

## Licensing Committee

11 SEPTEMBER 2017

**PRESENT:** Councillor J Brandis (Chairman); Councillors M Hawkett (Vice-Chairman), A Huxley, S Lambert, S Morgan, G Powell, S Renshell, B Russel and Sir Beville Stanier Bt (ex-Officio)

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors T Mills and L Monger

### 1. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 and 17 May 2017 be approved as a correct record.

### 2. INTRODUCTION OF AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND KNOWLEDGE TEST FOR TAXI DRIVERS

The Committee received a report regarding the introduction of a functional English language test and knowledge test for new and existing hackney carriage and private hire drivers. In March 2017, the Licensing Committee had agreed this and Officers had since explored this possibility further. The English language and topographical test had also been a recommendation from a recent All-Party Parliamentary Group on Taxis.

The test would be carried out online and hosted by a trusted third party organisation at their premises. Once the examination was passed and completed, a certificate would be provided which would then need to be submitted by the applicant along with their Application for a License for to AVDC. This was in keeping with current taxi drivers providing their proof of driving standards training.

Discussions had been held with a proposed company to supply the electronic knowledge test, with the geography to cover Aylesbury Vale and include routes and points of interest, as well as basic Maths and English. Additionally, the test would encapsulate basic behavioural standards that License holders should be adhering to as part of their condition of license, such as circumstances of sounding vehicle horns. Officers were considering further functions of e-learning to provide information on topics such as safeguarding.

The number of questions in the test would be set by AVDC Officers and the questions would originate from a pool of questions from each category based on the authority's standards. No two drivers will receive the same set of questions and the test would be multiple choice with one correct answer and three incorrect answers. The pass rate and the time limit would also be set by Officers. The test would currently cost drivers £30 to take but this was still under negotiation with the supplier.

The Lead Officer, Peter Seal, welcomed Member participation in the development and testing of the language and knowledge examination. Members would also have the possibility of a demonstration prior to implementation. It was the intention to provide a progress report on the examination back to the License Committee in future.

Members sought more information and were advised:-

- i. The estimated lead time for examinations to be ready was two-three months.
- ii. Basic Maths was included for providing change and receipts to customers.

- iii. An understanding of verbal English was necessary when attending the supplier site to sit the examination. Officers would look further at the possibility of verbal English for those that may struggle with written discourse. It was noted though that the written questions would be in a similar tone of the Highway Code's driving theory test.
- iv. Photographic identification was required when attending the examination as well as supplying paperwork that would have been posted to the applicant ahead of the test.
- v. Hackney Carriage tests would be different as they would incorporate customer accessibility questions.
- vi. The examination would potentially have a limit of three attempts to pass. Failure to pass after three attempts would result in a formal refusal to which an applicant could appeal to the Magistrates' Court.
- vii. The test would only be valid within Aylesbury Vale due to de-regulation locally.
- viii. There was currently a limit of 50 Black Cabs serving the town of Aylesbury and 10 White Cabs in the rural district, and there were around 2,500 licensed drivers.
- ix. The number of drivers operating within Aylesbury Vale was expected to fall with the introduction of the test as there were licensed drivers operating with licenses obtained from neighbouring authorities. It was preferred that license holders operate within the areas they obtained their license.

Members welcomed the opportunity to be updated on the progress of the test and for it to come back to Committee in future.

RESOLVED –

That the a functional English language test and knowledge test for all new and existing hackney carriage and private hire drivers be introduced, and that the Principal Licensing Officer be authorised to agree and confirm the content of the test and bring back to Licensing Committee.

### **3. COUNCIL'S LIMITATION POLICY IN RESPECT TO AYLESBURY TOWN**

The Committee had received a report ahead of the meeting carrying out an unmet demand survey in Spring 2018 regarding the AVDC's hackney carriage quantity control policy for Aylesbury Town centre. At present, there was a limit of 50 hackney carriages in Aylesbury town and there were 10 white, purpose built taxis. Section 16 of the Transport Act 1985 permitted AVDC to limit the number of these taxis if they were satisfied there was no significant unmet demand.

The Department for Transport Taxi and Private Hire Licensing: Best Practice Guidance (March 2010) encouraged authorities to review their control policies every three years. The last detailed review was carried out in 2014 and concluded there was no unmet demand so a review would be needed in 2017 if the guidance was followed. However, a change in hackney vehicle specifications had been revised by the Committee in March 2017 and this had only recently been implemented which meant that the trade would be looking to replace older vehicles and freshen the Aylesbury Town hackney carriage fleet. It was therefore recommended that the report due in 2017 be deferred to allow the trade to replace vehicles so that the survey was accurate.

The Committee then heard about an experimental traffic order carried out by Buckinghamshire County Council through the conversion of taxi ranks to paid-for parking spaces. This had reduced taxi ranks by one third in Aylesbury Town Centre, consequently affecting license holders. Currently there was no certainty over re-establishment of taxi ranks.

Members sought more information on this and were advised:-

- i. The full impact on the experimental traffic order was not yet known amongst license holders.
- ii. The survey could be deferred beyond Spring 2018 as the advice from DfT is guidance only. A 'Health Check' could be undertaken to keep in touch with drivers' demand which was quicker and cost effective.
- iii. Taxi ranks could be located on private premises and not necessarily the public highways.

In light of the information regarding the reduction of taxi ranks and following the discussion on implications for the Town Centre, it was:-

RESOLVED –

That Members agreed to defer the decision on carrying out the unmet demand survey for Aylesbury Town Centre until Spring 2018 to allow the change to vehicle specifications to take effect and also in order to allow taxi rank provision to be settled.