

<b>Report to:</b>	Licensing and Regulatory Committee	<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	Monday 6 January 2020
<b>Subject:</b>	Taxi Licensing Approved Training Providers		
<b>Report of:</b>	Head of Highways and Public Protection	<b>Wards Affected:</b>	
<b>Portfolio:</b>	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services		
<b>Is this a Key Decision:</b>	N	<b>Included in Forward Plan:</b>	N
<b>Exempt / Confidential Report:</b>	N		

**Summary:**

To seek the approval of the committee for the development of a Council approved accredited training provider scheme.

**Recommendation(s):**

That the Licensing and Regulatory Committee agree that;

1. Qualifications for new drivers only be accepted from Council approved accredited training providers; and
2. Council approved accredited training providers will be authorised to conduct knowledge tests as part of the final stage of driver training.

**Reasons for the Recommendation(s):**

There have been recent national reports of fraudulent training providers providing VRQ certificates on behalf of drivers for a fee without those drivers receiving any training. The Council has also seen an increase in counterfeit certificates being submitted. This proposal would only allow certificates from Council approved accredited training providers whilst making the knowledge test deliverable by said training providers.

**Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:** (including any Risk Implications)

None

**What will it cost and how will it be financed?**

(A) **Revenue Costs** - none

(B) **Capital Costs** - none

## Implications of the Proposals:

### Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets):

There are no direct financial implications for the Council associated with the proposals in this report. The service is wholly funded from the ring-fenced Taxi Licensing Account (Revenue Budget BD12) and does not impact on the Council's overall resources.

### Legal Implications:

None

### Equality Implications:

There are no equality implications.

## Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable:

Facilitate confident and resilient communities:

Commission, broker and provide core services: Improve the quality of Council controlled services and reduce waiting times for knowledge tests.

Place – leadership and influencer:

Drivers of change and reform:

Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity:

Greater income for social investment:

Cleaner Greener:

## What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

### (A) Internal Consultations

The Head of Corporate Resources has been consulted (FD5903/19) and any comments have been incorporated into the report. The Chief Legal & Democratic Officer (LD4087/19) has been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

### (B) External Consultations

The proposals have been discussed with taxi trade representatives who all agree with the proposals.

**Implementation Date for the Decision**

March/April 2020

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**Appendices:**

None

**Background Papers:**

There are no background papers available for inspection.

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 As part of the 'fit and proper' checks that all drivers must undertake (medical, DBS, DVLA, knowledge test & VRQ) the 'Level 2 Introduction to the Role of the Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver' VRQ qualification is currently accepted from any training provider.
- 1.2 The Council is aware of a BBC investigation report broadcast on 4 November 2019 highlighting the illegal trade in fraudulently obtained training certificates.
- 1.3 The Council has recently received a number of counterfeit training certificates in relation to the driver qualification and is aware of training providers in the Northwest that provide fraudulent certificates.
- 1.4 It is suggested that the Council no longer accepts certificates from any training provider and instead move toward only accepting from those Council approved training providers that have made accredited status. These training providers will also be authorised to conduct knowledge tests as part of the training programme.

## **2. Accredited Training Providers**

- 2.1 The proposal is for the development of an "accredited centre" model that will set minimum standards for training providers. This would involve any training organisation wishing to participate going through an application/assessment process providing details of their systems, procedures and third-party inspection details to which they are subject along with the other checks listed in 3.3.
- 2.2 If an application is successful the organisation would become an "accredited centre" and be permitted to introduce the "Knowledge of Conditions Test" as the final stage of an individual's training.
- 2.3 Accredited centres would remain under Council scrutiny to ensure standards are maintained and an appropriate regime of sanctions developed for those organisations that may fall short of what is expected.
- 2.4 Any accredited training provider would also be required to provide written satisfactory assurances to the Council that they have funding to deliver the VRQ.
- 2.5 It is accepted that currently, there may be occasions when drivers may have to wait several weeks to sit the Council's knowledge test. As part of the accreditation process, the proposal is that the accredited training providers could conduct the test as part of the training programme, thus reducing this delay. This will be subject to regular auditing and monitoring by Council officers.

## **3 Improving Standards**

- 3.1 The Council regularly receives complaints from members of the public about what they perceive as basic inadequacies on the part of drivers whom they expect, given that they are licensed by the Council, to be competent in all aspects of delivering the services expected by licensed drivers. In this regard, it is essential for the approved training providers to be able to deliver the training to an

acceptable high standard and for the Council to have confidence in the integrity of that training.

3.2 Any accredited training provider would be inspected and audited at regular intervals (timescales to be agreed).

3.3 Criteria for inclusion on an accredited training provider list would include examination of the following (where applicable);

- Full organisation details including details of all directors, company officers, partnerships and all other persons involved in the running of the organisation
- Details of any person(s) employed by the organisation who are related to directors/senior company officers
- Details of any bankruptcy proceedings
- Details of any criminal convictions for senior company officers and training providers
- Details of any affiliation to other companies
- Qualification details and DBS checks on staff providing the training
- Details of accreditation body (such as OFSTED) and grades awarded
- Plans for assuring consistent quality of training provided
- Details of complaints procedure
- Financial details and accounts
- Details of any claims or litigation against the company/individual
- VAT status/registration
- ICO registration
- Employers liability insurance
- Public liability insurance
- Equality Act policy
- Health & Safety policy
- Safeguarding policy
- Payment fee structure, policy & procedure
- Training results for previous 3 years
- Knowledge test examination procedures

3.4 Although the above list is not exhaustive, it is hoped that satisfactory examination of the above (as a minimum) would cover the main areas required to receive accredited status and ensure high standards of training.

#### **4 Recommendations**

4.1 That the Environmental Health & Licensing Manager be authorised to develop a Council approved accreditation training provider scheme.

4.2 That qualifications for new drivers will only be accepted from those Council approved accredited training providers.

4.3 That the Council approved accredited training providers will also be authorised to conduct knowledge tests as part of the driver training course.

4.4 If approval of the above is given, to introduce the scheme in March/April 2020.