

Council prepared for taxi plan backlash

by News reporter

October 12 2010, 7.11pm



Controversial plans to lift the limit on the number of taxis operating in Perth are set to be opened up for “public consultation”.

The move comes just days after local MP Pete Wishart warned a “free-for-all” could have catastrophic consequences. He said removal of the limit would “destroy careers” and claimed the removal of safeguards would put passengers particularly single women at risk.

The limit on taxi operator licences in Perth has operated since 1979. However, Perth and Kinross Council says that could be about to change.

“The main recommendation of the report is that the restriction on taxi numbers in Perth city should be lifted,” said a local authority spokesman.

“The council now wishes to give all of those with an interest in taxi services in Perth and Kinross an opportunity to submit further evidence and representations in relation to the options for regulating taxi services and the recommendation in the report.”

It is understood the council will make a final recommendation to the licensing committee in January next year.

Committee convener Councillor Peter Mulheron said, “On the issue of taxis, the primary concern of the council has to be that the system is serving the public well.

“There are indications that the current system might not be doing that. For example, we are aware of the trade in taxi plates which takes place locally.

“This has occurred as a direct result of the restriction on numbers which has in effect created a financial market in relation to the right to use taxi operator licences.

“The fact that such a market exists does suggest that there are individuals who would wish to enter the taxi trade and provide a service to the public but who are prevented from having their own licence because of the restrictions. This does seem to be hard to justify.”

Many taxi drivers have already expressed dismay over the possibility of lifting restrictions and Mr Mulheron is clearly prepared for an angry backlash.

“The council understands that existing operators and drivers might be concerned about the restriction being removed, and the impact on their income, particularly given the current economic climate,” continued Mr Mulheron.

“This is reflected in some of the responses received to a questionnaire issued late last year. However, it is not possible for a local authority to restrict access to a market to protect the economic interests of those who are already in that market. There must be an overriding public interest before doing so.

“No final decision has been taken on this and all submissions from the taxi industry and members of the public will be given full consideration during the consultation process,” he added.

In the report, the council also asks for views in relation to the age limit of vehicles and wheelchair accessibility.

Those who wish to comment on any aspect of the consultation report can do so before Tuesday, November 30, in the following ways:

Written comments can be sent either by post to: Civic Government Licensing, Legal Services, Chief Executive's, Perth and Kinross Council, 2 High Street, Perth PH1 5PH, or by email to civicleicensing@pkc.gov.uk. Oral evidence can be given at a public meeting on Monday, November 1, between 9.30am and 4.30pm, in the Hay Room at Dewars. For those who do not wish to make representations at a public meeting, an appointment can be made with licensing staff on either November 2 or 15. Anyone wishing to do so should call 01738 475166.