

Excerpts from the Scottish Government commissioned research in to Taxi and Private Hire Car Market and Local Licensing referred to within the body of the report.

Executive Summary

- 1.13 Significant differences existed between authorities in relation to the method by which public and industry views were sought and considered, ranging between regular forum and occasional ad-hoc postal engagement, though all authorities identified a need to be aware of and consider the range of impacts that may arise from policy development. The range of stakeholders and methods of engagement are set out in subsequent text, whilst the frequency of such engagement was considered to relate to the requirements for policy development and extent to which engagement would be taken up.

Trade Structure and Representation

- 4.23 The study sought to identify the relationships between the trade and authorities across Scotland. This included the nature of the trade, its structure and representation, and the methods by which authorities developed policies in discussion with the trade and the public. Authorities were asked to identify the nature of taxi operations in their area, and the extent to which differing operating types were represented. Categories allowed for independent operation, without grouping; groups representing taxis and PHCs, and groups representing taxis or PHCs separately. The categories used were:

- Independent street taxis (without radio rings)
- Independent radio rings with taxis and PHCs
- Taxi Owners' Associations with radio ring
- Taxi Owners' Associations without radio rings
- Dispatch companies with PHCs only
- Dispatch companies with taxis only

- 4.24 Independent taxis operate without membership of a radio circuit or company. In an urban environment this would require a dependence on street pick ups through hailing and use of ranks, giving rise to the term “street taxi” in many cities. Independent operation in a rural environment reflects differing practices, by contrast, with a larger number of sole traders operating on a stand-alone basis. Rural communities are also less likely to operate taxi ranks or have a significant hailed trade outside larger towns and conurbations.
- 4.25 Of the operating patterns indicated by responding authorities, 37% of taxis and PHCs operate independently of a central company or radio circuit. This figure falls to 33% of city based taxis operating independently, though some disparity exists between the largest cities. A far smaller number of taxis are reported to operate independently in Edinburgh (25%) than their equivalent in Glasgow (just under 50%). The difference is partially explained by the presence of a number of radio companies in Edinburgh compared to one in Glasgow.

- 4.26 Independent mixed radio rings with taxi and PHCs accounted for 37% of the Scottish market, though this fell significantly to 18% in larger cities, reflecting the distinct difference between taxis and PHCs in these markets. Taxi owners' associations (9%) and Company based dispatches of taxis only (27%) represented a small part of the total taxi market, but a more significant role in cities (42%), with a very high proportion of the Glasgow market (75% of all taxis).
- 4.27 In addition to operators and companies, a number of authorities recognised taxi trade and trade union groups. This included Taxi Owners' associations, the union Unite, and expert reference groups, the latter comprising differing trade and stakeholder participants.
- 4.28 Representation of the trade differed quite significantly between authorities communicating directly with the operators and companies, and those seeking a wider input. Patterns included the operation of general forum, working group meetings and meetings arising from specific issues. A number of locations recognised the union Unite as a representative body, though this was not seen as universal. Larger authorities tended to convene meetings with representative groups on a regular basis, though the frequency altered between locations (Glasgow and Renfrewshire every quarter, Aberdeen City, every six months), with additional meetings convened in response to specific issues. Other locations convened meetings on an ad-hoc basis. A smaller number, notably where operators are mainly independent, consulted as they felt appropriate, including consultation via letter (Dumfries and Galloway; East Lothian and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar).
- 4.29 A number of authorities highlighted that differences of opinion were often expressed at regular meetings, with little agreement between different parts of the trade. This was felt to add to the complexity of decision making.
- 4.30 The opinion of the public specific to taxi services was included directly in a number of authorities, through surveys and public participation, as well as through the committee process in all areas. Aberdeen City Council included taxi matters as part of a city voice survey, as well as including stakeholders, such as disability and older peoples representatives on their advisory panels. A small number of authorities reported direct public involvement, but the majority did not have a direct input, relying rather on objections to specific actions and a recognised complaints process.

Licensing Policies and Policy Engagement

- 5.13 Processes for involving both the trade and public in policy development varied significantly between locations. Proactive approaches including the constitution and meeting of expert panels, including a wide range of users and operator representatives, though the extent and breadth of such panels may in itself contribute to a level of disagreement within the forum. A number of authorities reported that the frequency at which expert panels were held had created difficulties in resourcing, with one moving from quarterly to twice annually. Other authorities reported an ad-hoc approach to the calling of panels, reflecting actual policy development rather than an on-going forum. A small number of authorities wrote to operators and licence holders as the basis for involvement, suggesting that a physical forum is not the only, and may not be the most appropriate, method of engagement.

- 5.14 The extent to which taxi forums appear appropriate is most likely to reflect specific policy development, or major issues affecting the delivery of services. Nevertheless, the presence of a common and repeated meeting allows for the presentation and discussion of issues arising in the supply and use of taxis that might not otherwise be considered or known about. Locations with a regular meeting convened on a quarterly or similarly frequent basis reported difficulty in resourcing these meetings. It is equally possible that repetitive meetings may lose focus or interest where new issues are not identified. A further issue is alluded to in some authorities, that attendance at the meetings may not be fully representative.
- 5.15 Representative groups, including those of public interest, such as disability action groups, groups representing particular sectors of the population, and other stakeholders do remain relevant to the development of taxi policy. Localised forum and engagement ensures that the issues presented remain relevant and in the interest of the group.