

Representative Interviews - Bradford Peer Review

The Officer conducting the Peer Review invited seven representatives to give their opinion on the services provided by Bradford. Although this was not part of the Peer Review terms of reference the reviewing officer used this for context. Those interviewed are referred to as Customers A to G to respect their anonymity. Three were Hackney Carriage trade association representatives, one a private hire trade association representative, two were private hire operators and one was a non-licensed person. For the purpose of transparency, it should be noted that two of those interviewed were in the midst of a long-running disagreement with the Licensing Service.

Each of the interviewees comments have been summarised and numbered below. A number of the comments raised were historical. A response from the Licencing Service, entitled "BMDC", has been provided after each interviewees comments.

Customer A

1. Customer A does not consider any of Bradford's licensing policies or procedures to be too onerous, in fact he considers licensing standards have "gone downhill" in the last 15 years.

BMDC: There is no evidence to support this opinion. All Changes to Policy and Conditions of Licence have been made through due process and with the safety of the public as the primary consideration.

2. He said that the Vehicle Age Criteria used to be under six years on first application with a vehicle test twice a year up to eight years maximum before the vehicle had to be replaced. He considered that policy to be much better than the current policy which is allowing older vehicles to be licensed over a much longer period of time.

BMDC: This is incorrect. The age was actually 5 years on first application. There is random vehicle checking for vehicles over the age of 6 years old. The vehicle failure rate has remained consistent; there is no evidence that older vehicles are less safe. It is the owner's vehicle safety inspection and maintenance regime that determines a good safe standard of vehicles.

3. He suggests that a full fee on test failure for cost of re-test would be a good deterrent. He believes this relaxation of standards has been introduced by councillors who have been influenced by parts of the trade.

BMDC: The re-test fee for vehicle failures has been increased and the possibility of the driver being suspended has been introduced for the most serious cases of poor to non-existent vehicle maintenance.

4. He believes the council needs to set much harsher criteria regarding offences and take more enforcement action.

BMDC: It is presumed that this question is along the same lines as question 3. As answered above, the new criteria allows for drivers with the most dangerous/poorly maintained vehicles to be suspended.

5. He considers CCTV is the best deterrent and an excellent aid for public safety. He would like to see Bradford set a policy for CCTV to be installed in all HC and PH vehicles. He thinks the

government should set minimum licensing standards for all authorities to help drive up standards and public confidence.

BMDC: The Council recognises the advantages of CCTV and is considering a policy CCTV for licenced vehicles. We are currently waiting for further advice from the Local Government Authority (LGO) and Information Commissioners Office (ICO).

6. Customer A was also very impressed with the work Bradford has been doing with the other WY authorities to harmonise licensing standards across West Yorkshire and share enforcement powers.

BMDC: Bradford Council continues to work positively with its West Yorkshire colleagues to improve public safety and move towards aligned convictions policies and consistent licensing procedures.

Customers B and C - interviewed together at their request

7. Customers B and C both said they were generally satisfied with Bradford's licensing policies and procedures, particularly the three year licence policy linked with DBS renewals.

BMDC: This has been the case for some years, going forward it is now a condition of licence that drivers sign up to the DBS update service, as a result there should never be a time when a driver has no current DBS in place.

8. Both suggested that the vehicle inspection was the same as a MoT so Bradford should rely on MoTs only. They said there was a long backlog of inspections and Bradford could appoint a number of MoT stations they trusted to test to their standards rather than doing the work themselves.

BMDC: The Vehicle Safety Inspection is not the same as an MOT, the Inspection also includes compliance with Policy Conditions. Having the vehicle inspections conducted in-house has proven to be the most efficient and cost effective way of administering the process. The Service is working towards having much more detailed information around the vehicle pass/fail criteria broken down by vehicle owner/operator and this which will be used to inform future decisions and also the planned "scores on the doors" initiative.

The "scores on the doors" initiative is something the service will be working towards once the new IT system is fully functional. It is a variation of what you see in restaurants with star ratings for food. In this case the service will be looking at subjects (yet to be confirmed) such as: annual and random base check audit scores; vehicle safety inspection pass rates; non-compliance results; proactive initiatives by the Operator/Proprietor and customer complaints or congratulations, etc. The service explained this is still in its infancy at this stage, not least because it is dependent on the new IT system, but it will pick up from 2018 and is likely to take a couple of years of data gathering in order to produce results and then the service intends publishing these on the web for customers to see.

9. Both thought there should be random checks on all vehicles above the six year age limit. They said vehicles over six years used to be tested twice a year.

BMDC: Vehicles over 6 years of age are called in for random checks, this was accepted as an appropriate alternative to the twice per year inspections. As well as random inspections,

proprietors are required to have a suitable safety inspection and maintenance programme in place for their vehicles.

10. They suggested Bradford should reintroduce more inspections to drive better vehicle standards.

BMDC: The context of this question is unclear, other than as already said in the previous response. A vehicle should be maintained to a satisfactory mechanical standard by the proprietors keeping to an appropriate suitable safety inspection and planned maintenance regime that aligns to the vehicle age and mileage. This should be carried out by a good quality garage with reliable standards.

11. Failure rates on vehicle testing is currently too high and hire companies are taking advantage of the generous Age Criteria by purchasing cheap poor quality vehicles. They consider the Vehicle Age Criteria was satisfactory, however they usually replace HC vehicles after 9 years rather than using the full 12 year max limit, so suggest a 10 years maximum is all that's required.

BMDC: Vehicle specialists / technicians confirm that provided a vehicle is maintained as outlined in the response to comment 10, the vehicle age is of less importance than the standard and quality of a suitable safety inspection and maintenance programme.

12. They were particularly concerned about how HC and PH vehicle standards are reported in the media. They said the local media continues to use the term "taxi" or "cabbie" in news stories, so the general public get the impression that the bad news is the fault of both HC and PH drivers. They think the council should do more to ensure the media use the correct terms in their news stories so that if a problem is caused by the PH trade it should be reported as "private hire" by the media.

BMDC: It is widely acknowledged that references to 'taxi' often include many more private hire as there are considerably more within the district. If the Council is to comment on any press release, then the correct terminology is used. However, the Council has no control of how the media report stories.

13. Both said they were pleased to see a drop in out of town vehicles in Bradford following the introduction of [Rossendale Borough Council's Intended Use Policy](#). They said enforcement officers need to work beyond 2am as drivers take advantage when they have finished their shift.

BMDC: As a service we do have officers working beyond 2 am.

14. They also said there was a problem with private vehicles parking in taxi ranks and blocking them as Parking Services enforcement ended at 9pm on an evening and the police were too busy to deal with them.

BMDC: The Services doesn't have the required delegated authority to deal with parking enforcement issues. The trade have been informed about how to report their issues to the correct Council Service.

15. They also thought that all drivers should have to keep their vehicle insurance in their vehicle at all times so it can be checked by enforcement officers at any time during roadside checks. They said many drivers cancel their insurance after they have provided a copy of the certificate to be licensed.

BMDC: It is a condition of licence that vehicle insurance is available to inspect either in the vehicle or it can be via electronic means. Checks on this are routinely conducted by Licensing Enforcement Officers. The Service has no evidence of drivers cancelling insurance and still driving.

16. Both said it was really good that when a driver reaches 6 points on their licence they are called in for a meeting to discuss their driver habits. When they reach 9 points they are called in again for further discussion and consideration is given to granting a licence for a shorter duration. They both believe this is an excellent deterrent for drivers and helps ensure driving standards are kept high. No one wants to be called into the office and risk losing their three year licence.

BMDC: The Service always looks to work with drivers to improve standards, the New and Refresher Driver Training also helps drivers to be prepared for what is expected as a professional driver in Bradford. It is believed that this staged approach will help drivers focus on their driving standards to ensure they drive in a safe and controlled way that will result in keeping a 3 year licence.

17. Both said they were very concerned about PH tariffs. They say some tariffs are very cheap. Cheaper fares lead to cheaper vehicles and lower standards. They would like to see controlled tariffs for both HC and PH to help drive vehicle standards up. They appreciated that current legislation doesn't allow the council to set PH tariffs but thought the council should ask the government to consider it.

BMDC: The Council are not able to set private hire tariffs, the law states that the fare has to be agreed with the operator before the commencement of the journey. In Bradford it is a condition of licence that operators work to a table of fares but the Service has no influence over what the fares are.

Customer D

18. Customer D told me that he didn't want to do any "council bashing." He said the enforcement team and licensing team are all brilliant and very professional and courteous with drivers. He said a lot of the trade were happy with the service and can see progress being made.

BMDC: This comment does not require a response.

19. He said that he felt there were too many changes every few months without proper consultation with no transparency. He knew about the online consultations using SnapSurvey, but he said the majority of drivers struggle with technology so find it difficult to use online surveys.

BMDC: Changes to conditions only take place following due process and agreement with the Regulatory and Appeals Committee – this happens perhaps twice per year. There is no evidence that the Service has ever failed to engage with the trades on changes, indeed the evidence is that despite frequent reminders many of the trade do not respond. The internet is here to stay, with more and more access to all services being done via the internet. It is a fast and efficient means of communication and a good source of access to information. The service is planning a series of internet workshops to help operators and hackney proprietors understand how to locate all the information they and their drivers need.

20. He felt the council had an obstructive and bullying approach to anyone who challenges processes or decisions, felt they are being told to “put up and shut up.”

BMDC: The service welcomes constructive challenge and has offered to work with the trade provided a positive approach is adopted by all parties. The licensing service performs a regulated function which is in place to protect the safety of the public at all times, this includes many young and/or vulnerable and disabled customers who may not have access to other means of transport such as buses or trains. The actions taken by the Service, after due process, are often misinterpreted by the trade as being overly regulatory and that too much is expected of them. However, the law is clear as to responsibilities, the service is required to implement reasonable policy and conditions with sound reason and good intent and those licenced are required to comply.

21. He believed that some decisions taken by Enforcement Officers are changed by senior management.

BMDC: In any business it is the role of senior management to oversee and ensure that decision making is technically correct, proportionate and appropriate. This is also the case in the licensing service where all decisions are required to be legally correct, comply with Council Policy and Conditions of Licence. As there is the requirement to consider departing from policy on occasion and that requests are evaluated on individual circumstances, these decisions are also monitored to ensure they are reasonable, fair and all the required factors are taken into consideration.

22. He was concerned about the three different computer systems that had been purchased by the authority over the past three years.

BMDC: There have only been two purchases. The reason for the changes in systems was that the original system was unable to meet the needs of the future, provide adequate management reporting and online services. The Service were advised that the corporate ICT solution (the first purchase) would be able to meet the needs of the service but this ultimately proved not to be the case. As such a second system was procured which will meet the needs of the service and also help to provide a solution to the sharing of information with regards West Yorkshire safeguarding concerns.

23. As a result the waiting time increased up to 5 hours trying to clear the backlog. He added sometimes normal waiting hours can be up to 4 hours.

BMDC: Whenever new systems are introduced there is a period of time which should be considered as a settling in period. During this period staff build up their confidence in the new system and become familiar with new ways of working. The service has also suffered technical difficulties which have taken longer than anticipated to overcome. The Service acknowledged and apologised for the increase in waiting time during the transition period but waiting times were significantly reduced once the transition was passed and now they are almost back to normal.

The service is working hard to make processes as smooth and efficient as possible for the customers. One of the ways that waiting time for customers can be reduced is for the customers themselves to look at how they renew their licences. An appointment can be made for all transaction types from badge renewal (which is mandatory) to completing a DBS check, changing operator, booking a vehicle in or collecting a plate. The service is actively encouraging booking

appointments together with starting the renewal process early could eliminate waiting time altogether.

The service has recently introduced a “drop & collect” or “click and collect” service. An enforcement officer has visited around 22 bases to date but as yet not one person has taken up this new service. Use of this process would mean no waiting time for the customer.

Future plans include making payments on-line, making your own appointment on-line and being able to complete full applications on-line.

24. He suggested the service needs to make use of more appointments. In his experience phone calls don't get answered and it takes hours to get through. He told me a recent example where it took him two hours to get through to the service on the phone. He suggested that opening hours should be 8am to 5.30pm (a 7am opening would be perfect for the trade). Current opening hours 8.30am to 3pm which is difficult for drivers as it clashes with their busiest period. He added that complaints are not being replied to.

BMDC: The Service has always said that telephoning the service is not an efficient means of communication, with over 7,500 licences in place, the chances of a response from a telephone call has always been very low and the cost of improving this by employing more staff would have significantly increased fees to the trades. The service has a dedicated email address which works extremely well, other than the expectation from some licence holders who believe they should receive a response immediately. A licence has always been able to be renewed 4 weeks in advance with no loss of time, this has now increased to a calendar month in advance so that it is easier to work out.

As stated in the response at question 3, customers can make appointments. There is sufficient time between the hours of 8.30 and 15.00 to deal with all customers. If licence holders began their renewal process in good time, for example 3 to 4 weeks in advance of expiry, there would be plenty of time for their process to be completed.

25. He said that over the past few years the staff had been reduced, their hours reduced, yet the cost of staffing had increased.

BMDC: This is incorrect. The service has increased in numbers over the years, processing time for some licenses has also increased due to additional checks, this includes the Right to Work checks, the DBS update service and also DVLA driver checking directly with DVLA themselves. There has been no reduction in licensing hours worked and the costs of staffing have increased in accordance with additional staff.

26. He told me the trade experience difficulties getting replies to FOI requests.

BMDC: The service aims to supply the responses to FOI requests within the timescales. However many ask for information which is not available or takes considerable resources to compile the information, this may include resources from other services such as ICT. It is exceptionally rare that the Service fails to meet FOI timeframes.

27. He raised an issue with the authority's policy on safe egress from the third row of seats in people carriers. The policy says that one of the middle seats must be removed to facilitate safe egress for passengers in the third row of seats.

BMDC: The Council does not say a seat must be removed. The Council requires vehicle proprietors to purchase vehicles which meet the vehicle specification requirements to be licenced. In Bradford this requires vehicles to have clear access and egress for all passengers, including those with mobility issues. This is to ensure each customer may access their seat without having to climb over or being obstructed in any way.

28. He said that over two years ago licensing fees had been increased by over 100% due to the council deciding to do MOTs in house. He told me the fee for a PH vehicle is £175 for first licence and renewal, and when the vehicle is over 6 years this increases to £250. He said the council has now ceased MOT testing itself, but fees still remain the same. He said some vehicle inspections take only ten minutes and are costing drivers £250.

BMDC: This is not correct, vehicle fees have been reduced on the last two occasions that they were amended: -

- Prior to August 2013, a vehicle over 6 years of age had to undergo 2 x inspections per year, this cost £350.00. After August 2013 this reduced to 1 test costing £250.00 per year; and
- In January 2015, vehicle fees were reduced again from £175 for vehicle 6 years and younger to £165 and from £250 for vehicles over 6 to £240 per year.

29. He said in his opinion Enforcement Officers need to be VOSA qualified to suspend drivers.

BMDC: Enforcement Officers are not required to be VOSA qualified to inspect or suspend vehicles. However most are qualified to NVQ level 3 in this area.

30. He said he had received a letter about a vehicle defect on a driver's vehicle which he didn't understand as the defect was too technical. Drivers are self-employed so the council should only contact driver/proprietor about vehicle defects, not the Operator. He said the council currently writes to both the Operator and vehicle Proprietor and both are expected to reply to say what they are doing to rectify the defect. In addition Operators are expected to explain what they are doing to ensure other vehicles working from their base do not develop the same fault. He believes the information should be sent to Operators for information only, and vehicle Proprietor should respond to their vehicle defects.

BMDC: This question has been asked and answered on many occasions. Operators are legally responsible for the safety of the vehicles that they dispatch. Full information can be found [here](#).

31. He believes that enforcement operations are preceded by negative press releases. He told me there is always a negative article in the paper just before an enforcement operation. He said last week there was an article in the paper about a failed vehicle, which was followed by roadside inspection operations. He says the trade doesn't trust the relationship between the media and the council. They believe the council feeds the media with information on failure rates.

BMDC: This is incorrect. There is no correlation between articles in the Press and enforcement operations. The Licencing Service does not 'feed' information to the press.

32. He believes there is a lack of scrutiny of the service by the wider council, with no overview from anyone else in the council.

BMDC: This is incorrect. The service is a regulated function and works within a legal framework. Compliance requirements ensure legal obligations are met before policies can be introduced. All

policies go through due process and are approved by Councillors with appropriate delegated authority. Policies are regularly reviewed to ensure they meet current needs and requirements.

33. He finished by saying that he would like to see a complete review of the service. He says he believes it needs an overhaul, as there is a loss of trust between the trade and senior managers. He believes licence holders should have a say in who leads and manages the service.

BMDC: The Council has commissioned an independent Peer Review of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Service and this should be due for release in October 2017.

Customer E

34. Customer E made a number of points about the service which were almost word-for-word identical to what Customer D had said hence it is likely they had pre-prepared together. Only those points which were different from Customer D have therefore been included so as to avoid duplication.

BMDC: This comment does not require a response

35. Customer E said the service has good points, it provides an effective licensing function for Bradford. He said the counter staff are lovely, and some of enforcement staff very good and helpful too.

BMDC: Thank you.

36. He said sending emails is insufficient, as people rarely check their emails. He said the service used to send letters and documents, nowadays they just refer to the internet which sometimes doesn't even work properly. As a result, the trade are only finding out late in day through the newspapers about policy changes after the decision has been taken.

BMDC: Please see answer 19. It is a requirement of licencing that licence holders have an email address and as such it is their responsibility to check this – just the same as you would for mail arriving through your front door. All changes are publicised on the Service's website which is available to all licenced personnel. The Service also provides information to Operators and proprietors for dissemination to drivers.

37. Customer E says he believes the service is wasting drivers' money. He told me the council charge £6 for a DVLA check and he asked to see a copy of the actual DVLA check but wasn't provided it. He said he wanted proof that the service actually carries out the DVLA check.

BMDC: This is incorrect. The council does not charge a fee for checking a DVLA driving licence. Previously there was a charge as the check was carried out by a third party supplier for which there was a charge. Changes to process to include service efficiencies which means the service now carries out these checks in house and no longer charges applicants for DVLA checks to be conducted.

38. He said the service had relocated its counter from the ground to the third floor at Shearbridge Depot. He said there was no consideration for any disabled access. There are only stairs to access the third floor and some drivers have bad backs and struggle to use the stairs.

BMDC: This is incorrect. Access via a lift is available to customers upon request.

39. He said that staff salaries had risen over time. He showed me some accounts that showed the salary costs in 2010/11 were £378k, in 2017/18 they are now £655k more than doubled, but no increase in staff. He showed me figures showing the Income in 2011 was £953k, and in 2017 it's now £1.284m. So in his opinion the £300k extra income has only gone on increasing existing salaries with no provision of extra staffing.

BMDC: This is incorrect. Staff salaries have only increased by the government allowances over the past seven years. The increase in salary costs is due to an increase in staff numbers. The accounts for hackney carriage and private hire are ring-fenced, this means that the money remains within the accounts for use by the service and is not taken by the Council.

40. Customer E then showed me other information from the accounts he had been sent. He was concerned that £178k had been spent on transport in 2017, and £163k in 2011. He wanted to know what transport costs are required to this level of expenditure. He showed me premises costs of £13k in 2011, raising to £27k in 2012, and then reducing back down to £16k in 2017. He says he doesn't understand why charges can vary so much for the same premises. The only change he is aware of is the move to the third floor for the licensing counter.

BMDC: All of this information has been supplied. Income and expenditure varies yearly, as in all businesses as, and is dependent on such things as the number of new applications received, cost of materials and inflation etc. The variation regarding premises is due to a process in which the Council equalises premises costs on an annual basis.

41. He said there is no clear guidance for annual inspections of vehicles. He said MOT guidelines are clear, but vehicles are failing the council test after the same vehicle passed its MOT test. He said he has asked for information on council test standards and was given a copy of the VOSA MOT standards. He says he doesn't understand what "extra" the council test looks for over an MOT test if they are the same standard. He added that he believes there should be more leniency for minor vehicle defects, such as dents, due to recent attacks on drivers.

BMDC: Vehicle safety inspections are based on MOT standards however they also include compliance with the vehicle specification dated August 2013 which can be found on our website.

42. He also thought the service shouldn't use defect rectification notices and just set a penalty charge of £75.

BMDC: The service does not issue penalty charges.

43. He told me there is widespread belief that the public are being deceived about sanctions against drivers. In January 2017 he said a report was made to the Appeals and Regulatory Committee which said 40% of all vehicles had faults and 20% had critical faults. He told me a number of requests had been made for the supporting evidence for the report but it has not been provided.

BMDC: Vehicle failure rates have remained consistent for the past six years and have been reported regularly at individual meetings with the trades. During this time this information was intentionally not put out in the public domain as it was expected that by working with the trade the vehicle pass rate would improve. This has not proved to be the case.

In the last 5 years the service has used three different computer systems, all of which hold data in different ways and it was not possible to migrate the vehicle failure information. It is not possible to report on the failures consistently. Current evidence shows vehicles are still failing

at the same/similar rates for dangerous and safety critical items. This information is being provided in the form of letters to both the vehicle proprietors and the operators.

It is anticipated that monthly statistics for vehicle failure rates will be available by operator/proprietor very shortly. This information will allow the service to be aware of those with concerning failure rates/reasons and for the appropriate action to be taken.

44. Customer E concluded by saying all the trade want is for the council to “play fairly with fair rules for all.”

BMDC: The Council applies the “rules” fairly, proportionally and in accordance with the evidence in each case.

Customer F

45. Customer F told me that he thought all the senior managers are brilliant. Sometime there are issues but it depended on the circumstances. He said some of the trade say the officials are rude, but not in his experience.

BMDC: Thank you.

46. Now that the computer system is in place, drivers need to make an appointment for half an hour, but he told me some people are losing up to two hours because they can lose a long distance job whilst attending the appointment. The new computer system is not working properly and very slow which he understands is beyond the service’s control and the trade can see how much the system frustrates the staff as well.

BMDC: The service has recently introduced a new appointment system which is much more efficient. All applicants are encouraged to make an appointment for any process required at Shearbridge. Development of the new computer system has been slower than expected but progress has been made, waiting times have been reduced and processing times are faster.

47. He told me that in the past the service didn’t suspend the vehicle licence for minor defects. Nowadays if a vehicle is suspended for a minor defect it can take four days to get the vehicle back on the road.

BMDC: This is incorrect. Under normal circumstances a vehicle is not suspended for a minor defect however each case must be looked at upon its own merit.

48. If you are late for an appointment you are turned away and told to make another appointment, he said this comes across as abuse of powers and being arrogant and rude. However, he did accept that officers can be accommodating at times and gave me one example where he had attended to get a vehicle suspension lifted for a minor defect.

BMDC: As with any appointment system, it is only successful if appointment times are adhered to. Staff will try and accommodate people who arrive late for appointments however this cannot always be the case. Applicants are expected to arrive in good time for their appointments so that this does not happen.

49. He believes the service isn’t working for the safety of public but for profit.

BMDC: This is incorrect. The prime responsibility of the service is the protection and safety of the public. The trade has been informed on many occasions that the budget is ring-fenced to the trade.

50. He told me the staff say they are under too much under pressure and Customer F blames all the policies they've brought in since Mr Webster left about 10 years ago.

BMDC: As answered previously, the service carries out a regulated function which requires that policies and conditions of licence are reviewed and amended to meet the changing needs of the public and service. This was highlighted recently when the trade received much publicity in particular regard to safeguarding and the issues raised in Rotherham. Councils across Britain have to ensure their policies and processes stand up to scrutiny and are fit for purpose.

51. He told me that the policy for increasing the vehicle retest fees went to committee recently after consultation. He said the trade asked for more time to speak to their members. The trade did not agree with new charging system where fees increase with number of faults on vehicle.

BMDC: Engagement with the trade with regard to the recent retest fee changes which were approved by Committee in July 2017 and effective from September 2017 commenced in October 2016. Information was widely available and brought to the attention of the trade at trade meetings and business operator meetings and on the website. There was ample time for the trade to make any representations it felt necessary.

52. He told me that the trade aren't told how licence fee income is spent. He feels this information should be provided without having to ask for it.

BMDC: Until recently no one had ever asked for this information. Once the request was made a breakdown of accounts from 2010 until now was provided. A copy of this information is published on the Service website.

53. He gave me another example where he had not received a response to 37 questions he had asked the service. He wrote to the Director of the service who promised that he would receive a written response to all of his questions but he is still waiting for that response to be sent.

BMDC: This is incorrect. A response was provided to the 37 questions. This comment refers to issues dating back to 2012 which have been asked and answered repeatedly.

54. He told me the trade are working day and night with no social life so cannot afford the increased fees the service has introduced. He told me it now costs £250 to inspect a vehicle. In 2005/06 it used to cost £122. When it was increased to £175 the following year the trade objected. The objection was taken to the Regulatory Committee and one of the Members walked out during the discussion at the committee. The trade felt this was disrespectful to them and the Member should have remained. The fee was not changed and remained at £175 per 40 mins. He told me the charges now are £175 for 40 mins, and £250 for 60 mins, for vehicles up to 6 years. He said the service charges £350 per hour for vehicles over 6 years and the retest fee is even more expensive. He added that the service were unable to check MOTs in house, so now the trade have to pay for external MOTs along with increased vehicle testing fees. He feels the service should have increased staff so that MOTs could be carried out in house. He does not believe the service can justify such high fees and they should be reduced.

BMDC: This question has been asked and answered on many occasions at trade meetings and dates back to 2009. The comments made are factually incorrect and the fees being quoted are for the full licence inspection and associated costs. At one time a free MOT test was incorporated into the testing procedure, this very quickly became unworkable for several reasons, the primary reasons being that the Trade complained because vehicles were off the road because they had failed the MOT and the length of time it took to facilitate the formalities of the MOT procedure.

Following discussions with the trade a review was undertaken and new agreement approved by the Regulatory and Appeals Committee the free MOT test was withdrawn and vehicles were allowed to continue to work with minor defects allowing the proprietor to repair those defects with no loss of work. The item is covered at 5.6.1 of the committee report found [here](#).

55. He told me that he disagrees with the service relying on email to communicate with the trade.

BMDC: This comment has been responded to at comment 19.

56. He finished by saying that he feels drivers' complaints about passengers are not listened to or acted upon. He told me when drivers complain about customers they are never believed and asked for independent witnesses. He says the drivers work alone so rarely have any witnesses and would like to see more support from the service concerning bad behaviour from passengers.

BMDC: This is incorrect. Offices always carry out a full investigation and refer to evidence where any complaint is received. The service cannot recommend strongly enough the use and benefit of CCTV cameras in licensed vehicles. The installation of CCTV will remove any doubt when confrontational situations occur as to the actions of both driver and customer.

Customer G

57. Customer G started by telling me that Counter staff excellent and very polite and do a very good job.

BMDC: Thank you

58. He told me that he believes there is no consistent approach to any policy, seems to be every case is looked at individually.

BMDC: The service has consistency in approach to a situation, however it is correct that each case is considered individually on its own merits.

59. He told me that the PH trade regularly ply for hire and drivers who have been prosecuted for plying for hire in other authorities are coming to Bradford to be licensed. He said they are now coming to Bradford because they know Bradford is soft on plying for hire and they can continue to do it here without fear of prosecution. He says this is resulting in a lot of poor drivers coming to Bradford delivering a very poor, illegal and dangerous service to the public.

BMDC: This is incorrect. Bradford does carry out playing for hire initiatives and prosecutes drivers when they are found to be playing for hire.

60. He believes the vehicle age criteria standards have dropped. He told me the policy used to be five years on first licence with a maximum of eight years on renewal.

BMDC: This is correct. The age was 5 years on first application. There is random vehicle checking for vehicles over the age of 6 years old. The vehicle failure rate has remained consistent; there is no evidence that older vehicles are less safe. It is the owner's vehicle safety inspection and maintenance regime that determines a good safe standard of vehicles.

61. He told me that there was no consistency about amount of vehicle damage acceptable during tests. Examples were displayed for drivers in the garage but it is still felt that "if you shout loud enough" your vehicle will get through.

BMDC: This is incorrect. Examples of damage are displayed within the vehicle inspection area to make the process open and transparent. No evidence to the contrary has been presented to the service.

62. He told me he does not agree with some of the PH Operator responsibilities. If a driver is suspended, the service chases the Operator, not the owner of vehicle.

BMDC: This question has been asked and answered on many occasions. Operators are legally responsible for the safety of the vehicles that they dispatch. Full information can be found by clicking [here](#).

63. Another example he gave me was an instruction all Operators received to print out a leaflet about child sexual exploitation (CSE) and ensure it was passed onto all drivers. He understood how important and issue CSE is but was concerned because he believes not all Operators would print out the literature. He said his firm had to print out over 300 leaflets at considerable expense and he is sure others didn't do it. As it was such an important issue he believes the council should have printed the leaflets themselves and mailed them to every driver's home address to ensure they received it.

BMDC: The service asked operators to provide CSE literature to be placed in drivers' vehicles but many did not. The most recent approved CSE sticker has been printed and is being supplied by the service for operators to collect on behalf of their drivers.

64. He also told me that before 2012 there was no policy for livery (or stickers) on vehicles. In 2012 he said his firm asked the council that stickers were made mandatory across trade to increase safety standards for the public.

BMDC: This is correct, it was a policy change in 2012 which made door decals obligatory for private hire vehicles and this was initiated at the request of the trade.

65. He then raised a different issue about livery on vehicles. He told me that during school contract work for the council there are multiple operator stickers on vehicles. If a vehicle works for one operator but then works for another on the school contract they can put the second operator's stickers on the doors of the vehicles.

BMDC: There are clear requirements for operators which carry out school contracts. For example, the original decal may be covered for the duration of the contract journey. Please speak to PTS re the full conditions.

66. He told me that council's policy on advertising on vehicles was dangerous because PH and HC vehicles with full body corporate wraps look too similar and can confuse the public. PH vehicles

with full body wraps could pose as HC vehicles and illegally ply for hire without the passenger realising they were using a PH vehicle.

BMDC: The advertising policy does not allow hackney carriage and private hire vehicles to look the same. Hackney carriage vehicles must always display the green stripe and crest on their front doors as well as the Taxi sign on the roof of the vehicle.

67. He told me about when Wheels Insurance Company wrote to council saying his firm's vehicles were not insured. He told me that his firm replied with evidence that there were a number of vehicles on road in other firms who may not have been insured properly by Wheels Insurance. He said the case dropped against his firm and he has heard nothing more from the council on the matter.

BMDC: This was a police matter and the council is unable to comment.

68. He said there had been an incident in the workshop where a driver was told to reverse his vehicle off an inspection ramp whilst his back door was open. The door clipped the ramp and was damaged. The driver asked for an investigation into the incident and asked for compensation for his damaged door but has not heard anything. He said a service manager believes the driver accepted liability but this was not the case. He doesn't believe that drivers are insured to drive on and off inspection ramps in the workshop.

BMDC: The procedure for accessing/departing vehicle inspection ramps has been in place and used safely for many years. A full risk assessment is in place for this. There was a driver who failed to comply with the requirement to be guided off the ramp and he damaged his vehicle in the process.

69. He told me that he has concerns about the training for HC drivers. All HCs now have to be WAVs. Some drivers don't pick up wheelchair users very often so should receive regular refresher wheelchair loading and securing training.

BMDC: Drivers of wheelchair accessible vehicles are obliged to attend specific training at least every three years this has been a condition of licence since August 2013.

70. He told me his firm had asked the service to inform us when drivers are suspended to ensure they don't give them any work. Some drivers are dishonest and will try to continue working after suspension. He says there is still a risk there that needs to be addressed.

BMDC: Operators should be made aware if a driver is suspended a system to ensure they are always informed will be implemented.

71. He told me he finds it very difficult to know what the current policy is, so doesn't know what to advise his divers when they ask him. In his opinion policies seem to change without notice or warning.

BMDC: All policy changes carried out follow due process, this includes engagement with the trades associations, operator business meetings, emails to the trade and information being placed on the website. It is a condition of licence that operators visit the Website once a month where all the latest information is available.

72. He says the service never answers the phone or replies to emails. Sometimes they get the wrong advice for what documents to bring to an appointment and then they are refused service when arrive with incomplete documentation.

BMDC: The Service has always said that telephoning the service is not an efficient means of communication, with over 7,500 licences in place, the chances of a response from a telephone call has always been very low and the cost of improving this by employing more staff would have significantly increased fees to the trades.

The service has a dedicated email address which works extremely well, other than the expectation from some licence holders who believe they should receive a response immediately. A licence has always been able to be renewed 4 weeks in advance with no loss of time, this has now increased to a calendar month in advance so that it is easier to work out.

The internet is here to stay, with more and more access to all services being done via the internet. It is a fast and efficient means of communication and a good source of access to information. The service is planning a series of internet workshops to help operators and hackney proprietors understand how to locate all the information they and their drivers need.

The service works hard to ensure that as much information as is necessary to facilitate any process is available on the website for applicants to view. We are constantly reviewing the content of information and any improvements identified will be made where possible. If members of the trade find that vital information appears to be missing we would welcome an email pointing out these issues for us to address and amend.

73. He told me a recent policy being discussed was the introduction of government grants to assist drivers purchasing electric vehicles. He said that electric vehicles are not good for the trade as they are very expensive, have limited range and take too long to recharge. He thinks it would be better to offer grants or incentives for drivers to purchase hybrid or ultra-low emission vehicles that have a much better range and are cheaper but still protect the environment.

BMDC: Grants regarding electric vehicles or any other assistance to purchase vehicles is not in the control of the service. There is now a new area on the Service website which covers electric, hybrid & gas vehicles for information.

74. He said that PH Vehicles are unable to make use of bus lanes in Bradford. He understands why this would not be possible during the day as the added congestion would make use of bus lanes unfeasible. However, it would be possible to allow PH vehicles to use bus lanes between the hours of 10pm and 5am when there are no buses, and this would allow vehicles to get in and out of the city centre quicker to pick up their passengers.

BMDC: This has been asked and answered on many occasions over many years. Bus lane use is not under the control of the licensing service.

75. He told me he does not agree with the council's policy on PH Operators carrying out vehicle maintenance checks.

BMDC: Please see answer to question 30. The service does not expect operators to carry out vehicle maintenance checks. They are required to have a system in place that ensures that vehicle's mechanical conditions. This can be done by way of regular safety inspections and a maintenance regime to suit the mileage and use of the vehicle. This is the responsibility of the

operator dispatching the vehicle for use by the public. The service does require operators/proprietors to check that their drivers are carrying out driver related safety checks.

76. The trade are 95% from an Asian background and believes the service should be as well. It would be useful for some of the staff to be able to speak in ethnic languages such as Urdu to help explain complex policy issues to drivers.

BMDC: The ethnicity of the staff is not relevant to the service being undertaken. The council has robust recruitment procedures which are complied with fully. It is a requirement for drivers to be able to communicate in English and therefore discussions in any other language are not undertaken.

77. Customer G concluded by saying he just wants to work together with the council to help improve the trade in a sensible and fair way.

BMDC: Thank you, we look forward to this.