

Taunton Deane Borough Council

Licensing Committee – 26 August 2015

Knowledge & Suitability Interviews for Hackney Carriage/Private Hire Drivers Applicants.

Report of the Licensing Manager

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor James Hunt)

1. Executive Summary

Members are asked to consider increasing the breadth and depth of knowledge required to obtain a Hackney Carriage/Private Hire Drivers Licence and the recommendations set out at section 11 of the report with regard to the additional areas to be included within the Knowledge & Suitability Interview.

2. Background

- 2.1 Knowledge and suitability interviews were introduced to replace the previous knowledge test in June 2010, as Members felt that since the increased use of satellite navigation systems, it was not necessary for drivers to take the route test and that too much emphasis was placed on the routes drivers should take. They resolved that the test should be revised to include questions from the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Drivers Handbook (which includes the Council's policies).
- 2.2 The interviews are the final stage in the consideration of the fit and proper test applied to all those seeking a drivers licence from the Council. It is a chance for the officer to meet the applicant face to face and establish, amongst other things, their knowledge of current policy and legislation. The officer will also assess the demeanour, comprehension and motivation of the applicant before answering the overarching question " Would you allow your son daughter, mother, spouse or other person you care about get into this vehicle with this person alone?".

3. Report

- 3.1 Taunton has historically benefited from a very high standard of taxi provision and the possibility of those standards dropping through the revision of the knowledge test was and through the taxi forums has been identified as still being a very strong concern of the trade.

- 3.2** Although no empirical evidence has been found to support those concerns the amount of anecdotal evidence from the trade and the increased numbers of applicants that do not reside within the local area or operate taxis as their main employment presents a risk to the levels of service provision to the travelling public.
- 3.3** To mitigate that risk it is considered necessary to expand the knowledge and suitability interviews so that new applicants are required to demonstrate knowledge of the local area, local and regional points of importance by identifying given locations on a map and being able to identify directions of travel to destinations outside of the district.
- 3.4** The Licensing Team has asked members of the taxi forum to provide suggestions or examples of frequently requested destinations so that a realistic list of questions can be produced to determine suitable geographical knowledge. Responses received have included village halls, hotels, transport and medical facilities.
- 3.5** It is also considered necessary that questions should be introduced for applicants to demonstrate a suitable ability to calculate change from tendered amounts.
- 3.6** The increase in the duration of the knowledge and suitability interviews will have an impact on the resources of the licensing team and will increase the cost to those wishing to become licensed. However these increases, for the reasons set out above, can be balanced by the potential increased standards of drivers and the benefits to services users.

4. Finance Comments

- 4.1** No direct financial implications.

5. Legal Comments

- 5.1** All the options set out in this report would meet the requirements of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1972.

6. Links to Corporate Aims

- 6.1** Although there are no direct links to the corporate aims the provision of an effective licensing regime benefits local businesses and the public alike in full accordance with the Council's Corporate Strategy.

7. Environmental and Community Safety Implications

- 7.1** Public safety is at the heart of the Licensing regime and it is essential that the public as a whole has the trust and confidence in the public transport system.

8. Equalities Impact

- 8.1** No adverse equality impact identified.

9. Risk Management

9.1 By approving the recommendation at paragraph 11.1, the standard of drivers will improve and therefore the risk to the travelling public is reduced.

10. Partnership Implications (if any)

10.1 None.

11. Recommendations

11.1 That Members approve the expansion of the Knowledge and suitability interview to include questions on local geography and an appropriate level of mathematical ability.

Contact: Ian Carter
01823 356343
i.carter@tauntondeane.gov.uk