

Record of Officer Decision

This form is the written record of a key or significant operational decision taken by an officer.

Decision type	<input type="checkbox"/> Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Significant Operational Decision
Contact person:	Andrew White Taxi & Private Hire Licensing Manager	Telephone number: 0113 3781562
Subject¹:	Safety screens in taxi and private hire vehicles	
Decision details:	<p>What decision has been taken?²</p> <p>To address the demand for safety screens in taxi and private hire vehicles by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Retaining the council's current policy on approving safety screens for permanent use, and permitting people who have had safety screens fitted of an approved design and installation to claim 50% up to £250 of the costs; b) As a temporary measure resulting from the current pandemic, permitting owners/operators of taxi and private hire vehicles to fit safety screens which have not yet been approved by the council, in order to raise confidence that taxi and private hire vehicles can reduce the likelihood of transmission of Covid-19. The council will accept no liability for loss, damage or injury resulting directly or indirectly from the installation and/or use of any such safety screen, and will require the screen to be removed when the Covid-19 emergency ends; 	
	<p>A brief statement of the reasons for the decision³</p> <p>The council has conditions in its Hackney carriage and Private Hire vehicle policies of encouraging the provision of safety screens between driver and passenger. At the start of March 2020, around 50 of the City's fleet of around 4000 vehicles had safety screens, each using a design and having been fitted by a supplier which had been approved by the council services. The council's</p>	

¹ If the decision is key and has appeared on the list of forthcoming key decisions, the title of the decision should be the same as that used in the list

² Set out all necessary decisions to be taken by the decision taker including decisions in relation to exempt information, exemption from call in etc.

³ Include any significant financial, procurement or legal implications

current policy and funding arrangements also enable the owner of a vehicle to claim 50% up to £250 of the costs of buying and fitting an approved screen.

The Covid-19 emergency significantly changes the context of safety screens. Initially designed to reduce the risk of a driver being assaulted or robbed of cash earnings, a safety screen might provide some degree of protection against transmission of Covid-19. The council has received several requests from vehicle owners, safety screen providers and a private hire trade magazine, each with different designs of safety screen. This indicates that a significant increase in the uptake of safety screens is likely, and the council, while likely to be supportive of extra measures to reduce Covid-19 transmission, may not be in a position to approve and inspect every design or to do so at the present time. A separate Significant Operation Decision will be recorded when the council approves a new permanent safety screen design and supplier.

The Department for Transport advice for licence holders and taxi and private hire passengers on 12 May 2020 advises drivers and passengers to wear face coverings, and the owner to keep the vehicle clean, and leaves it to individual licensing authorities and business owners whether to put additional measures in place, such as safety screens to separate driver from passenger, where the social distancing rule of 2m could not be observed. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers>

Taxi and private hire drivers are included on the Office for National Statistics list of occupations on 11 May 2020 where they fall within 'arms length' of their customers, and so are at higher risk of catching and transmitting Covid-19. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/whichoccupationshavethehighestpotentialtoexposeyouandyourcolleaguestothevirus/2020-05-11>

The decision taken has been for the council to permit owners of vehicles to act responsibly and fit as a short term measure additional but temporary safety screens, without requiring the council to approve and/or inspect them. The policy and funding for permanent safety screens will still apply, but only to permanent safety screens. Unlike the permanent safety screens, the council will not approve the design and fitting, and will not accept any liability if the temporary screen injures a driver or passenger.

	<p>Brief details of any alternative options considered and rejected by the officer at the time of making the decision</p> <p>Two alternatives were considered.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct a new procurement exercise for safety screens. This option was viewed as preferable in the long run, but would not give vehicle owners the ability to acquire and install safety screens in the short term, ahead of a possible relaxation in Covid-19 isolation and distancing guidance in June and July 2020. 2. Inspect the documentation and design of every safety screen design. This option was viewed as in line with the current policy, but similarly had the drawback of failing to meet likely demand for safety screens in May and June 2020, requiring a new check for every design, of which there may be hundreds. 3. Approve a safety screen without inspecting the documentation and/or the fitted screen. This option allowed owners to fit a screen, which may be used either temporarily or permanently. However, this option did not provide any assurance that screens could be installed and intended for permanent use which could put driver or passenger at risk, in the event of an accident. It was preferable to clearly distinguish (permanent = approved, temporary = no approval) policy.
Affected wards:	
Details of consultation undertaken⁴:	<p>Executive Member Cllr Lewis – 19 May 2020</p> <hr/> <p>Ward Councillors</p> <hr/> <p>Others Legal services – May 2020 Finance services – May 2020 Cllr Garner, Licensing Committee Chair – 19 May 2020</p>
Implementation	Officer accountable, and proposed timescales for implementation:

⁴Include details of any interest disclosed by an elected Member on consultation and the date of any relevant dispensation given.

	Andrew White All taxi associations and private hire operators would be written to during May, and given advice on the decision, in order to pass on the message to their members and drivers. All licence holders would receive a taxi and private hire licensing bulletin advising them of the decision.	
List of Forthcoming Key Decisions⁵	Date Added to List:-	
	If Special Urgency or General Exception a brief statement of the reason why it is impracticable to delay the decision	
	If Special Urgency Relevant Scrutiny Chair(s)	
	Signature	Date
Call In	Is the decision available ⁶ for call-in?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
	If exempt from call-in , the reason why call-in would prejudice the interests of the council or the public:	
Approval of Decision	Authorised decision maker ⁷ John Mulcahy, Chief Officer Elections and Regulatory	
	Signature 	Date 20 May 2020

⁵Complete this section for key decisions only

⁶Significant operational decisions are never available for call in. Key decisions are always available for call in unless they have been exempted from call in.

⁷Give the post title and name of the officer with appropriate delegated authority to take the decision.