

Report of	Meeting	Date
Director of Planning and Development (Introduced by Cabinet Member (Planning, Business Support and Regeneration))	Council	Wednesday, 20 April 2022

Is this report confidential?	No
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Is this decision key?	Not applicable
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Amendment Taxi licensing policy – Driver Knowledge Test

Purpose of the Report

1. Considering the outcome of the consultation exercise undertaken between January and February 2022, and the approval by the Licensing & Public Safety Committee, this report invites members of the Council to formally adopt the changes to the Taxi Licensing policy following with regards to the local area knowledge test taken by all new applicants for a hackney/private hire drivers' licence.

Recommendations to Council

2. Members are requested to note the contents of the report.
3. Members are requested to formally adopt the agreed proposal following the approval by the Licensing and Public Safety Committee on the 08/03/2022.

Reasons for recommendations

4. Minor policy amendments are required to the existing Taxi Licensing policy. The necessary changes were highlighted in a report taken to committee 07/12/2022 and 08/03/2022 with various options considered by members of the Licensing and Public Safety Committee.

Other options considered and rejected

5. All possible options have been considered by the committee in previous meetings, these options can be found within the body of the report. The age policy is due for renewal.

Corporate priorities

6. The report relates to the following corporate priorities:

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

Background to the report

7. A detailed report was presented to members of the Licensing and public safety committee on 07/12/2021, advising a request was submitted in writing from SRBC licensed operators for a single use/ restricted private hire licence to be available from this licensing authority.
8. Officers advised the committee that 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.
9. These request have been received from an operator who only perform airport and corporate travel, and an operator who perform school contract work, who's drivers are performing work which is outside the borough or doesn't have the need for any local knowledge of the area.
10. These types of driver are normally employed by operators part-time, 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.
11. 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.

Current Policy Wording

12. 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.

The Current Test

13. 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.

14. In order to pass the test, applicants must answer 15 out of 20 questions correctly.

15. 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

Committee Meeting 07/12/2021

16. At the meeting of 07/12/2021 officers explained that current test

17. A representative from a licenced operator "24/7 Ltd" addressed the committee and explained that they had been struggling to employ drivers since they started in Lancashire in March 2020 due to the local area knowledge tests in place.

18. The representative explained that the business was based within South Ribble and they would like to keep the business within the borough. It was provided that a lot of the school work was contracted through Lancashire County Council (LCC) and drivers were mainly collecting children to take them out of the borough to their school.

19. A second operator addressed the committee. He advised that his business had operated for 17 years and only undertook airport transfers.

20. They had been advertising for drivers since July and had not been able to employ a single driver due to the requirements in place for obtaining a PVH licence.

21. The operator went on to explain that if nothing changed his business would be forced to cease trading.

22. Officers advised of the options for members to consider;

- **Option 1** - To issue restricted single use Private Hire badges

- **Option 2** - Remove the knowledge test
 - **Option 3** - just remove the local area knowledge element of the test , keeping a “Competency Test” in place for English, Maths and highway code.
23. The policy wording for each of these options can be found within background document 1 – report of 07/12/2021.
 24. Members accepted that there was a national shortage of drivers and discussed the use of technology, how this could assist drivers and the drawbacks should the technology fail.
 25. Members considered the three options within the report and agreed to start consultation for all with signage for restricted use licences being included.
 26. Committee agree that the licensing section undertake a consultation exercise with stakeholders, on the proposed changes to the Taxi Licensing Policy and agree to receive a report on the outcome of the consultation exercise at a future meeting.

Committee Meeting 08/03/2022

27. The Committee considered a report that provided feedback on the consultation carried out between January and February 2022. This report can be found attached as background document 2.
28. It was the Officer’s view that option 3 would be the best option.
29. Keeping the test in place but removing the local aspect of the test completely for all applicants, keeping a section of the test as a “competency Test” for basic English, Numeracy and a test for using a satellite navigation system.
30. The officer explained that technology has changed since the knowledge test was first implemented, which whilst drivers do need to still be able to communicate with their passengers, may need read a map, be able to hold a basic numeracy knowledge to be able to take payments, use taxi meters etc, the local aspect is now covered by navigation hardware within the vehicles.
31. The officer explained that the days of operators using radios, to communicate bookings to its drivers, had gone and operators now used PDA software. Bookings are distributed straight to drivers through the PDA’s, utilising satellite navigation within the PDA systems.
32. Officers had found that drivers were failing the test multiple times before getting licensed elsewhere. Resulting in an increased amount of out of town drivers operating in the South Ribble area, with Officers having no enforcement powers over these drivers.
33. The Officer explained, the test is restrictive and in its current form unnecessary, officers report that new drivers are turning down applying for badges with this authority as they can’t obtain a licence due to the knowledge test being too restrictive.

34. Applicants are taking the test multiple times before giving up. Officers have found that this is having a knock-on effect, with the number of drivers applying for licences with this authority depleting, Operators also report, they are struggling to obtain new drivers.
35. Currently South Ribble have 4 licenced operators, who also hold operator licences with other authorities. Applicants are applying at neighbouring authorities where they find it easier to obtain badges, only to return to work in this area for these operators with licences issued by other authorities.
36. This is extremely counterproductive as this restricts the amount of enforcement power our officers have over these drivers.
37. At the meeting on 08/03/2022, members considered all proposals and agreed with the officer that Option 3 was the best preferred option, emphasising the need to keep the English and maths element of the test.
38. Drivers would also be asked to undertake a Sat Nav test to demonstrate their understanding on how they operated.

Hackney Carriage Driver Applicants

39. The additional Hackney Test would remain in place and would not be changed, this test requires applicants to answer additional questions, relating to the additional knowledge required to be a hackney driver.
40. But hackney applicants would also benefit from the knowledge test changing, as they are also required to pass the knowledge test alongside the hackney Knowledge Test.

41. Proposed wording to the Taxi Licensing Policy

5.8 Driver Competency Test

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

All applicants for a new driver's licence for both types of licence will be required to pass The Driver Competency Test before they can be granted a licence.

Where an applicant wishes to apply for both types of licence, they will also 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 test(s) before they can be granted a licence, 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.

Climate change and air quality

42. The work noted in this report does not impact the climate change and sustainability targets of the Councils Green Agenda and all environmental considerations are in place.

Equality and diversity

43. Any equality implications have been addressed within the report.

Risk

44. The elements of risk to the authority have been address within the body of the report.

Comments of the Statutory Finance Officer

45. There are no significant financial implications of these changes.

Comments of the Monitoring Officer

46. There are no significant legal implications as a result of the changes.

Background documents

47. Background document 1 – Committee report 07/12/2022

Please see agenda Item 6 within the following link,

<https://southribble.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=483&MId=2197&Ver=4>

48. Background Document 2 – Committee report 08/03/2022

Please see agenda item 5 within the following link

<https://southribble.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=483&MId=2227&Ver=4>

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