

CITY OF  
WOLVERHAMPTON  
COUNCIL

**NON-STATUTORY LICENSING  
COMMITTEE**

**Evaluation of Taxi & Private Hire  
Services Mystery Shopper Scheme**

**March 2020**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Councillors of the findings of an evaluation into the operation, usage, accessibility and equal access provided to people who are disabled.
- 1.2 Considering the provisions regarding taxi and private hire services contained within the Equality Act 2010 and the length of time since the last evaluation exercise carried out in 2008, in December 2019 Licensing Services began its Taxi and Private Hire Services Mystery Shopper scheme to evaluate the current provision of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Services to disabled customers within Wolverhampton.
- 1.3 To identify users of this service, appropriate external groups were contacted to gather a wide range of disabilities in which we could fully establish and recognise any flaws in the taxi service provided by drivers and vehicles licensed by Wolverhampton City Council.

## **2.0 Details of the Mystery Shopper Scheme**

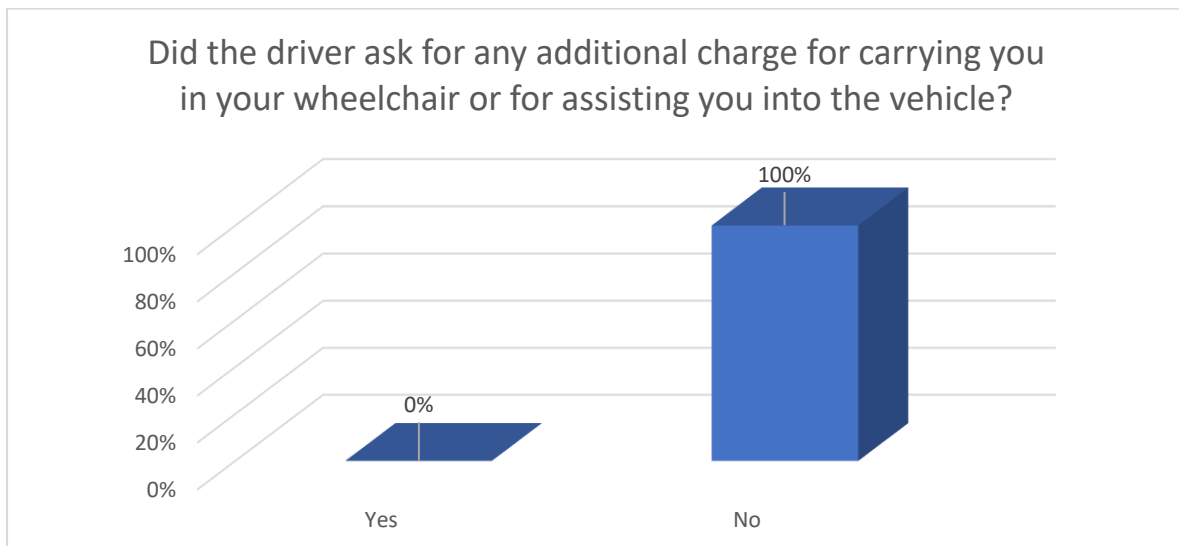
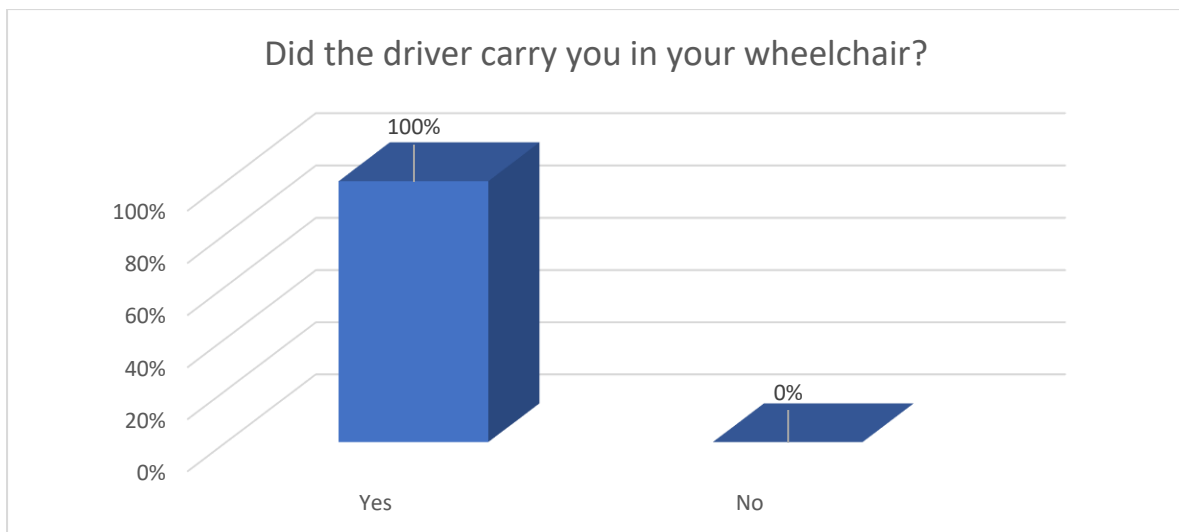
- 2.1 Contact was made with Disability groups informing them of the mystery shopper scheme. The scheme consisted of a set questionnaire surrounding the provisions and duties contained within the Equality Act 2010, issues of safety, accessibility, the driver's attitude, the comparison to other transport facilities and anything they thought was particularly good or bad.
- 2.2 The mystery shopper was required to hire a taxi from a taxi rank in the City Centre to a particular destination and then book a private hire for a return journey. If physically possible, the mystery shopper was asked to travel alone. All visits and questionnaires completed were anonymously to ensure that accurate and efficient results were collated.
- 2.3 Licensing Compliance Officers observed the start of the hiring from a concealed location so that they could take down the vehicle registration number and the Hackney Carriage/Private Hire licence number.
- 2.4 Every mystery shopper was accompanied beforehand and met afterwards to ensure their physical wellbeing and safety in locations they were not familiar with or areas that could be potentially busy.
- 2.5 Council staff involved were fully informed of the individuals' physical disability and how to further assist them in making their journey more comfortable.

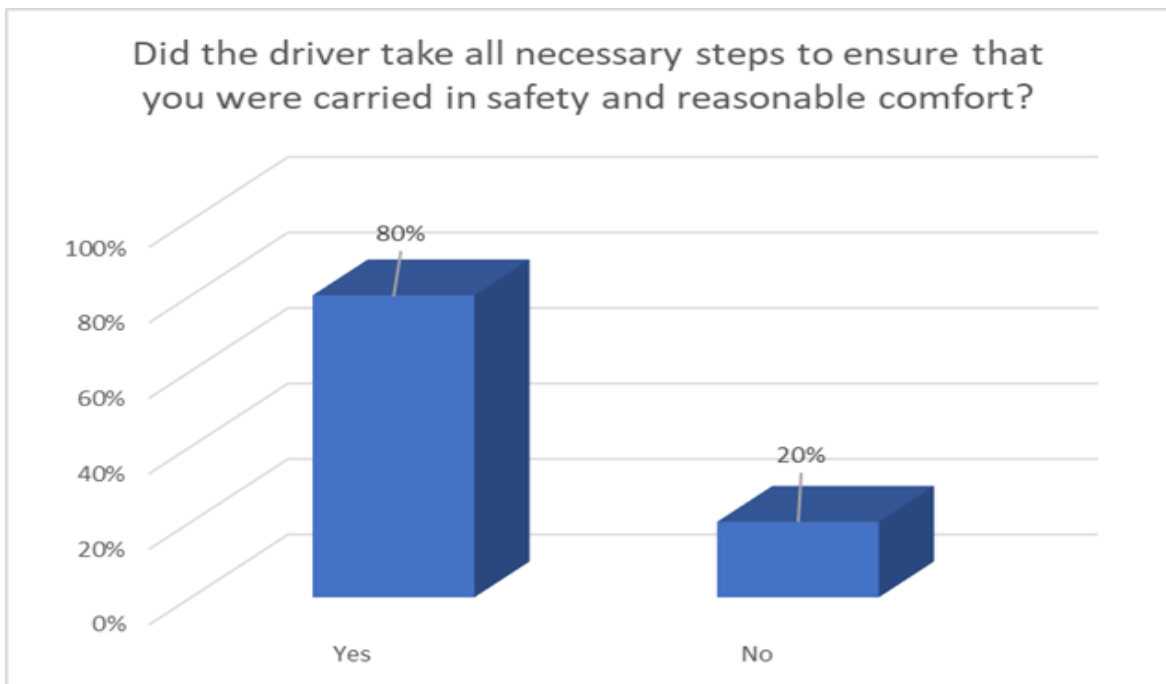
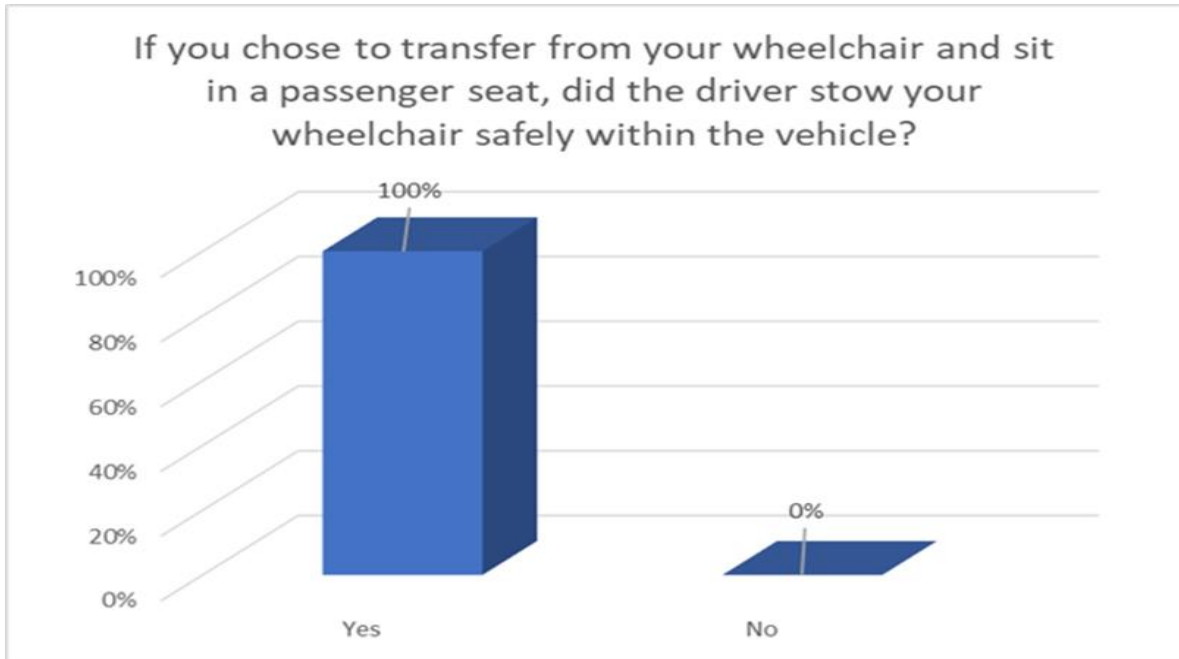
## **3.0 Data Analysis**

- 3.1 A total of 19 journeys were undertaken during December 2019 and February 2020, using both Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles. 13 journeys were undertaken in a Private Hire Vehicle and six in a Hackney Carriage.
- 3.2 10 journeys were taken by a volunteer in a wheelchair. Seven journeys were taken by a volunteer that was blind or partially sighted and accompanied by an assistance dog. Two journeys were taken by volunteers who were blind/partially sighted and also had difficulties with their mobility due to hip replacements and osteoarthritis.

#### 4.0 Survey results

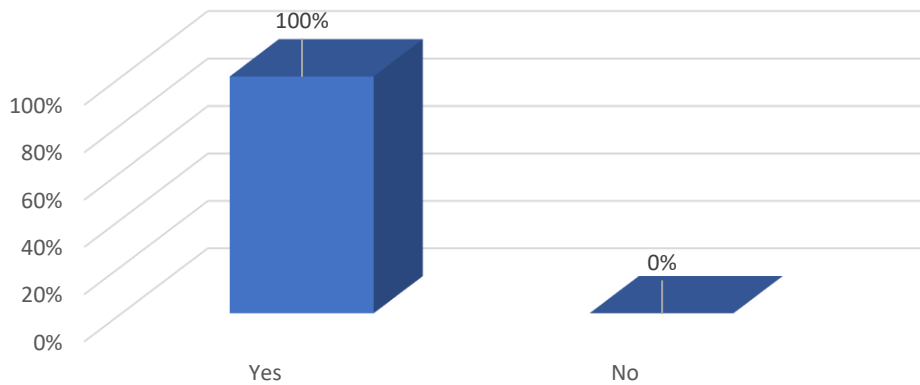
- 4.1 The survey consisted of both qualitative and quantitative questions in order to gather further information and identify possible reasons and issues that would otherwise not be recognised.
- 4.2 The Equality Act 2010 places clear duties on drivers when carrying a passenger in a wheelchair or when carrying a passenger accompanied by an assistance dog.
- 4.3 The Mystery Shopper was asked to confirm if the drivers complied with these duties, the following charts show the level of compliance that they experienced.



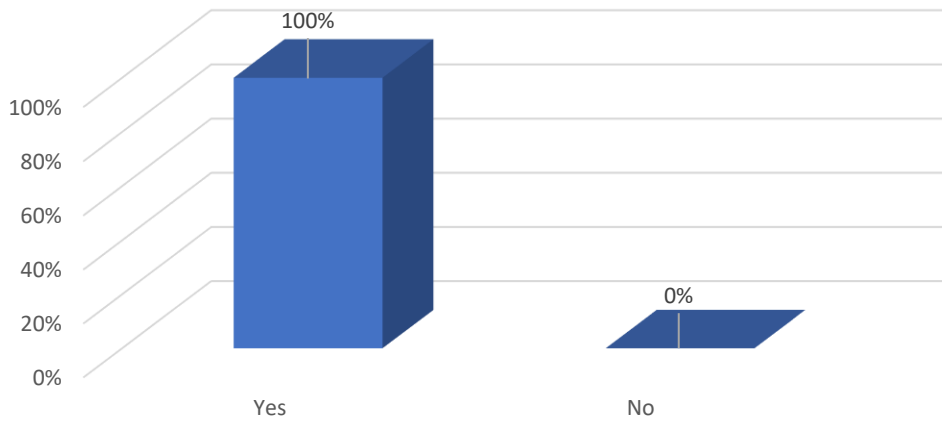


4.4 During two journeys undertaken in hackney carriages by wheelchair volunteers, the drivers failed to secure the wheelchair users correctly. As a result both drivers have attended a review hearing and have been sent on a Wheelchair Training and Assessment Course.

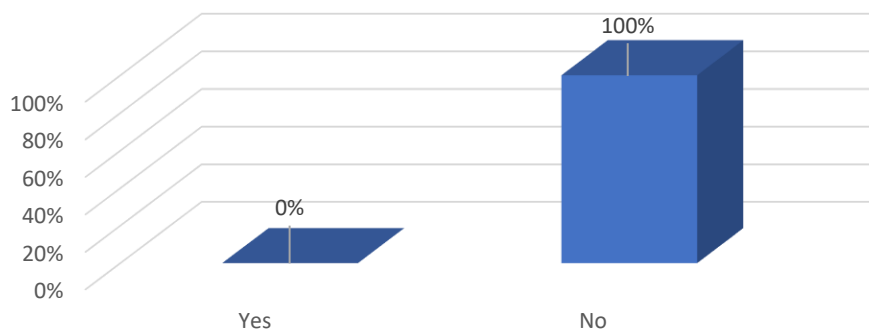
Did the driver give you such mobility assistance as is reasonably required?



Did the driver carry your assistance dog and allow it to remain with you during the journey?

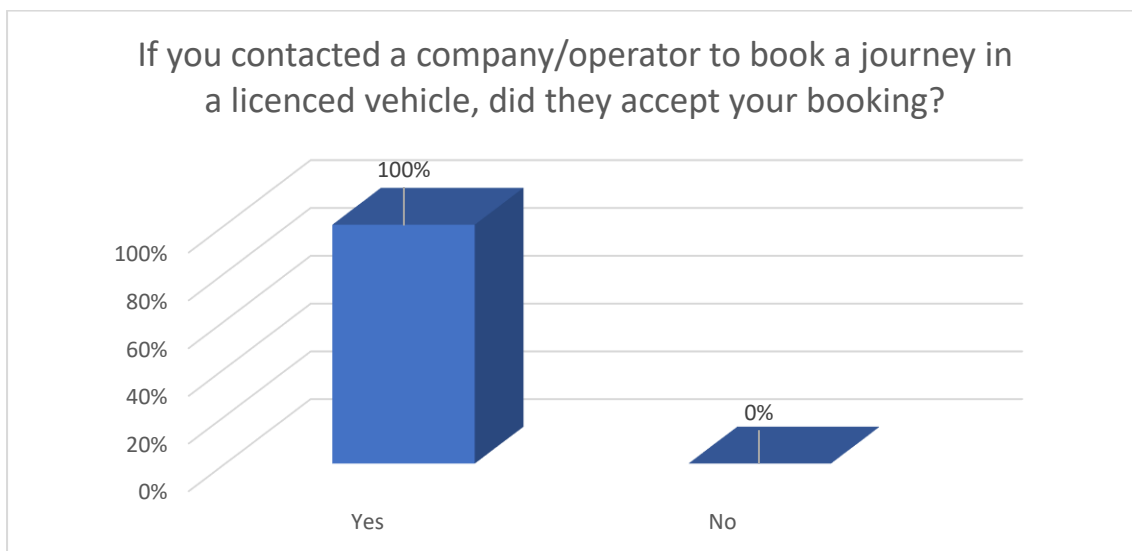
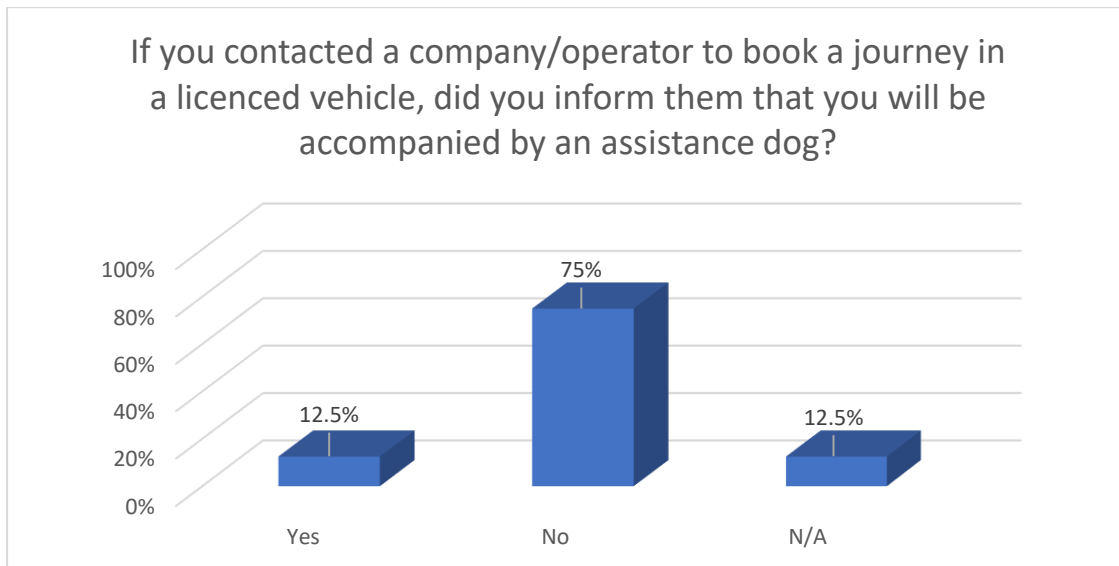


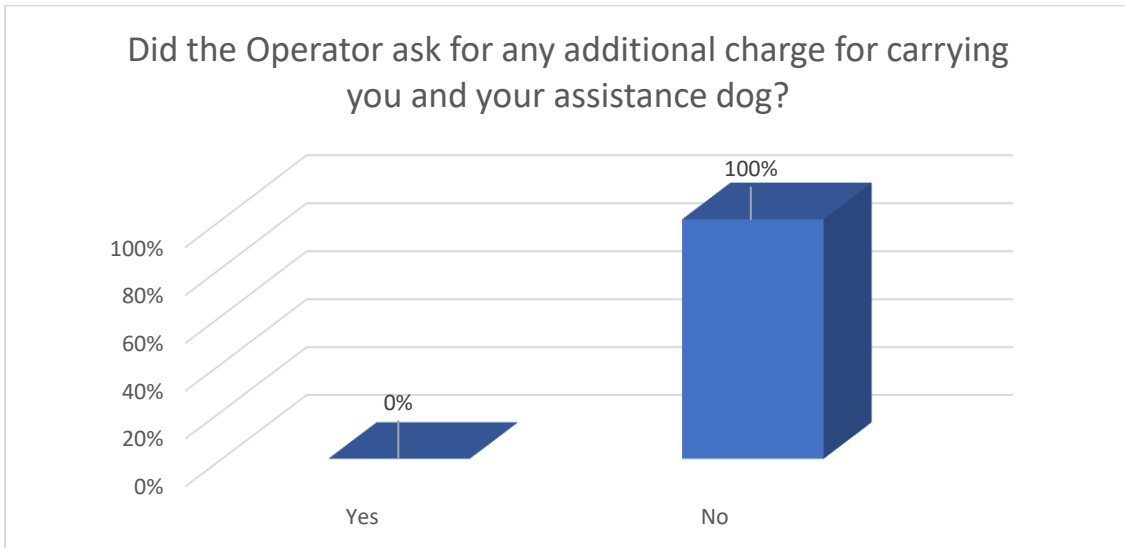
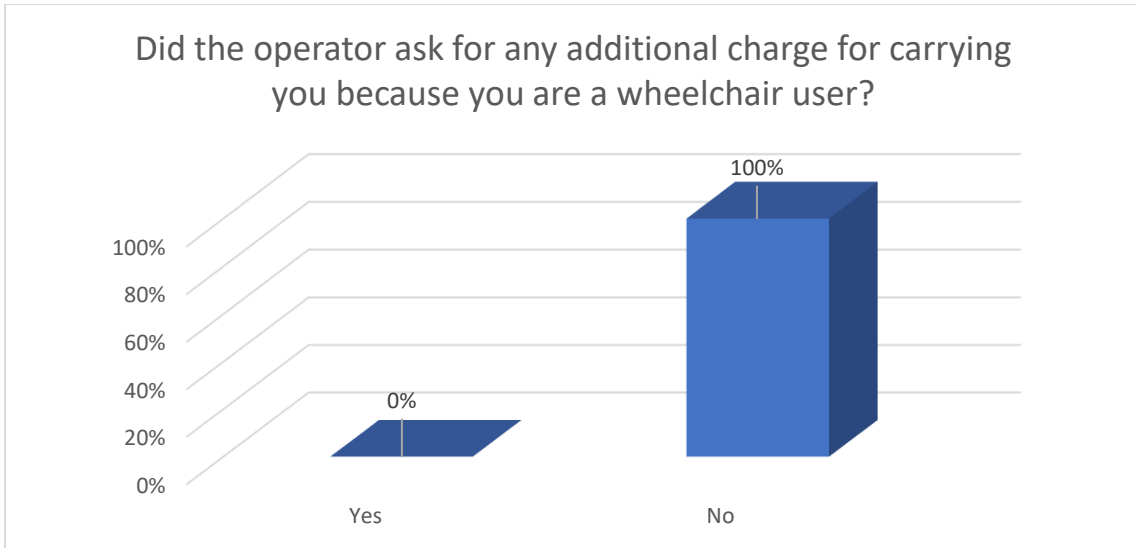
Did the driver ask for any additional charge for carrying you and your assistance dog or for assisting you into the vehicle?



4.5 Overall the compliance with the duties contained within the Equality Act 2010 in relation to drivers was very positive with the level of compliance being 100% in 6 of the 7 duties.

4.6 The Equality Act 2010 also places duties on Private Hire Operator's when receiving a request to book a vehicle to carry passengers / a passenger in a wheelchair or a passenger accompanied by an assistance dog. The results are shown below.

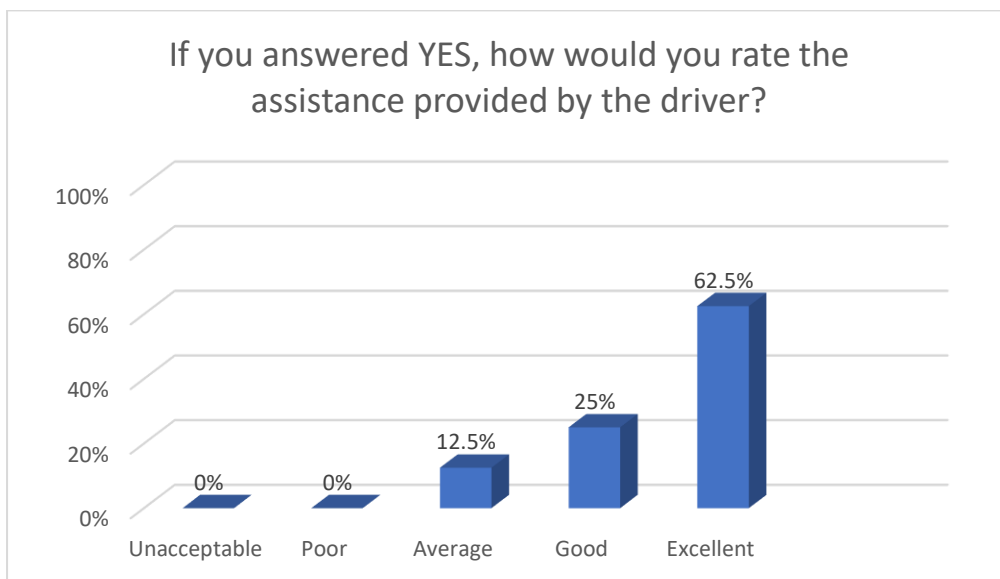
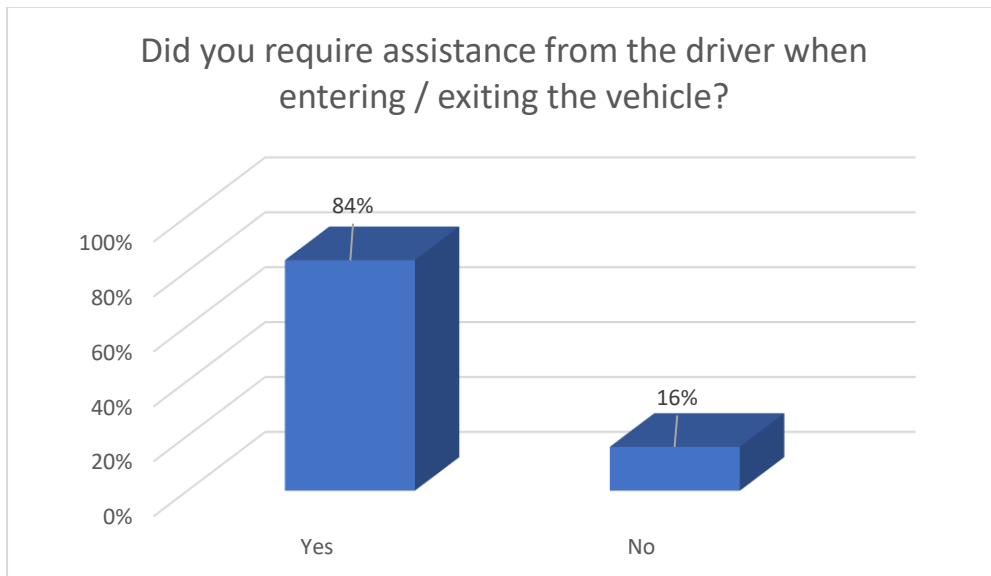




4.7 The Operators achieved 100% compliance with all the duties contained within the Equality Act 2010.



4.8 The following charts show the volunteers responses to generic questions which were asked to assess the overall satisfaction of the level of service that they received.



4.9 Overall 87.5% of the mystery shoppers rated the assistance provided by the drivers as good to excellent with 12.5% rating it as average.

**Positive Comments**

“driver offered to push me”

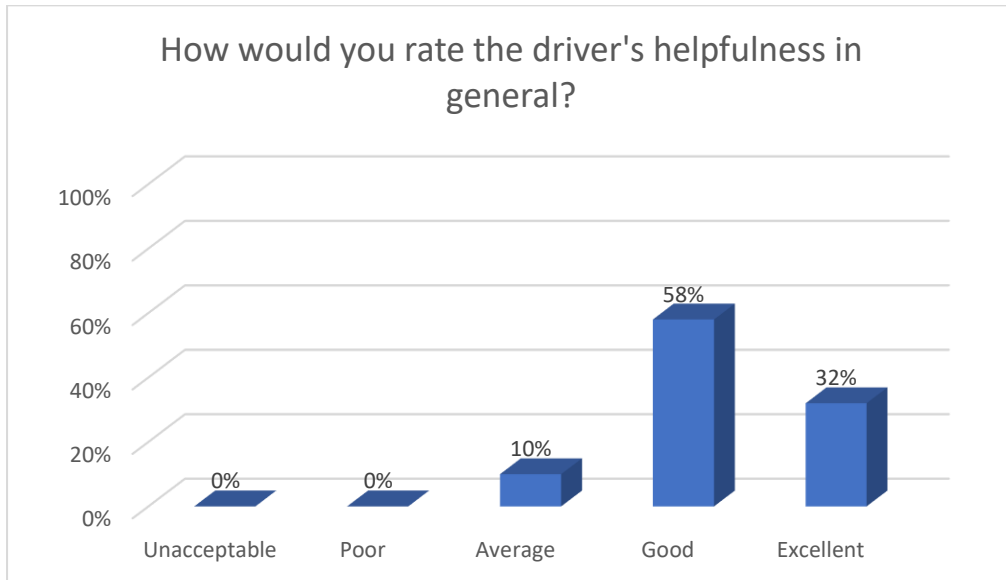
“driver offered to stow my bag with wheelchair”

“driver was unsure of the ramps he was using would be suitable, however when asked to try them they were fine”

“secured fully with straps...”

### Negative Comments

“driver didn’t fold up offside bench seat making it difficult to turn to face rear”.



4.10 Overall 90% of the mystery shoppers rated the driver’s helpfulness as good to excellent with 10% rating it as average.

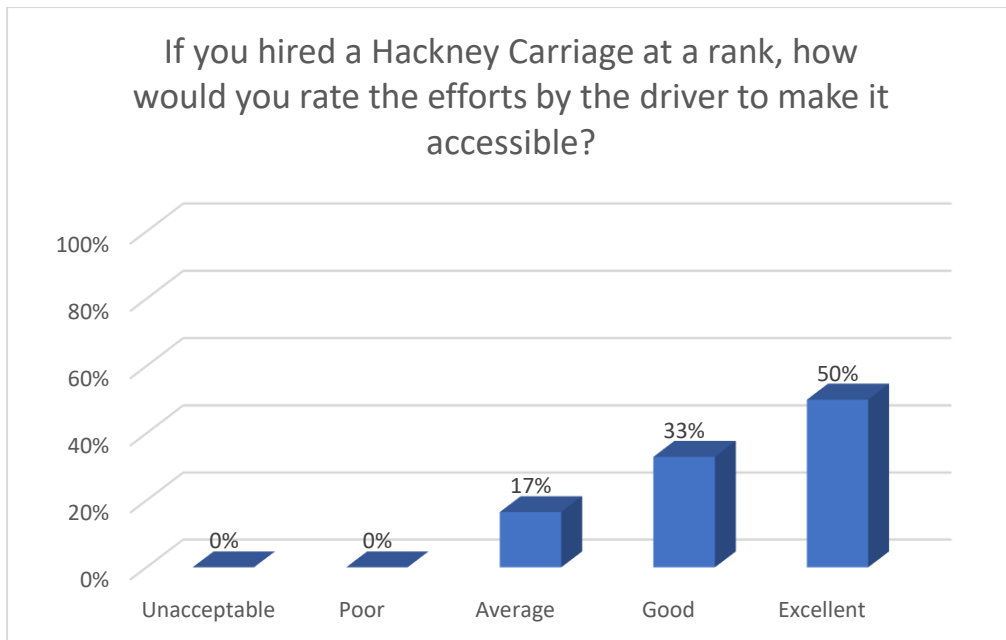
### Positive Comments

“Driver had to reposition car after drop off to avoid a kerb that would have hindered me transferring from car to wheelchair”

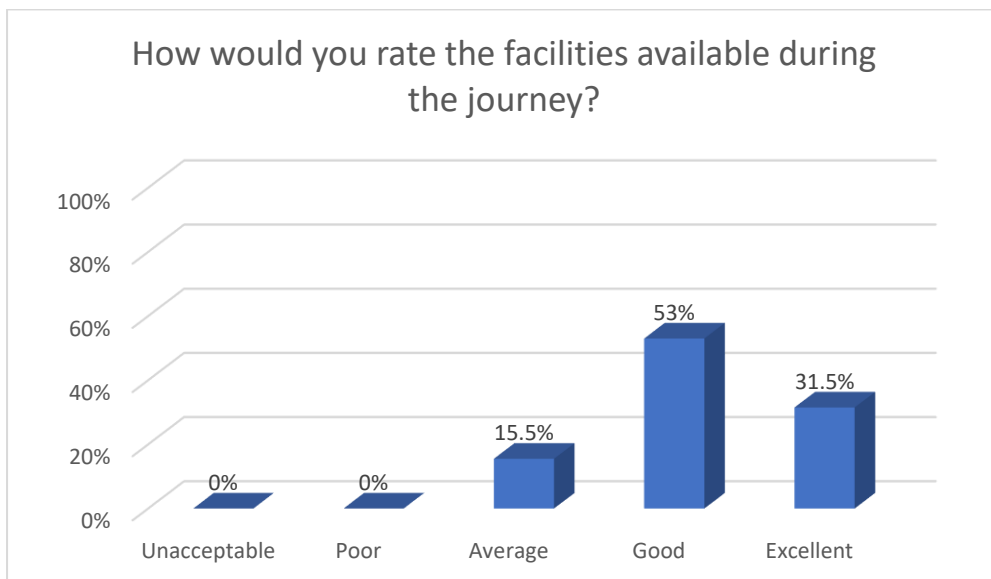
“Got out to help twice”

### Negative Comments

None



4.11 Overall 88% of the mystery shoppers rated the driver’s efforts to make the vehicle accessible as good to excellent with 17% rating it as average.



4.12 Overall 84.5% of the mystery shoppers rated the facilities available during the journey as good to excellent with 15.5% rating them as average.

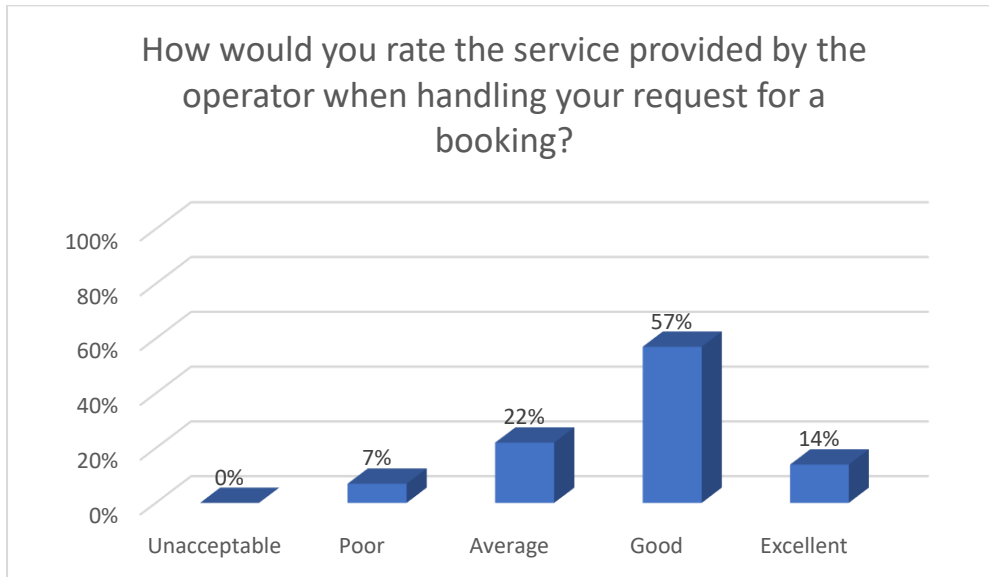
**Positive Comments**

“Clean Car, room to store wheelchair”

### Negative Comments

“Big car, driver never told us to put seat belts on, prefer a small car due to bad hip”

“Used handrails to account for chair not being secured”



4.13 Overall 71% of the mystery shoppers rated the service provided by the operator as good to excellent with 29% rating it as poor to average.

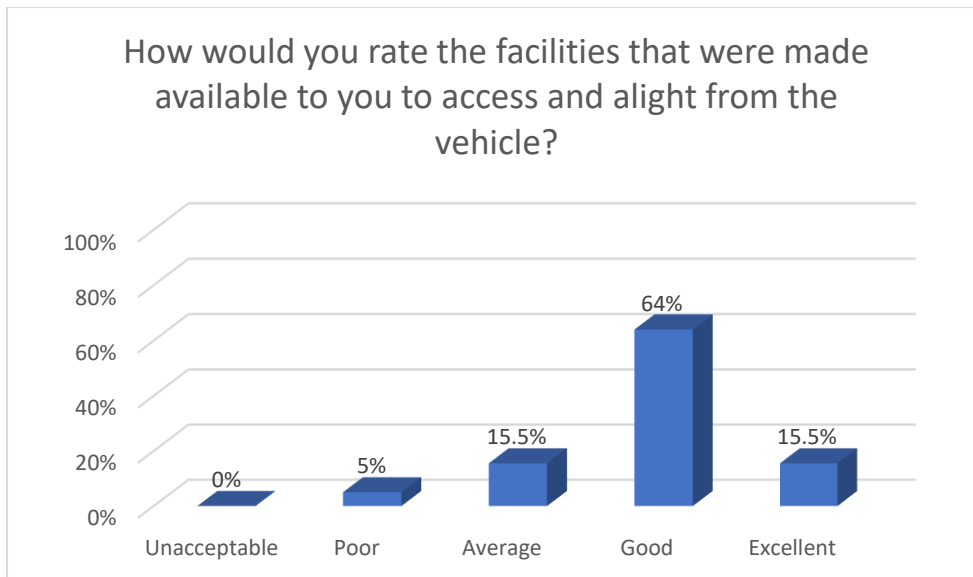
### Positive Comments

“Gave price on phone and used texts to update”

### Negative Comments

“Operator could not give pick up time”

“Didn't know where Molineux Stadium or Wulfruna Street was, couldn't offer an estimated time of arrival, difficult to understand”



4.14 Overall 79.5% of the mystery shoppers rated the facilities as good to excellent with 20.5% rating it as poor to average.

**Positive Comments**

“Driver assistance given”

“Assisted throughout by driver”

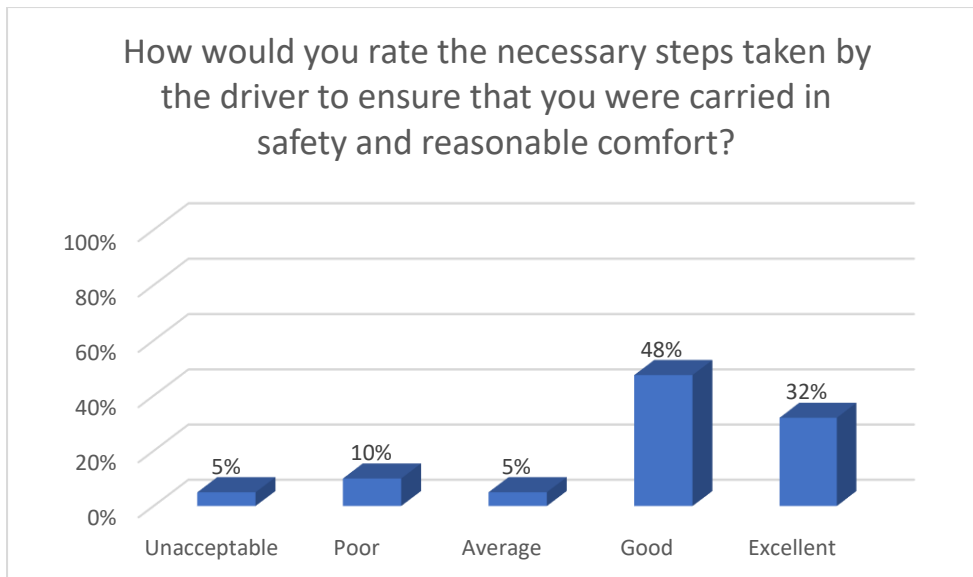
“Retractable ramp required, assistance to get in and out”

**Negative Comments**

“Small car so front seat did not go forward so slightly cramped”

“Very hard to get in as the taxi that arrived was a hackney carriage”

“Ramps a bit tight”



4.15 Overall 80% of the mystery shoppers rated the necessary steps taken by the driver as good to excellent with 15% rating it as poor to average and 5% as unacceptable.

### **Positive Comments**

“I was totally secure and did not have to hold on to any handrail”

“3 straps used”

### **Negative Comments**

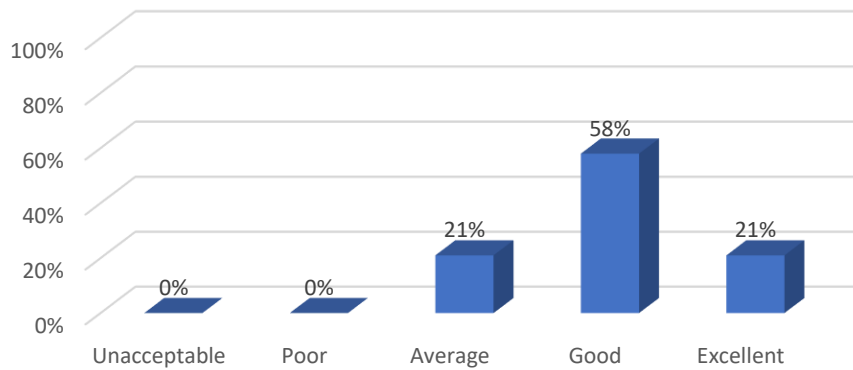
“Poor, due to not securing the wheelchair to the taxi”

“Didn’t strap the wheelchair, asked if I wanted seatbelt on, I asked for seatbelt, but he tried and pull strap out, said he would drive slowly”

“Driver initially asked if dog could go in boot and mentioned that he was not told about the dog”

“Poor, didn’t ask to put seat belts on”

How does the City of Wolverhampton Council Hackney Carriage / Private Hire fleet compare for accessibility to other forms of public transport?



4.16 Overall 79% of the mystery shoppers rated the fleet's accessibility as good to excellent compared to other forms of public transport with 21% rating it as average.