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Mr Paul Robinson  
Chief Executive  
Derby City Council

12<sup>th</sup> October 2017

Dear Paul

### **The Condition and Safety of the Private Hire and Hackney Fleet in the City**

For some time I have had a growing concern that the state of the private hire and hackney fleet operating within the city is unacceptably poor. My colleagues in the roads policing department regularly work with your enforcement staff to conduct checks of vehicles and their operators. They do this with the other boroughs and districts in the county also.

We have been operating a regime of monthly checks across the county. A typical check of vehicles in the city produces a much higher rate of failure than a comparable sample anywhere else in the county.

Before I go further though, I must emphasise that my officers have a great deal of respect for, and a good working relationship with, your licensing staff. Their capability and commitment is not being called in to question. It is the regime in which they work that I would ask you to look into.

The basic concerns my officers are telling me amount to two things: the age of the fleet and the amount of formal inspection undertaken. I am given to believe that there is no age limit for vehicles in Derby. Many other authorities do impose a limit, typically of ten years. While age is no guarantee of fitness, the newer the vehicle is the less likely it is to have really fundamental failings.

Allied to the age issue is that of condition, and connected to that is the level of operators' professional responsibility and your regime of formal inspection. I understand that vehicles in Derby are subject only to a yearly detailed inspection at one of your authorised centres. Again other boroughs are much more demanding. Erewash has a requirement of two tests per year for vehicles under eight years old, and three tests per year for vehicles aged eight to ten years.



South Division, St Mary's Wharf Police Station, Prime Parkway, Derby, DE1 3AB

These long intervals between tests in Derby lead to the following situation which I copy from my officers' report to me:

*The issue with the age policy is however particularly relevant with Hackney carriages, these vehicles are predominantly typical London style taxi cars manufactured by the London Taxi Company.*

*These cars tend to have seen service in other areas before they arrive in Derby and after a repaint and test are being used in Derby, these cars have weak corrosion protection and I have personally prohibited a number of these which were in appalling condition and have evidence of being concealed with underseal/mastic etc. There are only a small number of relatively new Hackney carriages operating within Derby, probably as a result of the high purchase value. An age limit would certainly help to remove these older vehicles. Other Hackney carriage vehicles including the fibre glass bodied Metrocab and Peugeot cars are used, the Metro Cabs are prone to chassis rusting, the Peugeot cars tend to have weak suspension components.*

His colleague reports also:

*The vehicles we find in consistently poor and dangerous condition are the LTI London Taxis and the Metrocab. Both suffer from significant floor pan corrosion issues. As an example on the 18th May 2017 I examined an LTI London Taxi which was suffering severe corrosion at both the rear passenger lower seat mounting points. The floor pan was so badly corroded I could push through the structure with a biro pen and see the road surface. In the event of a collision I have no doubt the seat mounting would fail and 'submarine' the seat through the floor causing severe injuries to any passenger sat on it.*

*This particular vehicle was 15 years old and was displaying 450732 miles on its odometer. The vehicle was issued with a prohibition and went back into service on the 5th July 2017 after repairs and an inspection.*

*Typical problems we find with the Peugeot Hackney vehicles are sliding doors which do not seal properly at the top which in some cases are so bad you can push your fingers through the gap\* from the inside to outside of the vehicle, weak suspension components and underbody exhaust mountings which corrode and fail. A Peugeot vehicle I examined on 30th August 2017 had an insecure exhaust system caused by a failing mount. It was 14 years old and was displaying 329088 miles on the odometer. In my opinion these vehicles represent a significant risk to members of the public who use them in good faith. If one were to be involved in a significant collision whilst carrying passengers it could result in structural failure of the vehicle and injuries to those carried.*

\*The last Derby taxi I travelled in a few weeks ago was exactly like this.

Furthermore, I have just had notification from the specialist officers that they worked with your officials on Monday of these week to check taxis in the city. The results are equally alarming:

*10 vehicles checked.*

*None were found to be fault free. 3 had advisory defects only. 7 had serious defects resulting in suspension of their licences, of which 4 were issued with Prohibition Notices*

*Vehicle 1:\*\* a) Excessive oil loss from engine & gearbox, b) Strong smell of diesel under bonnet, c) Rear door check straps in-operative, d) Ignition barrel insecure, e) Secondary bonnet catch in-operative.*

*Vehicle 2:\*\* a) O/s outer CV gaiter split wide open, b) Exhaust leak behind the turbo, c) O/s/r seat contaminated, d) O/s brake light in-operative.*

*Vehicle 3:\*\* a) Oil leaking on to the exhaust behind the turbo, b) Section of rear console missing.*

*Vehicle 4: a) Passenger floor badly worn/mis-shaped and presenting a trip hazard, b) Passenger floor covering in poor condition, c) O/s sill corroded to excess.*

*Vehicle 5: a) Air bag warning light illuminated.*

*Vehicle 6: a) Air bag warning light illuminated, b) Rear seat filthy, c) Luggage guard/cover missing.*

*Vehicle 7:\*\* a) Rear seat base insecure, b) O/s sill corroded to excess, c) Water ingress into boot.*

*\*\* Prohibitions issued.*

Of further concern to me is the officer's anecdotal report that word of our activity soon got round and many operators simply didn't come out to work. This is a worrying signal that they are well aware their vehicles are not up to scratch and would be removed from the road after inspection.

I must emphasise that we do similar levels of inspection across the county and we do not find vehicles in such poor condition.

Of interest, we know the authority is concerned about 'out-of-district' vehicles operating in Derby because they *perhaps* have less onerous driver licensing regimes. We have done a series of checks with officers of Rossendale council. We have found their vehicles to generally be in much better condition than their Derby counterparts.

I ask that the authority takes note of our concern and seeks to address it in the most suitable manner it sees fit. From a policing perspective, it would seem to us that an age limit and significantly increased inspection regime would be sensible, necessary steps to take.

If you require any further information or evidence, or wish for me and my officers to appear before any enquiring panel, we would be happy to so.

Yours sincerely



JM Allen  
Chief Superintendent

Copy to: John Tomlinson, Director of Communities, Environment & Regulatory Services  
Insp Justin Brown, Roads Policing