

MINUTES OF THE
REGULATORY COMMITTEE

held on 13 July 2023 at 7.00pm

Present:

Councillor R.J. Lee (Chair)
Councillor D.J.R. Clark (Vice Chair)

Councillors S. Davis J.A. Frasca, A, John, S, Rajesh and S. Scott

Also in attendance:

Councillor N. Walsh

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bugbee, Chambers, Davidson and Wilson.

2. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2023 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3. **Declaration of Interests**

All Members were reminded to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary interests or other registerable interests where appropriate in any items of business on the meeting's agenda. None were made.

4. **Public Question Time**

Statements were made by members of the public under Item 5 and are detailed under that item.

5. **Taxi Licensing Policy Amendments (Euro 6 Compliance)**

The Committee considered a report that detailed requests, that had been submitted by licence holders for an exemption to the Euro 6 requirement. The Committee were reminded of their decision in February 2020, which had made it a requirement for all licensed vehicles to be Euro 6 compliant by April 2024 and for any replacement vehicles to be Euro 6 compliant after 31st March 2020. Officers also referred to the recent meeting on 1st June 2023, where the Committee had considered requests and decided to keep the Euro 6 requirement in place. It was noted that not all taxi drivers had been aware of the meeting and therefore in consultation with the Chair, it had been agreed to reconsider the matter. As a result, all licensed drivers, proprietors and operators were provided with notification of the meeting and informed that the matter would be reconsidered.

Officers informed the Committee that the requests as detailed in Appendix A to the report, had been made on the basis that the financial implications for replacing vehicles were more damaging post the Covid pandemic and cost of living crisis. Officers detailed to the Committee that a total of 76 vehicles would be impacted if the policy was kept in place. Officers also stated that if the section of the policy was removed it would not be until 2027 that Euro 6 compliance would be reached as a result of licensed vehicles not exceeding 12 years in age.

The Committee heard that ahead of reconsidering the matter, an additional 27 representations had been received in addition to the ones heard in June. It was noted that a petition with 33 signatures had also been sent to officers. The Committee heard that (as they did in June), rather than dealing with each request individually, they would be asked to consider the matter for all Euro 5 vehicles. Officers also informed the Committee that because of comments referring to a lack of Euro 6 wheelchair accessible vehicles, they had written to providers. It was noted that one response from the providers had been received and was at Appendix C.

Councillor John arrived at 7.05pm and Councillor Davis arrived at 7.08pm.

Members of the taxi trade attended the meeting and highlighted the following points to the Committee that had been made in the representations before them;

- The initial decision in 2020 had been taken before the Covid pandemic, cost of living crisis, higher fuel and energy costs and much higher interest rates. These had all been very damaging to taxi drivers and their financial position was considerably worse as a result. This meant finding the money for new Euro 6 vehicles earlier than expected had been a major issue.
- There was a significant shortfall of Euro 6 compliant wheelchair accessible vehicles, with many providers not even able to provide estimates dates for availability. The prices of these vehicles had also increased due to the lack of demand and combined with ever increasing interest rates, were simply not affordable.
- Potentially losing a significant number of wheelchair accessible vehicles from the fleet would have a major impact on members of the public who required wheelchair accessible vehicles.
- Many drivers had purchased vehicles prior to 2020 on the understanding they would be able to use them for the full 12 years, but the 2024 deadline would force them to leave the trade.
- Members of the trade understood the requirement for less polluting vehicles but stated that emissions across all areas of Chelmsford should be looked at rather than just those from Euro 5 taxis.
- All taxis had to pass two mechanical inspections a year and were regularly tested for emission levels.
- An extension to the policy for a few years would be of great benefit to the trade, enabling them more time to raise the required funds and at that point there would also be more availability of required vehicles.

Members of the Committee stated that they appreciated the concerns raised and agreed that the situation was very different to when they had made their initial decision in 2020. It was noted that the Council did have a responsibility to help reduce emissions but there were limited powers available to do this. Members of the Committee also highlighted concerns about potentially losing a large number of

wheelchair accessible vehicles and stated that this would have a negative impact for the residents of Chelmsford. Members of the Committee also highlighted lost earnings during covid and that an extension for a few years would in effect allow those drivers to regain some of those earnings with their current vehicles. Members of the Committee discussed potentially issuing an exemption for wheelchair accessible vehicles, but it was felt that this would not be fair on all members of the trade.

In response to a question from the Committee, officers stated that if the deadline was to be extended there would be a natural reduction in the number of Euro 5 vehicles, as some would reach the 12-year limit prior to 2027. Officers estimated that in 2026 for example there would be around 20 Euro 5 vehicles remaining that had not hit the 12-year overall limit.

The Committee agreed that due to very different position the taxi trade was now in, compared to 2020, that an extension of two years would be a sensible solution. It was felt this would allow the taxi trade time to save money for new Euro 6 vehicles in the future, and that more vehicles should be available by 2026. The Committee also stated that the matter would not be revisited in 2026 and that the decision was final. Officers also confirmed that all members of the taxi trade would be notified of the change. It was also confirmed that officers would explore options in the future to incentivise the use of electric wheelchair accessible vehicles once they were on the market.

RESOLVED that

1. The Euro 6 condition be amended so that all licensed vehicles be Euro 6 compliant by 1st April 2026 rather than 1st April 2024 and
2. Officers be asked to explore options to incentivise the use of electric wheelchair accessible vehicles and to prepare a report for a future meeting.

(7.01pm to 7.36pm)

6. **Urgent Business**

There were no matters of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.36pm

Chair