

Licensing Committee – 8 November 2010

5. Driver Standards Agency Private Hire & Hackney Carriage Testing

Executive Portfolio Holder: Ric Pallister – Housing & Health
Group Manager: Laurence Willis, Assistant Director Housing & Health
Lead Officer: Nigel J Marston, Licensing Manager
Contact Details: nigel.marston@southsomerset.gov.uk or (01935) 462150

Purpose of the Report

To consider amending the councils existing policy for private hire and hackney carriage driver applications by changing the requirement for all new applicants to obtain a pass certificate from the Driver Standards Agency (DSA) as part of the application process.

Recommendation(s)

- (1) That the existing policy for private hire and hackney carriage driver applications be amended to also include the acceptance of a DSA equivalent test as determined by the Council;
- (2) That the Portfolio Holder Health & Housing be requested to make the necessary policy amendment in conjunction with the Licensing Manager.

Background

Members will recall that at the Licensing Committee meeting of the 4 December 2007. The Licensing Committee agreed to adopt the requirement for all new private hire and hackney carriage drivers to attain a pass in the Driver Standards Agency (DSA) Taxi Test and Assessment before the Council would consider their application.

The Current Issues

This system has worked incredibly well since its introduction in April of 2008. The testing has improved the standard of taxi and private hire driving throughout the district.

However it has been noted that booking of the required tests has become more problematic for business owners and operators over the last 6 months. This came to a head in late August of this year when a letter was received from Mr Andrew Rossiter the proprietor of Radio Cabs. I have attached this letter for your information as appendix A.

The basis of the letter is that having tried to book tests for potential new drivers; the earliest dates available were in November, some three months away.

Actions Taken

I spoke with my contact at the DSA and was informed that there were no alternative test dates available, the DSA had frozen recruitment and that the situation was not likely to improve.

On the 27 August I e-mailed the CEO's department at the DSA and outlined my concerns that this was causing problems for local businesses. I received a response from the DSA on 13 September. The response was not particularly helpful and confirmed that November was indeed the earliest dates available for tests, despite the DSA's

service standards being 6 weeks from making a booking to taking a test. I attach a copy of this e-mail exchange as Appendix B to this report.

Following a helpful suggestion from Cllr Peter Seib, I contacted the Yeovil & District Driving Instructors Association and spoke with Mr Bryan Booth the Chairman. I have subsequently had two meetings with Mr Booth to discuss this issue.

Mr Booth is a fully qualified driving instructor and is a grade 6 instructor. Of the 30,000 qualified driving instructors in the UK only 7% of those qualified are at grade 6, the highest level. Mr Booth is also an accredited Taxi Driver Trainer. Mr Booth holds all the necessary professional indemnity and public liability insurances.

I have worked with Mr Booth to devise a testing regime that is the equivalent of the current DSA test. I have attached the test format as Appendix C to this report. Mr Booth expects to be able to conduct a test within 1 week of booking.

Financial Implications

None for the Council. The costs to potential drivers are reduced, as Mr Booth is able to undertake the test for £35, compared to the £78 currently charged by the DSA.

Implications for Corporate Priorities

There will be a positive impact on Corporate Aim 2, increasing economic vitality and prosperity, by supporting local business. Ensuring that all taxi and private hire drivers are adequately trained to transport the public will also satisfy corporate Aim 4 of ensuring safe, sustainable and cohesive communities.

Other Implications

None

Background Papers: None
