

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Licensing Committee – 26 June 2012

Proposed Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Meter Testing Regime

Report of the Licensing Officer

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor Ken Hayward)

1. Executive Summary

Members are asked to consider the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Meter Testing Regime within Taunton Deane and the recommendations set out at section 11 of the report.
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2. Background

- 2.1 Discussions with the Taunton Taxi trade surrounding the need to carry out meter tests on licensed Hackney Carriages/Private Hire Vehicles have prompted a review of the current regime in respect of the requirement to test and the frequency of testing meters.

3. Report

- 3.1 Currently before a grant or renewal of a Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Vehicle Licence can be issued, a mutually convenient time between a Licensing Officer and the vehicle proprietor must be found to allow for the testing of the taxi meter to ensure it has been calibrated to a rate that does not exceed the Council's maximum tariff.

- 3.2 There are two different methods of testing the calibration of taxi meters.

Method 1

- 3.3 The Licensing Officers have received training in interrogating the following makes of meters Cygnus MR320, MR350, MR400 and MR500, by pressing different variations of the 'Select' and 'Extra' buttons on the meter.

Method 2

- 3.4 A Licensing Officer will accompany the driver of the vehicle along a measured route. The measured route begins at Canal Road and continues along Priory Bridge Road to the Shell Garage. Points are

marked along the route at the first 500 yards and then at each completed 160 yards. When the vehicle passes these points (and not before) the meter should increase the fare in accordance with the current tariff structure. The meter test ends at the Council Offices on Belvedere Road with a timing of the meter to ensure the waiting time charges do not exceed the current tariff either. Through out the year the route is checked by Licensing Officers and markings that have faded are refreshed.

- 3.5 Once the calibration of the meter has been checked and approved they are also checked to ensure that, all seals are intact, the meter can clearly be seen by passengers and that the meter serial number matches the number printed on the meter and the number shown though interrogation.
- 3.6 A meter test is pre-arranged with the vehicle owner on a day and time that is mutually convenient with the Licensing Officer who has to arrange to carry out the test between other licensing duties and vehicle owner who has to ensure the testing time does not interfere with school runs and pre-arranged bookings. Problems with finding a convenient time to undertake the meter test can delay the issuing of the licence.
- 3.7 It is the opinion of the Licensing Officers that when they pre-arrange meter tests the meters are more likely to be correct at this point then at any other time during the year.
- 3.8 It is therefore proposed that a program of random unannounced checks on the calibration of meters should be introduced in place of the current pre-arranged system of checks.

4. Finance Comments

- 4.1 Currently, there is no charge for a meter to be tested upon renewal of a Hackney Carriage/Private Hire Vehicle Licence. Charges are applied only for the testing of a meter on a grant application or if the owner changes the meter tariff during the period of the licence prior to renewal, the current fee for this is £22.18.
- 4.2 The cessation of the meter test will reduce the financial burden upon the taxi trade and reduce the time taken to issue a new licence.
- 4.3 If the recommended changes are approved by the Committee the fee for undertaking a meter test will only be charged if a meter is found to be incorrect through the proposed compliance checks.

5. Legal Comments

- 5.1 Measuring Instruments (Taximeters) Regulations 2006, Section 19 Powers of entry and inspection states that 'an enforcement officer may for the purpose of these Regulations, at all reasonable times; a) inspect and test any taximeter in such a manor as he considers appropriate, b) inspect and

take copies of any documentation relating to a taximeter and c) enter any premises at which he has reasonable cause to believe there to be a taximeter, not being premises used only as a private dwelling house. An enforcement officer may, at any time, seize and detail a) a taximeter which he has reasonable cause to believe is liable to be forfeited under these regulations; and b) any document or goods which he has reason to believe may be required as evidence in proceedings for an offence under these Regulations.

5.2 The Act does prescribe the intervals at which tests should be carried out.

6. Links to Corporate Aims

6.1 No links to specific corporate aims. However if the Licensing function were not carried out in an efficient manner, complaints or legal challenges may be brought that could undermine the work being done to support the Council's Corporate Strategy.

7. Environmental and Community Safety Implications

7.1 If the Committee resolve to adopt this measure the Officers are satisfied that our taxi trade will continue to operate within the correct tariff. We receive very low numbers of complaints from members of the public being over charged and in within the majority of overcharging claims it is determined that the correct fee has been charged.

8. Equalities Impact

No adverse impacts on any of the recognised equality strains have been identified.

9. Risk Management

Not required.

10. Partnership Implications (if any)

None identified.

11. Recommendations

11.1 That Members approve the removal of the requirement for meter tests to be undertaken at renewal and or grant of a vehicle licence as a matter of course.

11.2 That Members approve the implementation of a new procedure where random meter tests are carried out through the year to ensure meters are correct.

11.3 That Members approve the amendment of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Drivers, Vehicles and Operators Handbook to reflect the above changes.

Contact: Olivia Walton
Licensing Officer
Tel: 01823 356343
E-mail: o.walton@tauntondeane.gov.uk