

Name of meeting: Licensing & Safety Committee
Date: 13th December 2016
Title of report: Licensed Drivers Driving Assessments

Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards?	No
Key Decision - Is it in the Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports?)	No Public Report – Yes
The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny?	“ not applicable”
Date signed off by <u>Director</u> & name	Jacqui Gedman – 23/11/16
Is it signed off by the Assistant Director - Financial Management, Risk, IT & Performance?	Debbie Hogg – 02/12/16
Is it signed off by the Assistant Director – Legal, Governance & Monitoring?	Julie Muscroft – 24/11/16
Cabinet member portfolio	Cllr Mather – Portfolio Holder for Housing & Enforcement Management

Electoral wards affected: All
Ward councillors consulted: None
Public or private: Public

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The Licensing and Safety Committee is asked to note the change in service provider to carry out an equivalent test to the Driver, Vehicle and Standards Agency (DVSA) Taxi Driver Assessment course which is being ended by the DVSA as from the 31 December 2016.
- 1.2 The reason that it is necessary to do so, is that the requirement to pass a DVSA Taxi Drivers Assessment is part of the Council's policies in relation to hackney carriage and private hire drivers that all new applicants for hackney carriage and private hire drivers licence must pass a DVSA Taxi Drivers Assessment as a prerequisite to being granted a drivers licence in the Kirklees District.
- 1.3 The DVSA wrote to all Local Authorities on the 31 August 2016 to advise them that it is withdrawing its Taxi Driver Assessment with effect from the 31 December 2016. There was no prior warning or consultation with Local Authorities over this withdrawal. See letter attached to this report as Appendix 1.

2. Background

- 2.1** The Council's policy requirement that all new applicants for hackney carriage/private hire drivers licences in the Kirklees District must pass a DVSA Taxi Drivers Assessment was affirmed by Members of the Licensing and Safety Committee at their meeting on the 26th October 2009.
- 2.2** The requirement that all new applicants for hackney carriage/private hire driver's licences must pass the DVSA Taxi Drivers Assessment before being granted a driver's licence is part of a number of prerequisites for the grant of such a licence in Kirklees and which includes a group 2 Medical, In house training on customer care, equalities and safeguarding to name but a few.
- 2.3** All of these requirements including the DVSA Taxi Drivers Assessment were introduced by the Licensing and Safety Committee in consultation with the local taxi and private hire trades in order to maintain and improve the standards of driver and passenger safety in Kirklees, along with encouraging applicants to regard taxi driving as a professional long term occupation and one which can provide high standards of customer safety and care for fare paying passengers.
- 2.4** This overall ethos may have been put in jeopardy by the very recent announcement from the DVSA that they will be ceasing all Taxi Driver Assessments as from the 31 December 2016 because the demand for these tests is outstripping the DVSA's capacity to meet that demand. They have advised that they do not have enough test examiners and need to prioritise their resources to reduce waiting times for those waiting to take ordinary car tests.
- 2.5** As mentioned the DVSA) Taxi Driver Assessment course is ending by the 31 December 2016. However, all slots available to that date have been fully booked for weeks and the knock on effect is that new applicants can no longer get a test with the DVSA and are being delayed in their applications for a badge.
- 2.6** Most other councils in the country have the same requirement and find themselves in the same position as Kirklees.
- 2.7** Kirklees are more fortunate than most in that it has an in-house driver training unit which delivers the Speed Awareness Course on behalf of West Yorkshire police. As such they are members of the Association of National Driver Improvement Course Providers (ANDISP).
- 2.8** The Unit has previously put in place a hackney carriage/private hire driving test for existing drivers who have accumulated 9 penalty points on their driving licence. Members may recall this was the option that was approved at a previous Licensing and Safety Committee on 11 February 2015 which was instead of existing drivers being suspended pending obtaining a DVSA test which at the time had a waiting list of in excess of 2 months at some centres.
- 2.9** As time is of the essence, the Licensing Manager has been working with the Unit to see if they can extend their current arrangements to new applicants. This would be the quickest, safest and most reasonable option for the Council when considering how to replace the DVSA test. Fortunately, this is possible and work has commenced to introduce the test as soon as practically possible.

3. Implications for the Council

The Council's policy to require all new applicants to take and pass a Taxi Driving Assessment as well as promoting passenger and driver safety and comfort also links into and supports the Council's Corporate Plan for 2016 – 2017 under the following criteria:

- Enhanced employment prospects,
- Community safety
- Increasing skills
- Support business growth
- Enable better job prospects
- Facilitate improved qualification and skills attainment

4. Consultees and their opinions

The requirement for all new applicants applying for a hackney carriage and private hire driver's licence to take and pass a DVSA Taxi Drivers Assessment is an existing policy. Members are being asked to note the changes of the tests being carried out by a suitable alternative service provider in light of the DVSA withdrawing its own test examiners and facilities with effect from the 31 December 2016.

Given that there is no change suggested or required to the Council's current policy in this regard and also that there is likely to be very little difference in cost for new hackney carriage/private hire driver applicants, undertaking any form of consultation with the existing hackney carriage and private hire trades or any form of public consultation is unnecessary in the circumstances and could also incur the existing taxi trade unnecessary cost through their licence fees.

5. Next steps

To consider the contents of this report. To implement the new testing regime.

6. Officer recommendations and reasons

It is recommended that the Licensing & Safety Committee note the following actions

- 1) That the Council continue requiring all new applicants for a Kirklees Council hackney carriage/private hire drivers licence to take and pass a Taxi Drivers Assessment equivalent to the standard required by the DVSA Taxi Drivers Assessment
- 2) Note the change of service provider for the assessments.

7. Cabinet portfolio holder's recommendations

Cllr Naheed Mather endorses the revised practice and in the interest of maintaining high standards recommends that the Committee also endorse the revised practice.

8. Contact officer & relevant papers

Catherine Walter

Licensing, Local Land Charges & Highways Registry Manager

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Papers:

Appendix 1 – DVSA Letter

9. Assistant Director responsible

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APPENDIX I



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Chief Executive
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31 August 2016

DVSA Taxi Driver Assessments

DVSA (and previously DSA) have been conducting Taxi Driver Assessments for participating Local Authorities since 1999. Demand has increased over the years, with a throughput in 2015-16 of approximately 23,000 and a forecast of 28,000 for the business year 2017-18.

These assessments now require considerable examiner resource, at a time when the demand for statutory tests is at an all-time high. The Agency is under pressure to reduce car test waiting times and in order to achieve this, we need to prioritise our activities.

Regrettably, a decision has been made to withdraw the provision of Taxi Assessments with effect from 31 December 2016. We understand that this will be a disappointment and inconvenience to those Local Authorities who currently require their taxi drivers to pass the DVSA assessment.

The Agency also recognises the road safety benefits of such an assessment; therefore, we would point out that there are potential providers such as road safety charities and Driving Instructor representative bodies, who may be interested in providing an alternative service. Details of these organisations can be easily obtained by submitting a general internet search.

Yours faithfully

Neil Wilson
Head of Driver and Driver Training Policy