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To: "Mark Kay" <Mark.Kay@wyreforestdc.gov.uk>
Date: 16/01/2007 18:02:57
Subject: Re: Accessible taxis

Dear Mark

Thank you for your e-mail of 15 January, seeking clarification on the statement in the Best Practice Guide about accessible hackney carriages.

As you know, the Department did announce in 2003 its intention to introduce regulations for accessible taxis and tabled a possible scheme. Ministers are aware that, since then, the absence of a decision and uncertainty as to the Government's plans is causing difficulties for the industry and local licensing authorities. We have therefore been asked to look at how best to take forward the commitment to increase the number of accessible taxis, which may or may not be by national regulation.

Consequently we have been in informal discussion with some key stakeholders before going back to ministers. In the meantime, as we have indicated in the Best Practice Guidance, licensing authorities are encouraged to introduce taxi accessibility policies for their areas.

The proposal by Wyre Forest DC in its deregulation plan to only approve purpose built wheelchair accessible vehicles or converted vehicles would appear to be in line with this advice. The proposal permits a wide range of accessible vehicles which are to be phased in. It is not uncommon for a licensing authority to remove a quantity limit and adopt a higher quality threshold (ie accessible vehicles) in its place.

We recognise that national guidance on technical standards for accessible taxis would be welcomed by licensing authorities and it would be our intention to consult on this in due course. There also appears to be a consensus that disabled people favour a mix of vehicle types - whether wheelchair accessible or saloons. The challenge is of course how to ensure that this mix materialises. One solution is the one adopted by your authority - ie for all hackney carriages to be either purpose built or adapted vehicles, with the saloon market met by PHVs. Whether hackney carriages could provide a mix of vehicles is something that we need to explore, since one of the arguments from disabled groups is that hackney carriages should be accessible to all. These issues were flagged up in my e-mail to Trevor Owen. The section in the Best Practice Guidance on accessibility draws a distinction between accessible taxis and PHVs, but does not attempt to define accessible taxis - they could include saloon vehicles.

The Best Practice Guidance also makes the point that, under current legislation, licensing authorities have a wide range of discretion over types of vehicles that can be licensed and that they should seek to meet the varied needs of their community in specifying the types of taxis to be licensed.

I hope this helps.

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