchair accessible vehicles.

5.8 In addition to the recommendations in the study, there are three more potential options that have been identified:

- Cease the practice of regulating the maximum number of Hackney Carriage vehicles and insist that any new vehicle licences plates issued (beyond the current 148) are attached to WAVs.
- Require that any change of vehicle (i.e. when a proprietor replaces an older vehicle with a new one) in the existing fleet of 148 Hackney Carriage vehicles be to a WAV until the required number is reached.
- Require that any change of vehicle (i.e. when a proprietor replaces an older vehicle with a new one) in the existing fleet of 148 Hackney Carriage vehicles be to a WAV until all the Hackney Carriages are WAVs.
- To engage a third party to deliver a solution e.g. a community transport scheme or charitable body.

These options do have some significant problems.

Existing ranks would not cope with ceasing the regulation of Hackney Carriages numbers altogether and highways are under heavy demand for other uses so the chances of gaining the necessary additional rank space are small indeed.

Insisting that change of vehicle in the existing fleet be to a WAV until the required number is reached will rest unfairly on those who just happen to be ready for a change in vehicle (and those who wish to provide good quality modern vehicles). It would also result in a stock of older vehicles as people will resist changing their vehicle until the required number is reached.

To move to a position where all Hackney Carriages are WAVs is a ‘one size fits all’ solution. WAV vehicles are adapted for wheelchair users and are not necessarily good for people other types of disability such as impaired mobility.

No community transport schemes or charitable bodies have been identified.
that are in existence and able to deliver a WAV service.

The suggested way forward

5.9 The recommendations in the study and the additional options in paragraph 5.8 have significant details and considerations which have been identified, some of which have potential impacts on the existing Hackney Carriage trade. It is therefore recommended that officers consult widely on each option with both the trade, wheelchair users and those who represent both bodies. It is also proposed that the consultation seeks views on the potential ways to implement each recommendation.

5.10 It is recommended that the consultation be open for one month before reporting back to the Licensing Committee to decide on the implementation of the recommendations.

5.11 There is a no change option but this is not recommended because the study found that many wheelchair users face difficulty in obtaining the services of suitably equipped WAV and that the resultant lack of flexibility and freedom to travel has a significant impact on the quality of life for many people who are forced to use wheelchairs on a full time basis.

6.0 REQUIRED ASSESSMENTS AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The following were considered: Financial Implications; Human Resources Implications; Legal Implications; ICT Implications; Strategic Property/Asset Management Considerations; Risk Assessment; Equality and Diversity (the Public Sector Equality Duty and impact upon people with protected characteristics). If applicable, the outcomes of any consultations, assessments, considerations and implications considered necessary during preparation of this report are detailed below.

6.2 Equality and diversity: The study identifies that wheelchair users are currently suffering a lack of flexibility and freedom to travel having a significant impact on the quality of life for many people who are forced to use wheelchairs on a full time basis. This report considers these matters and puts forward a recommendation to secure and improvement.

Legal implications: Local authorities are expected to demonstrate ‘due regard’ to the Public Sector Equality Duty to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

7.0 CONCLUSIONS

7.1 The purpose of this report is to consider a study into the provision of
wheelchair accessible Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicles and to consider the options available to increase provision to the customer.

7.2 It is recommended that consultation takes place for one month requesting views on each of the recommendations and additional options in paragraphs 5.7 and 5.8 and on the potential ways to implement each recommendation before reporting back to the Licensing Committee to decide on the implementation of the recommendations.

**Background Papers** – The Harrogate Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle Study

https://www.harrogate.gov.uk/info/20085/taxis

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