

Meeting: LICENSING & REGULATORY

Date of Meeting: 20th December 2010

Title of Report: HACKNEY CARRIAGE & PRIVATE HIRE DRIVER TRAINING

Report of: Mr Peter Moore
Environmental and
Technical Services
Director

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This report contains	Yes	No
CONFIDENTIAL information/		✓
EXEMPT information by virtue of paragraph(s)..... of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972		✓
Is the decision on this report DELEGATED?	✓	

Purpose of Report

To advise Members of the progress of the Driver Training Programme which was adopted under Minute 26 (3)(i-iii) of the licensing and Regulatory Committee of 27th October 2008, and the steps taken to address the concerns raised by Trade Stakeholders about the sustainability of current funding arrangements.

Recommendation(s)

That Members:

1. Note the report;
2. Agree policy be amended as follows:
 - a) Compulsory VRQ for all new applicants.
 - b) For drivers licensed prior to November 2008, who are currently compelled to complete an NVQ by 2013, the requirement be changed to read VRQ to be completed by 2015.
 - c) Maintain the current route knowledge test condition.
 - d) The NVQ remaining acceptable in lieu of or in addition to the VRQ.
3. Request a further update on training in October 2011.

Corporate Objective Monitoring

<u>Corporate Objective</u>		<u>Positive Impact</u>	<u>Neutral Impact</u>	<u>Negative Impact</u>
1.	Creating a Learning Community	√		
2.	Creating Safe Communities	√		
3.	Jobs and Prosperity	√		
4.	Improving Health and Well-Being	√		
5.	Environmental Sustainability		√	
6.	Creating Inclusive Communities	√		
7.	Improving the Quality of Council Services and Strengthening local Democracy	√		
8.	Children and Young People	√		

Financial Implications

None directly from this report

	2009/ 2010 £	2010/ 2011 £	2011/ 2012 £	2012/ 2013 £
<u>CAPITAL EXPENDITURE</u>				
Gross Increase in Capital Expenditure	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL
Funded by:				
Sefton Capital Resources				
Specific Capital Resources				
<u>REVENUE IMPLICATIONS</u>				
Gross Increase in Revenue Expenditure	NIL	NIL	NIL	NIL
Funded by:				
Sefton funded Resources				
Funded from External Resources	√	√	√	√
Does the External Funding have an expiry date? Y/N	N/A			
How will the service be funded post expiry?	N/A			

Departments consulted in the preparation of this Report

None

List of background papers relied upon in the preparation of this Report

Go-Skills Report on the Consultation with Licensing Authorities on Qualifications for the Taxi & Private Hire Industry

BACKGROUND

1. The Licensing & Regulatory Committee will recall the report entitled “Review of the Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Licensing Conditions”, dated 27th October 2008. That report introduced the Taxi Licensing Scheme Handbook and clarified policy in respect of driver training. The Committee resolved (Minute 26 (3) (iii)) that:
 - All new driver applicants were, as of 1st December 2008, to be required to obtain the Theory and Practice VRQ in Transporting Passengers by Taxi and Private Hire before receiving a maximum 12 months licence;
 - These new drivers would also have to complete the full NVQ Level 2 Practical Assessments before that licence expired, or their Licence would not be renewed;
 - All existing drivers were also to obtain the full NVQ qualification no later than October 2013, either by obtaining the VRQ and then the NVQ, or by being assessed on existing skills and completing the full NVQ assessment in all required subjects; and
 - Should funding sources be exhausted, then the matter would be referred back to the Committee for consideration.
2. Members will also recall a follow up report presented on the 26th October 2009. The committee reiterated its commitment to achieve a 100% professionally qualified hackney carriage and private hire driver base by October 2013 and agreed that the project continue with the built in safeguard that if funding does cease, then the matter will be referred back to the Committee for direction, (Minute 46).

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

3. Nationally the current funding streams for the NVQ level 2 have almost all been exhausted and they are unlikely to be replenished, meaning driver training is no longer subsidised. Indeed quite a variety of funding streams have come and gone over the last two years, with eligibility criteria changing by the minute.
4. The VRQ, a ‘knowledge based’ qualification has been upgraded and improved nationally to a “certificate” level 2 qualification.
5. The NVQ has attracted a lot of adverse comments. Providers let candidates down and one provider has had its accreditation removed and has ceased trading leaving drivers without certificates. Learndirect are working with affected drivers to resolve this matter.
6. Both the hackney carriage and private hire trades have always maintained that formal driver training is desirable but by no means essential and have

supported the Council's aspirations in seeking a 100% professionally qualified fleet.

THE CURRENT POSITION

7. Access to VRQ/NVQ is still available via many providers and can be obtained at a cost of £150- £550 dependant on a candidate's own personal circumstances. The minimum teaching requirement is 30 guided learning hours followed by an externally verified on-line examination, which must be passed in order to gain the award.
8. As of the 19th November 2010, 1197 VRQ passes and 463 NVQ passes have been recorded in Sefton's Taxi licensing system. Training providers have reported a much greater number of NVQ passes being attained by existing drivers and it is clear that many NVQ trained drivers have, as yet, failed to notify the Council of their achievement.
9. Training policy for new drivers is relatively consistent across the Merseyside authorities (see Table 1), but no consistency with respect to existing drivers. Wirral are aware of the potential difficulties arising in 2011 and are considering a policy amendment.

Council	New Driver	Existing Driver	Time Limit
Knowsley	VRQ- 12 month licence to obtain full NVQ - approved trainers only	VRQ & NVQ by 2014 - approved trainers only	End of 5 year period (Oct 2014)
Liverpool	VRQ- 12 month licence to obtain full NVQ	No requirement although will record if does NVQ	No limit re existing drivers
Sefton	VRQ- 12 month licence to obtain full NVQ	NVQ by 2013	End of 5 year period (Oct 2013)
St Helens	VRQ- 12 month licence to obtain full NVQ	NVQ by 2014 presuming funding remains available	End of 5 year period (Aug 2014)
Wirral	VRQ- 12 month licence to obtain full NVQ	Either VRQ <u>or</u> NVQ by no later than 2011	End of 5 year period (Nov 2011)

Table 1

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

10. The existing policy was adopted with the proviso that should support funding change then the matter would be referred back to the Licensing & Regulatory Committee for consideration. Initially support funding was available to all except for those with other employment or those with prior learning to a higher level than VRQ or NVQ 2.
11. Consultation with the Trade (Respondents to the recent 'Demand Survey') indicated that training was essential with typically 85% of respondents stating

it should be compulsory. Such training should include disability awareness and customer care.

12. Anecdotal evidence suggests there has been a massive variation on the quality of training delivered across all providers, and more specifically, the quality of assessments conducted as part of the drivers' NVQ.
13. Licensing conditions should remain at all times reasonable and justified and not act as a barrier to the industry or indeed force experienced drivers out of the profession.

PROPOSALS

14. The Trade have supported the Council's aspiration of seeking a 100% professionally qualified fleet but have requested an amendment to current policy because recent events suggest the proposed scope and timescale is too ambitious for the following reasons:
 - Funding is sporadic;
 - Delays are unacceptable;
 - Inconsistency in the quality of assessments; and
 - If action is not taken driver numbers may diminish having a detrimental effect on the local economy.
15. It is accepted that minimum standards must be maintained and that drivers should take advantage of what funding remains available and of new funding streams as they arise.
16. The main difference between the VRQ and the NVQ is that the VRQ contains underpinning knowledge whilst the NVQ is an assessment of driver skills and experience. It is this "non examination" route, which commended itself to many existing licence holders of long experience. The Council should continue to recognise both qualifications
17. It is therefore proposed that policy be amended as follows:
 - a) Compulsory VRQ for all new applicants.
 - b) For drivers licensed prior to November 2008, who are currently compelled to complete an NVQ by 2013, the requirement be changed to read VRQ to be completed by 31st December 2015.
 - c) Maintain the current route knowledge test condition
 - d) The NVQ remaining acceptable in lieu of or in addition to the VRQ
18. Members are asked to note there is currently a local EDEXCEL training centre that can offer the VRQ for Sefton licensed drivers at £180.00 and the NVQ course for a maximum £550.00.

19. The revised proposals seek to minimise the burden on the trade whilst allowing the Council to pursue its aim of a 100% professionally qualified hackney carriage and private hire driver base, however should funding sources be exhausted, then the matter will be referred back to the Committee for consideration.