

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Public Protection Sub-Committee
Date: 24th September 2015
Report of: Head of Regulatory Services

Report Title

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE HACKNEY CARRIAGE/PRIVATE HIRE DRIVER APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Summary

The report outlines the outcome of a review of the current taxi driver application procedure following an increase in the number of potential applicants for a licence.

It is proposed to change the current requirements in respect of English language skills; and local area knowledge and training, in order to reduce delays in the application process whilst maintaining driver standards.

Recommendation(s)

It is recommended that the Sub-Committee agrees to:

- extend the range of acceptable qualifications to prove English language skills;
- remove the requirement to pass a local area knowledge test but introduce a condition that all drivers must carry a working satellite navigation system; and
- extend the length and scope of the driver induction course.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Joanne Boyle
Extension: 4129

Iain Veitch
Head of Regulatory Services

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council's current hackney carriage/private hire driver licence application procedure consists of five stages:

Stage One – English, numeracy and verbal communication test

- 1.2 In October 2013 the Council introduced a requirement that any person wishing to apply for a hackney carriage/private hire driver's licence must pass an ESOL Entry 2 in English and Numeracy. The requirement applied to all persons irrespective of their educational background or if English was their first language.
- 1.3 The assessments are carried out once a month at the Town Hall by Bolton College. The cost is £40 which is paid in full to the College.
- 1.4 Bolton College are only able to supply an ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) assessor once a month. Each session takes fourteen candidates only.
- 1.5 There has been a recent increase in the numbers of people wishing to take the assessment in order to apply for a licence. This is primarily because of the decision by Rossendale Council to review its policy on intended use. The result is that the current waiting time for a place on the assessment is six months.

Stage Two – Application & DBS forms submitted

- 1.6 All applicants are required to submit an application form with supporting documents; a DBS disclosure form and the application fee.

Stage Three – Induction course

- 1.7 All applicants must complete an 'in house' induction course which consists of:
- Licensing conditions and legislation framework
 - Customer Care
 - Disability Awareness

Stage Four – Knowledge Test

- 1.8 All applicants must pass a knowledge test which is delivered 'in house' and consists of a written test on places of interest, pubs, clubs and restaurants; routes; and private hire driver conditions and hackney carriage byelaws. The current pass rate is 25%.

Stage Five – Medical

- 1.9 All applicants must undergo a Group 1 medical with their own doctor.
- 1.10 Should a candidate pass the knowledge test on the first occasion it would on average take eight months to be granted a driver's licence due to the current waiting times and volume of potential applicants.

2. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE DRIVER APPLICATION PROCESS

- 2.1 Officers have been asked to propose changes to the current requirements in respect of English language skills; local area knowledge and training, in order to reduce delays in the application process whilst maintaining driver standards.

English Language Skills Assessment

- 2.2 The current system requires that all applicants, irrespective of education or background, must pass an assessment undertaken by the Council's specific provider Bolton College. This requirement is extremely restrictive meaning, for example, a person with a degree in English must currently wait six months to take the assessment before they can apply for a licence. Also, the Council is currently reliant on Bolton College to provide an assessor who is only available once a month which limits the number of candidates who can be assessed at any one time.

Proposal 1

It is proposed to extend the range of acceptable qualifications to prove English language skills as follows:

Any UK qualification - degree, A/O level, GCSE; or
A non-UK degree in English; or
ESOL qualification at Entry 2 from any accredited UK College

Qualification certificate to be produced on application for a hackney carriage/private hire driver's licence

Local Area Knowledge Test

- 2.3 Anecdotal evidence suggests that one of the reasons for the increase in out of area drivers working in Trafford is the lack of available licensed Trafford drivers. The main reason for the lack of Trafford drivers is that few applicants pass the Council's current knowledge test the first time; and many take several attempts to pass resulting in long delays.
- 2.4 Officers have received complaints from both the hackney carriage and private hire trades that the knowledge test is simply a memory test and is out of date.
- 2.5 The Law Commission in its recent review made a series of far reaching recommendations in respect of taxi and private hire services. It recommended that private hire services should not be subject to locally imposed topographical knowledge tests.

'Satellite navigation technology is widely if not universally used. The Law Commission suggests that local topographical knowledge tests for private hire drivers is an unnecessary regulatory requirement and they see no need for licensing authorities to require them.'

- 2.6 It could be argued that the Council's current requirement to pass a local area knowledge test in its current format has had a detrimental effect on the quantity of hackney carriage and private hire drivers in Trafford.
- 2.7 In the light of technological advances, it is suggested that a knowledge test is no longer necessary to determine the 'fit and proper person test' for both hackney carriage and private hire drivers.

Proposal 2

It is proposed to remove the requirement for applicants to pass a local area knowledge test but introduce a condition that all drivers must carry a working satellite navigation system.

Hackney Carriage/Private Hire Induction Course

- 2.8 The Council currently requires that all applicants attend an induction course which focuses on the roles and responsibilities of being a taxi or private hire driver. It is proposed that a greater emphasis be placed on training applicants on customer care and disability awareness; how to work within local authority guidelines and national legislation; and a greater awareness of child sexual exploitation and how to report any concerns.
- 2.9 It is suggested that delivering 'in house' would give the Council greater control over course content, delivery and effectiveness, and post-course reinforcement; and would also allow the Council to tailor the course content to address localised practice, policy, procedures and conditions.

Proposal 3

It is proposed to require all applicants to complete a driver induction course consisting of:

Licensing conditions and legislation framework
Customer care
Wheelchair access and disability awareness
Child sexual exploitation awareness

3. CONSULTATION

- 3.1 At its meeting on the 20th August 2015 the Sub-Committee agreed that officers should undertake a four week consultation with the trade on these proposals. It also agreed that the proposals and the results of the consultation should be reported back to the Sub-Committee for consideration at this evening's meeting.
- 3.2 Officers wrote to all 950 licensed drivers to invite them to take part in the consultation by completing an on-line survey. The last date to complete the survey or submit comments is the 22nd September 2015. A full analysis of the results of the survey will be available at the meeting. An analysis of the survey

results received at the time of writing is attached at Appendix A together with respondent's comments and separate email responses.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The Sub-Committee is invited to consider the report and the responses received following the consultation exercise, and decide whether to:
- extend the range of acceptable qualifications to prove English language skills;
 - remove the requirement to pass a local area knowledge test but introduce a condition that all drivers must carry a working satellite navigation system; and
 - extend the length and scope of the driver induction course.
- 4.2 The Sub-Committee is also invited to agree the implementation date for any proposed changes to the application procedure. Officers are currently working on an appropriate effective date which will allow for additional training of staff; and a review of the need for any additional resources in the short-term to deal with a possible increase in demand.

**PROPOSED CHANGES TO DRIVER APPLICATION PROCEDURES
ON-LINE SURVEY RESPONSES**

Q1. You may be aware of the legal loop-hole that allows taxis licensed by other authorities to work in the Trafford area. Do you think the Council should try to do something to address this issue?		Results	
	Yes	56	94.92%
	No	3	5.08%
Q2. Proposal 1 – Do you think that the above qualifications are appropriate to prove competency in the English Language?			
	Yes	42	71.19%
	No	17	28.81%
Q.3 Proposal 1 – Are there any other qualifications which you think would be acceptable?			
See separate sheet for respondent's comments			
Q4. Proposal 2 – Do you agree with the proposal to remove the requirement to pass a local area knowledge test?			
	Agree	9	15.52%
	Disagree	49	84.48%
Q.5 Proposal 3 – Do you have any other suggestions for topics that should be covered on the induction course?			
See separate sheet for respondent's comments			
Q6. Overall, are you satisfied that these proposals will meet the Council's aim of reducing delays in the application process whilst maintaining standards?			
	Satisfied	14	24.14%
	Not satisfied	34	58.62%
	Don't know	10	17.24%
TOTAL NO. OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS		60	
OTHER (emails etc.)		6	

SURVEY COMMENTS:

Respondent No.	Q3: Proposal 1 – Are there any other qualifications which you think would be acceptable?
4	I think to save time and money, a common sense approach is needed, at the first point of call, any officer of the council, having engaged in a conversation with a potential new driver should be able to use their own judgement to see if they can have a normal conversation. If the officer has any doubts, the potential new driver could be referred to the licensing panel, who would have the final say? I know many people who can speak fluent English, have lived in England all their life , but do not have a qualification to prove this. I also know people who cannot read or write but are great orators. Make life simple, please stop putting in my opinion unnecessary obstacles in the way. (certificates).
6	ESOL and other approved and accepted English language tests
7	We expect the driver to know basic math and speak english
10	They should know the area Pub club libraries hotels bars and other things didn't comes up on TomTom so you must take knowledge test and English and math test also important too
12	An applicant must be able too demonstrate conversational English, and numeracy.
13	No, the government set maths and English test should be imposed
15	Language communication skill personality skill Very strong knowledge test very strong criminal record should be required to all driver drivers come from oversee should be quiet criminal record from oversee
16.	LOCAL KNOWLEDGE TEST AND BASIC ENGLISH AND MATHS
21	Qualifications should only be acquired in UK. But spoken English and comprehension should be tested by the council
22	Proven qualifications in English and Maths And proof of identity, ie passport.
24	to have some knowledge of the local area
26	English speaking clearly, well mannered, very good area knowledge.
28	Verbal test
32	I don't believe a degree obtained in another country will show that the person applying to work as a taxi driver can actually speak and understand the English language.
36	Life in the uk
37	Wheel chair training with all the different Hackney vehicles licensed by Trafford council . A verbal test & communication skills ie able to speak good English
38	They need to pass the English Test Set out by Bolton University.
39	I think that the current in house driver training course is sufficient for a taxi driver who wants to work in the trafford area as i had to pass my test - badge no: PD1079 and so did my dad badge no: PD0069 and i see this removing the knowledge test as unfair on us that had to go through

	this procedure
41	Mathamatics
42	Communication Skills Hold a conversation
44	A knowledge of the area you want to work
48	All candidates must gone through the basic English communication test to ensure that customers get the quality service. British is multi cultural society and some drivers not able to communicate in English at all which is quite frustrated for customers.
52	ESOL qualification should be Entry 3
54	Ability to speak english
56	It should include a verbal test .as a paying customer should be able to convers with the driver.

SURVEY COMMENTS:

Respondent No.	Q5: Proposal 3 – Do you have any other suggestions for topics that should be covered on the induction course?
4	I personally would like to see a basic test carried out by Trafford licensing, a simple 10 min interview would show their knowledge, I.E. Full knowledge of emergency hospitals. You don't need to know the road names ,just prove you have a general idea of where you are and where your going?
5	Sat Nav compliments direction but many times takes the longest route, fastest is not always shortest! This will cause problems! The knowledge test should remain and beefed up.
7	I think roof signs should be removed and door signs compulsory
10	Must to do knowledge test Hospital didn't comes up on nevegation
13	Sexual harassment, drug and alcohol use
15	The council should take very strong cases to protect Hackney carriage trade in Trafford Trafford have a very big problem the driver coming from different borough council they have hackney carriage plate in the normal vehicle this should be stopped immediately
16	BASIC ENGLISH AND MATHS TEST , KNOWLEDGE TEST
18	Knowledge test is really important as the customers they expect you to know the area,some customers they don't like you giving the postcode.
21	Actual driving test as some councils have introduced. with RIGID IDENTITY CHECKS. (So that you can check the person named is actually taking the test).
22	highway code and traffic bylaws
24	be observant ask if any help is required
26	Most important area knowledge, and for drivers to be polite. My recent trip back from Manchester Airport I had to direct the driver back to my home Address of Salemmoor. To me this is not acceptable
28	A more difficult knowledge test is required to reduce the ridiculous amount of complaints of drivers not knowing the basics from now on we will direct all complants from the public to the licensing department at trafford town hall so you can see for yourself the amount of bad feeling from the public.personally I can't believe the stupidity of the proposals why not do away with with all tests and just give anybody that turns up a badge
31	Hygiene of driver. Hours worked. How to correctly carry a wheelchair passenger
32	Not all clients know the postcode of their destination and in this regard i feel it is necessary that all drivers applying for a licence to work in the borough of Trafford should undergo an examination to show that they have a working knowledge of the borough.
38	They need to be able to prove they can read and speak a understandable level of English.
39	No. This the knowledge test is key as there are enough complaints daily from customers who are having to deal with uneducated non english literate drivers, not knowing where they are going.

41	No there all area's are covered
43	How to communicate with the public. ie they can understand a customer and a customer can understand the driver
44	A current crb and badge for the area you are going to work
48	Area knowledge must required for taxi drivers as this must be the basic job description of a private hire or Hackney driver. Drivers from the others council should not be allowed to work for trafford operators.
50	No suggestions but don't let Trafford's standards drop by getting rid of the test and presentation. Let Trafford continue to be one of the better authorities where residents feel they are being safeguarded
52	How to put a wheelchair in to each type of Taxi used in Trafford
57	I think Council should put a cap on how many licenses are issued for Drivrers. Also I think Trafford Council should ask for feedback from customers who use taxi instead of us Drivers.
59	No other suggestions. As a Trafford resident I feel it is important for me to know that you have conducted a written & induction course on all taxi drivers

Boyle, Joanne

From: Guy Morgan <pmjtravel@btconnect.com>
Sent: 25 August 2015 15:21
To: Boyle, Joanne
Subject: Re: PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE DRIVER APPLICATIONS PROCESS

when I opened the link it went straight into the survey so I couldnt read anything before, so I filled in the survey best I could.

The part that related to the knowledge test being replaced by Sat Nav is a cause for concern, on the sat nav it states fastest route, which may not be the shortest route (as we are required to take?) that could lead to problems and drivers should know where they are going in case the sat nav breaks down, we are regularly stopped by drivers who have no idea where the "Top Club" is in Altrincham, (Conservative Club) sat navs wont tell drivers these things only the knowledge test provides for them, so to remove it seems wrong to me.

Cheers

Guy

From: [Boyle, Joanne](#)
Sent: Tuesday, August 25, 2015 2:16 PM
To: 'Guy Morgan'
Subject: RE: PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE DRIVER APPLICATIONS PROCESS

Hi Guy

I have not sure what is happening...no one else has encountered a problem. Have you tried copying the link and pasting it into your internet address?

Joanne Boyle

Team Leader (Licensing)
 Licensing Section
 Regulatory Services
 Trafford Council
 Trafford Town Hall
 Talbot Road
 Stretford
 M32 0TH
 Tel: 0161 912 4129

Trafford Council is a well-performing, low-cost council delivering excellent services to make Trafford a great place to live, learn, work and relax
 You can find out more about us by visiting www.trafford.gov.uk

From: Guy Morgan [mailto:pmjtravel@btconnect.com]
Sent: 25 August 2015 13:57

Boyle, Joanne

From: Paul Brent <paulbrent04@hotmail.com>
Sent: 27 August 2015 08:13
To: Boyle, Joanne; Freeman, Mike; Mike Whetton
Subject: Proposed Changes to HC / PHV

Hello Joanne

I have completed your recent consultation paper, with the omission of the question of the knowledge test being removed.

Whilst I agree with the removal at the inception I feel it would be prudent to put in a condition that a new applicant must pass a knowledge test before their next renewal.

Kind regards

Paul Brent (HC 75)

Boyle, Joanne

From: philjordan1147 <philjordan1147@gmail.com>
Sent: 29 August 2015 21:28
To: Licensing
Subject: Driver Application Procedures

Categories: Joanne

I've just completed the survey, and while "two out of three ain't bad", I'm very concerned about the satnav requirement.

It isn't possible to monitor the way in which a satnav is set up. I always have mine on "shortest route" when working, but on "quickest route" at other times.

The latter setting can send the driver considerably further by using a motorway....I see difficulties particularly on jobs to the Airport.

I therefore believe that a local area knowledge test needs to be maintained.

Have the Council ever considered sending an examiner out with a candidate for approximately an hour, and sending the driver to two or three destinations and back to the Town Hall ? I believe this would be an excellent way to test the driver's skills.

Sent from Samsung Mobile on O2

Boyle, Joanne

From: linda thomas <lindarosestomas1@gmail.com>
Sent: 01 September 2015 20:03
To: Licensing
Subject: proposed changes to driver application procedures

Joanne Boyle. Licensing Team Leader.

Regarding your proposed changes to the driver applications

I am a hackney cab driver in Trafford , and the amount of complaints , (on a daily basis from customers regarding the total use of sat navs by both hackney and private hire drivers . Mainly private hire drivers who come from other parts of the country, Rossendale, etc etc etc to work in Trafford.

You need a good knowledge of the area, which the test make sure of. we all had to do the test and pay for it, some of us also taking the N.V.Q.Test.

Your proposed changes are an open invite for drivers from every part of the country to flood Trafford.

We are struggling to earn a living these days, we sit at the ranks for hours while our work is being took by private hire drivers, who don't care about rules or licensing and they even sit on the ranks right in front of our eyes and swear at us if we say anything , the amount of private hire cars being allowed in Trafford without the fear of even more. is ridiculous and they can't possibly be monitored by by Trafford.

Trafford cab drivers should live in trafford .

How on earth can all these cars from all over the country be monitored or watched over if they can work anywhere in the country

David Cherry hackney cab driver Trafford

Boyle, Joanne

From: Roy Courts <roysmobi@googlemail.com>
Sent: 02 September 2015 14:00
To: Licensing
Subject: Re- Proposed changes to Driver Application Procedures/

I would like to make the following comments.

Extending the range of acceptable qualifications:-

I would suggest this be kept to 'VERIFIED' English organisations only (with a strict verification i.e. that person has sat and passed the test). As, we are all aware that *even* medical qualifications are being forged abroad and used in the UK.

Removal of Knowledge test:-

I would recommend that new drivers at least show a working knowledge of the Trafford Area.

Other Additional Items.

To protect the public, some councils now insist on a driving test as part of qualification. As driving standards may well have slipped since the licence was issued to the driver or they may never have sat a test themselves (someone else took it for them?). I would like to request that all new drivers take a driving test (with rigid identity checks).

All new drivers should sign to say that their details may be shared with other organisations i.e revenue and customs, immigration, csa etc....

You should verify that applicants have the right to stay and work in the U.K.

Many Thanks

Roy Courts

To extend the range of acceptable qualifications to prove English language skills

On this subject I have no comments other than to say that if it speeds the applicants through quicker and removes a bottle neck then I am in favour of it.

To remove the requirement to pass a local area knowledge test but introduce a condition that all drivers must carry a working satellite navigation system.

As a Hackney carriage driver I have no say or opinion on how Private Hire drivers work so I cannot comment on whether they use a Sat. Nav. or not for local work.

However, I was informed when I took and passed my knowledge test that a Hackney Carriage Driver is required to take passengers from point A to point B by the shortest possible route. Therefore I believe that a Sat. Nav. should not be used for local work. Each driver should have some local knowledge of where he works, a Sat. Nav. even if set for the shortest routes does not use small side roads, this is where local knowledge comes into it.

I would suggest if an applicant takes and fails the knowledge test he should be given a 3/6 month Badge. And after that time he should be brought back in to retake his knowledge test. (If he fails the second time his badge is not renewed). I also believe that you should be more flexible with the answers. (I.e. when going from Altrincham to Stretford if they say straight down the A556 this should be as acceptable as saying Manchester Road, Washway |Road, Cross Street, Chester Road and Talbot Road)

To extend the length and scope of the driver induction course

As I do not know the course I cannot comment on this.

RECEIVED FROM ERIC BULLOCK (TTODA) 14.09.15