

LICENSING COMMITTEE– 3 APRIL 2008

REPORT OF HEAD OF TRANSPORTATION SERVICES
A CHANGE TO THE LICENSING CONDITIONS FOR HACKNEY
CARRIAGE & PRIVATE HIRE DRIVERS

1. Purpose of the Report and Policy Context

- 1.1 To consider a change to the licensing conditions for hackney carriage and private hire drivers. Taxis are an integral part of the area's public transport network. The Borough of Poole has a duty to regulate the conditions of licensed drivers.

2. Recommendations

- a) It is recommended that with effect from 1 July 2008 the licensing conditions for new hackney carriage (taxi) and private hire drivers be amended to make a compulsory requirement for all new applicants to have passed the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) taxi test prior to issue of licence.

3. Information

- 3.1 The Borough of Poole licences the town's taxi and private hire drivers, vehicles and operators primarily for public safety. Prospective drivers currently undergo a Police (Criminal Records Bureau) check, a Group 2 Medical and a verbal knowledge test of the roads of the Borough before licensing. Applicants must have held a valid DVLA licence for at least 12 months. There is no additional test of driving ability.
- 3.2 Poole has been at the forefront of training for the industry and has piloted the introduction of Btec and NVQ qualifications. The latter includes a driving assessment but the course remains voluntary for drivers.
- 3.3 Nationally the taxi and private hire industry is the only fare-paying passenger trade not compelled to take a separate test of driving ability. Following requests from other Local Authorities, the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) devised a test in 1999 to meet this demand. The test is of an agreed national standard and is designed to provide a fair and consistent benchmark for prospective taxi and private hire drivers.
- 3.4 Currently over 100 Local Authorities across the country have made the DSA taxi test a compulsory requirement before licensing. The test itself consists of a 30-minute assessment of on the road driving to check correct use of speed, anticipation of other road users and awareness of driving conditions. Specifically it includes manoeuvres such as performing safe U turns, which taxi drivers have to perform more often than other road users.

- 3.5 The DSA test also includes Highway Code, taxi and traffic sign questions. This will provide an invaluable refreshing of knowledge as it may potentially be thirty years since the applicant last took their conventional car test.
- 3.6 The practical test is undertaken in the licensed vehicle itself and will be available in two forms: -
- Drivers of **saloon style** vehicles would report to the DSA offices at Gillam Road, Northbourne to collect the examiner. From here a specially designed route would be followed encompassing a variety of road/traffic conditions. A fee of £69 is payable.
 - Drivers wishing to use **wheelchair accessible** vehicles will also be required to undertake an additional practical exercise. This will test the correct loading and securing of the wheelchair in the vehicle and will be undertaken at VOSA's premises on the Nuffield Estate. A fee of £80.50 is payable.
- 3.7 It is therefore proposed that with effect from 1st July 2008 the licensing conditions for new hackney carriage (taxi) and private hire drivers be amended to make a compulsory requirement for all new applicants to have passed the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) taxi test prior to issue of licence.
- 3.8 Drivers that successfully pass the test will receive a certificate and will also have the DSA logo added to their ID badges. In addition a link up with a leading taxi insurance company allows significant savings to be made. Drivers that fail the assessment are given a thorough debrief and are offered training advice.
- 3.9 Taxi and private hire drivers licensed with the council that have allowed their existing licences to lapse will be treated as new drivers from 1 July 2008 and will be required to pass the DSA test.
- 3.10 The DSA Test is a National standard and it is proposed that the Borough will accept pass certificates from other areas, providing the assessment has been undertaken within the previous twelve months.

JULIAN MCLAUGHLIN
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Background Papers

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976

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