

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Planning and Development	Licensing and Public Safety Committee	Tuesday, 7 December 2021

Single Use/Restricted Private Hire Licences

Is this report confidential?	No
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Purpose of the Report

1. To inform members of the Licensing and Public Safety Committee, about the recent request from SRBC licenced operators for a single use/ restricted private hire licence to be available from this licensing authority.

Recommendations

2. To note the contents of the report.
3. To consider the proposed request for a single use/ restricted private hire licence
4. To agree that the licensing section undertake a consultation exercise with stakeholders on the proposed changes to the Taxi Licensing Policy.
5. To agree to receive a report on the outcome of the consultation exercise at a future meeting.

Corporate priorities

6. The report relates to the following corporate priorities: (please bold all those applicable):

An exemplary council	Thriving communities
A fair local economy that works for everyone	Good homes, green spaces, healthy places

Background to the report

7. For some time, requests have been received by a number of operators for the possibility to have various aspects of the application process removed - mainly regarding the local

area knowledge test, for drivers that predominantly are performing work which is outside the borough or doesn't have the need for local knowledge of the area.

8. Various licenced Private Hire Operators have advised officers that they are struggling to employ Private Hire Drivers, due to the obstacles put in place during the application process with required documents as per the conditions of the taxi licensing policy.
9. The current policy regarding new applicants' requirement to pass a local area knowledge test states;

5.8 Local Area Knowledge Test

The Council acknowledges that it is important to the travelling public that the drivers it licences have a good knowledge of the Borough and its boundaries, the Highway Code and the ability to comprehend and communicate effectively in English. All applicants for a new driver's licence for both types of licence will be required to pass either the hackney carriage or private hire knowledge test before they can be granted a licence. Where an applicant wishes to apply for both types of licence, they will only be required to pass the hackney carriage knowledge test.

Drivers who have been previously licensed by this Council who have allowed their licence to lapse for whatever reason will be required to pass the appropriate knowledge test before they can be granted a licence, even if they have passed a local knowledge test previously unless:

- They can demonstrate that they have held a licence for a continuous period of five years or more immediately prior to the expiry of their licence, and*
- The application for a new licence is submitted within three months of the expiry of the previous licence.*

10. Operators are reporting that they are struggling to recruit drivers mainly due to the local area knowledge test. Mainly from operators who solely operate as school transport or airport services.
11. These types of driver are normally employed by operators are part-time drivers, often retired and only perform one or two journeys per day, that could be taking a specific child to and from school or taking a booking to Manchester airport.
12. These are not drivers who are working predominantly within the borough doing short journeys where the knowledge of the local area is required.
13. Operators are advising that the lack of drivers available to them, are having implications on them being able to perform the service levels required by members of the public.
14. These licenced operators are not performing the normal private hire work, but performing school contract work, that requires a regular collection of one child with specific requirements, to be taken to the same school every day, or are performing specific airport contract work or corporate contract work that takes passengers from their home out of the borough usually to Manchester or Liverpool Airport.
15. Operators are asking for members to consider removing the requirement for these types of drivers needing to pass a local area knowledge test as a requirement when first licenced for these type of drivers.

16. As part of the school contract agreement, Lancashire County Council request that all their service providers are licenced as private hire operators, drivers and vehicles licenced with the local authority.
17. These contracts could be collecting someone from Preston and taking them to their school in Blackpool, but considering the operator is licenced by SRBC, the private hire drivers must also be licenced by this authority and pass the local area knowledge test.
18. An official approach has now been made by an operator to request that members of the Licensing and Public Safety Committee, change the wording in the policy so that their drivers are no longer required to pass the local area knowledge test. This can be found as background document 1 attached to the report.

What is the need and requirements for a local area knowledge test?

19. The knowledge test was introduced to make sure all drivers licensed, give members of the public the best service possible.
20. Every private hire/ hackney carriage driver is expected to collect passengers on time. On a busy night drivers should know where passengers want to go and have a good local knowledge.
21. In theory, jobs booked in advance with specified locations should be easy enough to carry out but, in reality, this is not always the case.
22. If a driver takes the wrong route or gets lost this may cause additional charges being passed onto their passengers and result in a conflicting situation.
23. Licenced drivers are expected to know the shortest journeys across key parts of South Ribble and have a good knowledge of addresses of local public amenities.

The Current Test

24. The knowledge test cost £25 per test, if after 3 attempts the applicant fails, applicants must then wait 4 weeks before they can take another test.
25. In order to pass the test, applicants must answer 15 out of 20 questions correctly.
26. Questions are asked on the following topics;
 - Private Hire/Hackney Carriage Vehicle Conditions and Legislation (which can be found in our Taxi Licensing Policy).
 - The Highway Code
 - Places of interest within the Borough i.e. Pubs, Schools, Churches and Restaurants etc.
 - Routes throughout the Borough
 - South Ribble Borough Council's Boundaries
 - Have a basic understanding of the English language
 - Numeracy

Single Use/restricted Private Hire Licence

27. Would allow certain private hire driver applicants, who meet a criteria to apply for a private hire badge that is easier to obtain as they don't need to pass a local area knowledge test.

28. They are limited to what type of work they can perform as part of the conditions attached to their licence.
29. The restricted private Hire badge would be conditioned, so that the drivers would only be able to perform the following specific tasks;
1. Prearranged school or special educational needs transport
 2. Prearranged airport work
 3. Prearranged corporate travel.
30. If drivers were caught performing any other private hire work than listed above via a restricted badge this would be classed as a breach of conditions and would be enforced accordingly, unless extraordinary circumstances were in place that driver would be placed in from of the committee for a decision to revoke the driver's badge.
31. All the other documentation required in the new application process would still remain a requirement to be provided before a licence is granted as per the taxi licensing policy.
32. Applicant will still be required to obtain a level 2 qualification in taxi licensing, which applicants would need basic English and maths skills to pass.
33. Proposed new Policy wording

5.8 Local Area Knowledge Test

The Council acknowledges that it is important to the travelling public that the drivers it licences have a good knowledge of the Borough and its boundaries, the Highway Code and the ability to comprehend and communicate effectively in English.

Applicants for a new driver's licence for both Hackney and Private Hire Licences will be required to pass either the hackney carriage or private hire knowledge test before they can be granted a licence.

Where an applicant wishes to apply for both types of licence, they will only be required to pass the hackney carriage knowledge test.

Drivers who wish to apply for a restricted private hire badge do not need to complete a local area knowledge test upon first application, but they will be restricted by condition on their licence to perform only the following specific work.

- Prearranged school or special educational needs transport
- Prearranged airport work
- Prearranged corporate travel.

Drivers who have been previously licensed by this Council who have allowed their licence to lapse for whatever reason will be required to pass the appropriate knowledge test before they can be granted a licence, even if they have passed a local knowledge test previously unless:

- *They can demonstrate that they have held a licence for a continuous period of five years or more immediately prior to the expiry of their licence, and*

- *The application for a new licence is submitted within three months of the expiry of the previous licence.*

34. New Proposed Private Hire Driver Condition attached to the licence

Restricted Private Hire Licence

The driver is restricted to only perform the following work

4. *Prearranged school or special educational needs transport*
5. *Prearranged airport work*
6. *Prearranged executive corporate travel.*

The licence holder may only conduct regular pre-booked operator work other than the listed criteria above when they have completed a local area knowledge test, at which point the licences authority will lift the restriction on their licence.

Other options considered

35. Option 1 - Remove the knowledge test for all private hire drivers.

The knowledge test could be scrapped completely for all applicant and kept in place for hackney drivers who would consist of be hailed down on the street and would still require that local area knowledge.

36. Option 2 - just remove the local area knowledge element of the test

Keep the private hire test in place but remove the local aspect of the test completely for PH drivers, keeping a section of the test for highway code, English and math skills.

Climate change and air quality

37. N/a

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

38. There are no significant financial implications of this report.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

39. The Council must grant private hire driver licences only to those applicants it considers to be fit and proper. There is no statutory definition of “fit and proper” but it is generally accepted to include geographical knowledge of the area of the Council granting the driver licence. Any applicant licensed with the proposed restrictive conditions would still need to be fit and proper so grant would require a redefining of fit and proper in relation to such drivers with such restricted licences.

Since the knowledge test is in English the test operates indirectly as an English language test.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Request for Conditional Restricted licences from 24/7

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