

WELWYN HATFIELD COUNCIL  
COUNCIL MEETING – 20 JULY 2020

COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE NO. 14 QUESTIONS – QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

Notice of the following questions has been received in accordance with Council Procedure Rule No 14:-

1. Question from Richard Bunday, Welwyn & Hatfield Taxi Drivers Association

The Council has continued to pursue the standardisation of livery of Hackney Carriages and now the standardisation of vehicle type without proper consultation with the drivers.

We appreciate that there is a need for more WCAVs within the borough but believe it is neither necessary nor advantageous to anyone to insist that all vehicles accommodate wheelchairs. Many wheelchair-bound customers prefer to transfer into the more secure seat of the taxi and find it both uncomfortable and frightening travelling strapped into their chair, especially when facing backwards.

The disability spectrum is vast and not all disabled customers are in wheelchairs, this is just a small proportion. By limiting the scope of the vehicles provided within the fleet, you potentially create problems for customers with other disabilities and alienate other customers who require alternatives such as an executive car or 6, 7 or 8-seater.

The Council has not made available to us its survey regarding the public's almost unanimous agreement that all taxis should be WCAVs and we dispute it's findings which are the exact opposite to the survey carried out by our drivers, which is available to the Council on request. We acknowledge that it's possible that 98% of the public would think that WCAVs are a good idea and should be provided, but not that that the whole fleet should be wheelchair accessible.

If the Council continue on this route, many Hackney carriage and private hire/chauffeur cars will choose to be licensed by another district or change careers altogether. The loss of revenue to the council already exceeds £10,000.00 and there will be more to follow. The Council will end up without a taxi service at all.

Some drivers' vehicles are near the 8 year age limit or have to replace their vehicles owing to mechanical problems or accidental damage. It is wholly unreasonable for the council to expect these drivers to find the thousands of pounds extra immediately or in the next few weeks or months.

My question is, if the Council feels there are not enough WCAVs within the borough, and the need is not fulfilled by the Private Sector, why doesn't the Council invest in vehicles and drivers themselves, or just insist that all new drivers coming into the trade provide a wheelchair-accessible vehicle, thereby, in time, replacing the whole fleet, rather than expect existing drivers to outlay thousands of pounds which, in the current economic climate, which has already put their livelihoods in jeopardy, is not financially viable?