

TAXI LICENSING POLICY SURVEY

BACKGROUND & METHODOLOGY

The survey was open from 11th April to 26th May 2019.

The survey was carried out online and by email, with a direct email to approximately 8,000 customers who have signed up to the council's consultation mailing list. A direct email was sent to licensed taxi operators using customer details provided by the licensing team. Parish Councils and other stakeholders identified by the licensing team were also directly emailed. The survey was also promoted on the Council's website and paper copies of the survey and alternative formats were available on request.

The survey was open to all Maidstone Borough residents aged 18 years and over as well as visitors and workers in the borough. The data has not been weighted, however the top two and bottom two age brackets were combined to give the groups 65 years and over and 18 to 34 years.

Survey respondents were asked their opinions about the proposed changes to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Taxi policy. Links to a draft of the revised policy with tracked changes and a document listing each change and the reasoning behind it provided were linked to the survey were set out alongside and embedded within the survey for ease of reference. Respondents also had the opportunity to provide additional comments.

There were 230 responses to the survey.

Please note not every respondent answered every question therefore the total number of respondents refers to the number of respondents for the question being discussed not to the survey overall. There were seven responses from workers in the borough and three from stakeholders therefore these groups have not been analysed further.

The data has been z-tested at the 95% confidence level. The z-test is a statistical test which determines if the percentage difference between subgroups is large enough to be statistically significant or whether the difference is likely to have occurred by chance.

Base sizes for some questions are low – e.g women – so results should be interpreted with caution.

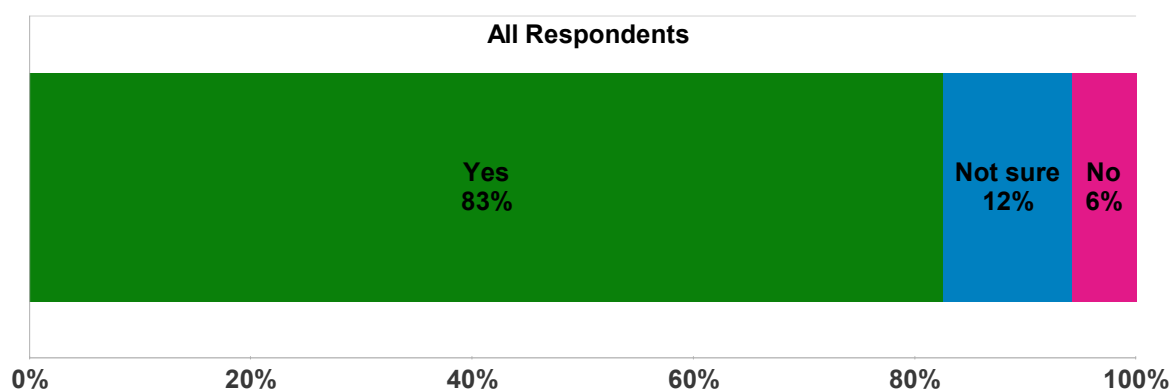
SUMMARY FINDINGS

- Almost two thirds of residents are in favour of the proposed changes to the licensing policy.

- Although the response from the taxi industry was almost split across the three responses many of the comments submitted by drivers do not relate to the changes proposed.
- The areas of biggest concern appear to be around the changes proposed to testing of knowledge and driver standards.

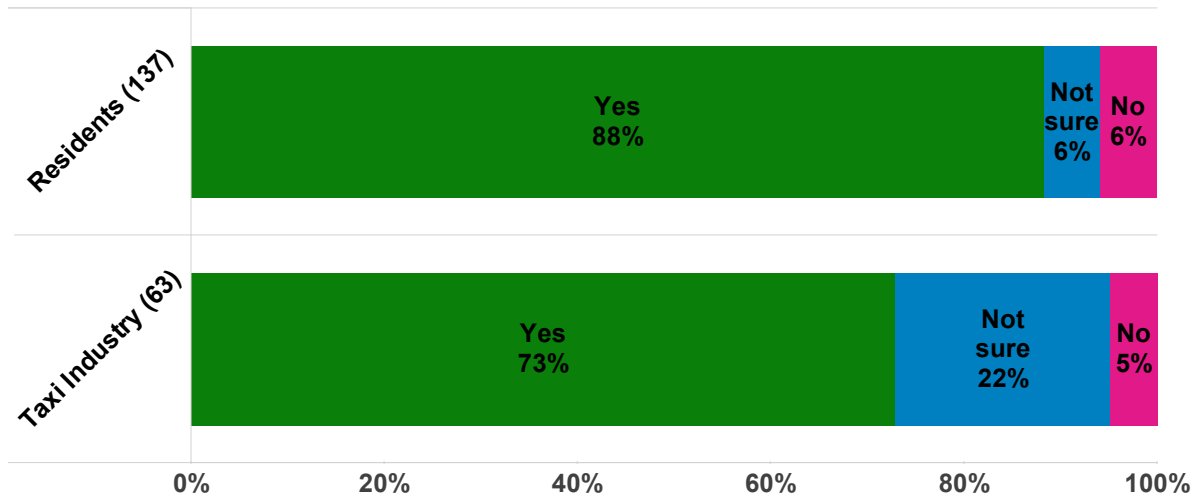
DO YOU THINK THAT THE COUNCIL SHOULD HAVE A DEDICATED LICENSING POLICY FOR THE HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE TRADE REFLECTING CURRENT LEGISLATION AND GUIDANCE?

There were 207 responses to this question, overall more than four out of five respondents said they thought that the council should have a dedicated licensing policy for the hackney carriage and private hire trade that reflects current legislation and guidance. Just over one in ten said they were not sure and 6% said the Council shouldn't have a licensing policy for hackney carriages and private hire trade.



When responses to this question were assessed across the different respondent types residents were more likely to respond 'yes' than industry drivers. 88% of residents were in favour of a licensing policy for the hackney carriage and private hire trade compared to 73% of industry respondents. The difference between these two groups answering this way is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Respondents from the taxi industry were more likely than residents to respond 'Not sure' with just over one in five respondents answering this way compared to 6% of residents, this difference was assessed as being significant.



There were no significant differences in the proportion of respondents from either group answering 'No'.

The data was also assessed across the different demographic groups: Gender, Age, Disability and Carers. The only group where a significant difference could be identified was between male and female respondents. 100% of female respondents said that there should be a policy compared to 80% of men. It should be noted that there were no female respondents to the survey from the taxi industry.

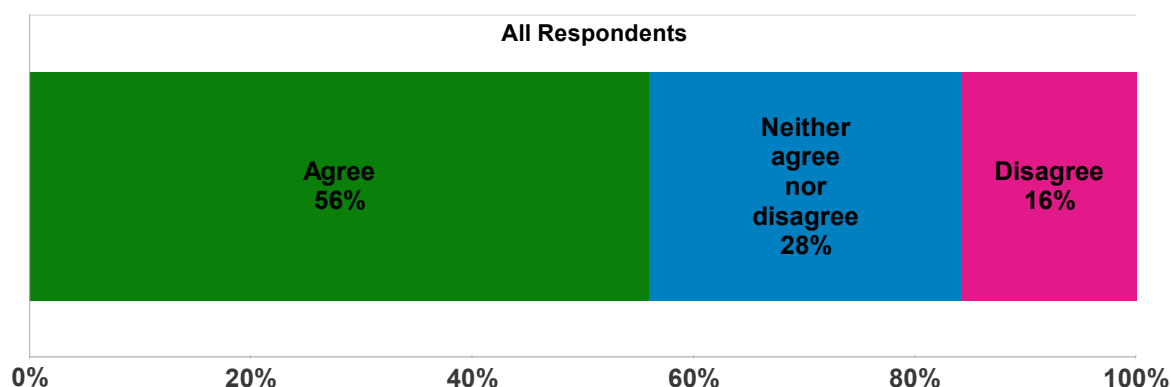
Overall, these results suggest that the majority of both residents and those from the taxi industry value having a policy that sets standards around the issuing of licenses for hackney carriage and private hire vehicles operating in the borough. It should be noted that there were no comments from drivers suggesting that there should not be a licensing policy of this nature but have made remarks about specific clauses or current issues in the industry.

DO YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE POLICY

There were 184 responses to this question.

This question was posed in the survey with five answer options: Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree and Strongly disagree. The most common response across the five answer options was agree with 42% responding this way. The least common response was Strongly disagree with 8% responding this way.

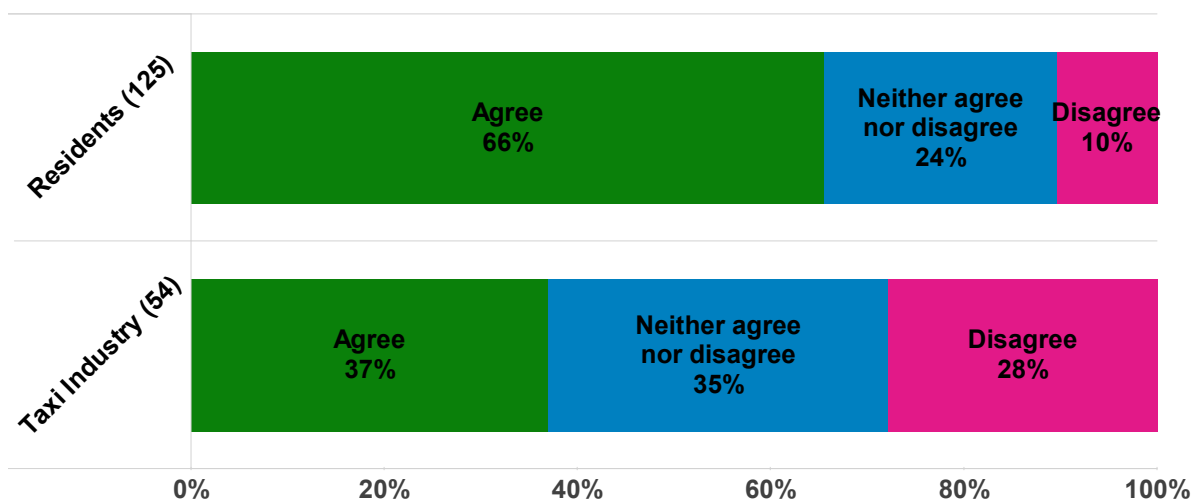
The chart below shows responses to this question with the top two (Strongly agree and Agree) and bottom two (Disagree and Strongly disagree) combined. Overall, just over half of all respondents said they agree with the proposed changes to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy. Just over a quarter of respondents said they were not sure and 16% said they disagree with the proposed changes to the policy.



When responses to this question were assessed across the different respondent types; 66% of residents were in favour of the proposed changes to the licensing policy for the hackney carriage and private hire trade compared to 37% of industry drivers. The difference between these two groups answering this way is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Respondents from the taxi industry had a greater proportion than residents to responding 'neither agree nor disagree' with 35% answering this way compared to 24% of residents, but it should be noted this difference was not assessed as being significant.

The data shows a significant difference of 18% in the proportion responding disagree between residents and respondents in the taxi industry. More than a quarter of the industry responded this way compared to one in ten residents.



The data was also analysed across the different demographic groups: Gender, Age, Disability and Carers. There were no significant differences at the 95% confidence level identified. The data suggested there may be some differences between the proportion men and women responding disagree, with 5% of women responding this way compared to 19% of male responders. The data also suggested there could be some differences in relation to age groups with those aged 55 to 64 having the lowest proportion responding agree at 49% and a higher proportion responding neither agree nor disagree at 14%. A larger sample would be required to identify if these differences are significant.

DISAGREE RESPONSE COMMENTS

Respondents that said they disagree with the proposed changes were asked a supplementary question as to why they had responded this way. There were 22 respondents that provided further comment, 10 of these comments were from residents/workers in the borough the remaining twelve were from respondents working in the taxi industry. There was one comment from a resident that could not be categorised (comments that are unable to be categorised include things like 'see previous comments', n/a, incomplete words and comments where the meaning/intention cannot be deciphered).

Of the nine comments from residents that could be categorised; two have been classified as generally negative with one stating rules should be tightened not loosened and another that just said the respondent disagrees with some of the points but no specifics were given.

Two respondents made comments in relation to drivers' knowledge with both stating that satellite navigation systems mean that detailed knowledge of the area is not required. One of these commenters said they believe this change is designed to make it more difficult for Uber drivers to obtain a license.

There were three comments from residents about driver standards. With one stating that obtaining information about penalty points from the DVLA should take minutes not days. One stated that the license should be removed, and anyone should be able to provide cab services. The final comment expressed strong feeling about the change from DSA and KCC testing to new providers. The accompanying policy documents for the consultation made it clear that these tests were no longer being

provided by KCC and provided links to the new suppliers, all of which adhere to guidance set by the Driving Vehicle Standards Agency.

Three comments made reference to air quality and low emissions, with one expressing an expectation that the policy would introduce air quality measures for taxis, another said that the policy doesn't encourage the take-up of low emission vehicles and the third queried where charging points would be for electric taxis. It should be noted for context that the Low Emission Taxi Policy was consulted on earlier this year. The policy has not yet been approved as the Licensing Committee requested further information before making a decision. As such no changes to the emission levels for vehicles used as hackney carriages and private hire vehicles have been proposed as part of this policy.

Of the twelve comments submitted by drivers, one could not be categorised as the intent was unclear. Two comments have been classified as generally negative. One commenter said they do not think any changes are needed and the other stated they will no longer be able to work in Maidstone as although they currently hold an Operator license as they do not reside in the borough.

There were six respondents that made comments about age of their vehicle or the need to purchase a new vehicle. As stated above the proposed policy contains no amendments to type of vehicle required in relation to their emission levels or vehicle age. This matter is still under review by the Licensing Committee.

There were three comments regarding driver standards, one stated they did not think that an electronic multiple-choice test was the way forward. One person made a comment that there were no clauses around preventing bullying and abusive behaviour by drivers towards one another and the last expressed frustration about finding good drivers.

The comments from the industry, regarding low emission vehicles suggests that there is a small subsection of drivers that may not have read the accompanying consultation documents, as some comments make reference to changes that are not part of the proposed policy. It is clear that the industry remains concerned over possible changes to emission requirements for trade vehicles.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS ABOUT PROPOSED POLICY OR ABOUT HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE TAXIS IN MAIDSTONE

There were 60 respondents that provided additional comments about the proposed policy or about Hackney Carriages and private hire taxis in Maidstone, of these 57 could be categorised.

General comments

There were two comments that have been categorised as broadly positive and two categorised as broadly negative. In regard to the positive comments; one responder said the Council should continue to try and improve things and we are, which they think is good. The other stated they had read the proposals and they seemed fine and understandable. Of the two negative comments one stated they do not think any changes are needed and the other suggested that the policy needs more study.

Knowledge and driver standards

There were ten comments that have been categorised as relating to knowledge and driver standards. Three of these comments were negative about the knowledge test saying it is excessive, too hard and unnecessary, two of these comments make reference to satellite navigation systems removing the need for local knowledge. Two of these comments were from within the taxi industry and one was from a resident. There were two comments, both from residents, that implied they were in favour of the knowledge test with one stating that all private hire drivers should be tested and another stating that more testing and regulation is required to ensure a high standard of service.

Another comment (resident) said that they thought that it used to be that drivers were held to a higher driving standards in order to obtain a hackney or private hire license, but that now it's all about generating revenue and given to anyone. They also raised other concerns around standards including knowledge of local traffic orders, parking on the footpath and blocking pedestrian crossings. They suggested that enforcement is required and proposed having a specific officer undertaking these duties. Three further comments stated that they think a written test with road names and numbers was more appropriate; another stated that there should be choice between online and traditional testing. The final comment queried if the standards set out in the policy were national or if they align with other local authorities.

The last comment in relation to standards and knowledge concerned drivers' appearance, they said they feel drivers should be of smart appearance, stating that in Europe drivers are always smartly dressed and would never be in jogging bottoms which they have seen Maidstone drivers wearing.

Safety

There were four comments that related to safety. One stated that all private hire drivers should be subject to Disclosure and Baring Service (DBS) checks as this safeguards all vulnerable people using the

services. One person was concerned about the changes to section at 3.5 Criminal Record of the proposed policy; but stated as long as consideration for applicants with previous criminal convictions for driving offences is part of the new guidance (which it is), they don't see any problems.

One commented that there is nothing about speed of driving or about drivers wearing seatbelts. It should be noted that regulation around both of these issues are part of the Highway Code. The last comment was a query asking if there are any criminal convictions that automatically result in a license being revoked or application refused. The guidance from the institute of licensing which is proposed as basis for assessing criminal convictions sets out circumstances where licenses would be refused based on criminal convictions.

In addition, there were three safety orientated suggestions, one for a mentor style training programme to pass on experience and knowledge and improve standards. The other two suggestions were both for some sort of cross authority system for vetting applicants and sharing driver information to improve safety. For example, this would show if an applicant had been refused a license or had one revoked by another authority. One of these was submitted by an industry driver and the other was submitted by a Parish Council.

Vehicle age

There were seven respondents that made comments about vehicle age, six of which were submitted by industry drivers. It is thought that these comments stem from consultation undertaken in 2018 on low emission vehicles for hackney carriages and private hire. Three mention that the vehicle lifespan of 15 years should be retained, the proposed policy does not make any changes to vehicle lifespan for hackney carriages. Of the remaining four comments in this category, there was one that said the age of vehicle should be considered as many drivers cannot afford to purchase new vehicles, another said that there should be a maximum of 5 years lifespan for diesel taxis, and another stated vehicle age from plate from new should be increased to 6 years, with a maximum age of 10 years for private hire vehicles. The last comment in this category said that the responder thinks the lifespan of a vehicle should be whatever was agreed when the vehicle was first plated.

Low emissions

There were eight comments that made reference to low emissions and electric vehicles. Five of these comments were from industry drivers and three were from residents. There were five comments (four from industry drivers and one from a resident) that made comment about there being a lack of infrastructure, namely charging points and the logistics of using these for the taxi trade. There was one comment from a driver that expressed concerns that the technology is not yet ready, with only one vehicle available and which only has a range of up to 80 miles. The last two comments were both from residents with one stating diesel vehicles should pay a higher fee and that electric cars should pay a lower fee and be encouraged. The last comment stated that the policy should be driverless and environmentally focused.

Uber and Hackney licensing

There were five comments that mentioned Uber, all of which were from residents. Three of these expressed the desire for Uber to operate in Maidstone, one commented that this didn't appear to be covered in the survey (Uber drivers operate using a private hire license).

There were three comments that stated that there should be more hackney plates available.

There were five comments about drivers from other areas working in Maidstone, two from residents and three from industry drivers. Three stated only those with Maidstone issued badges should be allowed to work in Maidstone. One stated something needs to be done about drivers from other areas picking up passengers in Maidstone without booking. The last comment here was from an industry driver stating they have noticed more drivers from other areas operating in Maidstone.

Other comments

There were nine 'Other' comments, three from residents and six from industry drivers.

Of the three resident comments, the first queried the placement of taxi ranks, requesting a notice setting this out to go in the Kent Messenger. The second said the service to rural areas should be improved and be at a reasonable cost. The third stated that Councils should be more supportive of Park & Ride schemes and provide more of this service.

The six other comments from industry drivers included requests for the private hire restriction on the High street to be removed, less red tape while maintaining standards and action on bullying behaviour between hackney and private hire drivers.

One comment stated that payment security is not good, another stressed the need to look after drivers or they may be lost and the last comment in this section queried the need for both types of license saying there should just be hackney carriages.

DEMOGRAPHICS

