

Report to:	Licensing and Regulatory Committee	Date of Meeting:	Monday 7 September
Subject:	Taxi Licensing Performance Report 2019/20		
Report of:	Head of Highways & Public Protection	Wards Affected:	
Portfolio:	Regulatory, Compliance and Corporate Services		
Is this a Key Decision:	N	Included in Forward Plan:	No
Exempt / Confidential Report:	N		

Summary:

To report the progress of the Taxi Licensing service during 2019/20.

Recommendation(s):

- (1) Note the contents of this report; and
- (2) Request that similar reports be brought on an annual basis.

Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

In order that the Licensing & Regulatory Committee can have an overview of the work carried out by the Taxi Licensing Service.

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):
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The cost of the service is wholly recovered from the ring-fenced Taxi Licensing Trade Account (Revenue Budget BD12).

Legal Implications:

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: Provide update on taxi licensing service provision.

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 Executive Director Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD.6107/20) and Chief Legal and Democratic Services Officer (LD4299/20) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

None

Implementation Date for the Decision

Immediately following the Committee meeting

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Appendices:

There are no appendices to this report

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

Background

- 1.1 The Taxi Licensing Service comprises two distinct service elements:
 - a) The licensing function, administered through the Council's two One Stop Shops (OSS); and
 - b) The 'Enforcement' function provided by the Environmental Health and Licensing Section.
- 1.2 Policy is determined and reviewed by the Council's Licensing & Regulatory Committee and client feedback provided by an established trade consultation regime.
- 1.3 The primary role of taxi licensing is to ensure the safety of the travelling public by ensuring the drivers, operators and vehicles meet standards of safety and good conduct.
- 1.4 To become a licensed driver in Sefton, all new applicants must satisfy the following;
 - A full driving licence (DVLA, EU or Northern Ireland only). A "fee-paid" driver record check is compulsory to check current entitlement to drive
 - A full vocational (DVLA Group II) medical examination obtained via the applicant's General Practitioner or a registered Doctor provided they have access to the applicant's medical records at the time of the examination. Medicals are currently required on first licensing, on reaching 45 years of age, then 55 years of age and on reaching 65 years of age and every 3 years thereafter.
 - A "fee-paid" satisfactory Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) "Enhanced" disclosure. EU applicants may be permitted a short-term licence provided they can produce a "Certificate of Good Conduct" from their last country of residence until an "Enhanced" DBS certificate can be provided.
 - A VRQ level 2 qualification in 'Transporting Passengers by Taxi and Private Hire'.
 - It is a requirement of all new driver applications to take a 'Knowledge of Conditions Test' in addition to the VRQ qualification. Both must be obtained without the aid of an interpreter and the pass mark is 70%
 - Evidence that the applicant is legally entitled to work in the UK
- 1.5 All vehicles must obtain a 'certificate of compliance' from an approved testing station which is the equivalent of the current Department for Transport MOT plus extra checks on the condition and appearance of the vehicle.

2. Licence Numbers & Applications

- 2.1 The below tables show a summary of the numbers of licences in force during 2019/20;

Licence Totals 2019/20

Type	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19
Hackney Carriage Driver	323	325	326	329	331	332
Hackney Carriage Vehicle	270	270	271	271	272	271
Private Hire Driver	5,374	5,490	5,611	5,753	5,828	5,915
Private Hire Operator	101	99	105	103	102	108
Private Hire Vehicle	4,689	4,748	4,802	4,887	4,955	5,015
Total	10757	10932	11115	11343	11488	11641

Type	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20
Hackney Carriage Driver	335	334	333	331	331	328
Hackney Carriage Vehicle	271	271	270	269	268	268
Private Hire Driver	6,029	6,159	6,243	6,307	6,398	6,517
Private Hire Operator	112	110	110	111	110	114
Private Hire Vehicle	5,108	5,226	5,334	5,418	5,461	5,509
Total	11855	12100	12290	12436	12568	12736

2.2 The total number of licences increased by 1,979 over the year. During 2018/19, the total number of licences increased by 2,245 and 2017/18 saw an increase of 1,045 licences. This is an increase of 5,269 licences during the last three years.

2.3 The following is a summary of the total number of licensing applications and knowledge tests handled in the One Stop Shop;

Vehicle Applications 2019/20

New applications	2,494
Renewals	3,830
Transfers	278
Variations	713
Total	7,315

Driver Applications

New applications	3,176
Renewals	2,051
Total	5,227

Knowledge Tests

Tests completed	3664
Tests passed	1816
Pass rate	50%

2.4 The number of non-attendees for the knowledge test was 1,250

3. Driver Licence Appeals, Breaches and Panel Decisions

- 3.1 Before the Council grants any driver licence, applicants have to demonstrate they are a 'fit and proper person' to hold that licence. The Council requires all drivers (new and renewals) to obtain an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) report which will contain information about any criminal records including motoring convictions.
- 3.2 If the applicants report potentially breaches Council Policy, then the application will normally be refused. If an applicant appeals this decision, the first step in the decision-making process is for the Council to review the original decision made during the application process at the One Stop Shop.
- 3.3 A review of the original decision is considered by a panel of officers who review the application data and hear representations from the applicants. The appeals panel have received details of 166 cases relating to new applicants. Out of these new applications, 20 drivers have had licences issued whilst 99 have been refused.
- 3.4 Out of the applicants refused, 7 appealed to the Magistrates Court and 3 cases have successfully been issued with a licence by the court whilst 4 were refused. Due to the coronavirus lockdown, a number of licence applications remain undetermined as the council is currently unable to process new applicants.
- 3.5 The panel is also convened to consider reports and allegations of misconduct by existing licence holders. In 2019/20 the panel considered 79 cases which led to 9 suspensions and 46 revocations.
- 3.6 Typical reasons for refusing or revoking a licence include the possession or supply of drugs, theft, violence, offensive weapons, sexual offences and driving offences including drink & drug driving.

4. Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Vehicle Checks

- 4.1 Vehicle checks are an integral part of the Council's enforcement regime. The checks are carried out to ensure vehicles are safe. At the time of every vehicle licence application or renewal, a satisfactory test certificate from a Council approved testing station has to accompany the application. Once a licence is granted, vehicles are subject to ongoing checks throughout the duration of the licence period.
- 4.2 During the period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, a total of 491 vehicle inspections were carried out.
- 4.3 The outcomes of the checks can be summarised as follows:
- a) Hackney Carriage on Street Inspections / Pre-Planned Inspections
 - 32 vehicles inspected
 - 65% Fault Free – 4 vehicle defect notices issued, 6 stop/suspension notices issued.
 - b) Private Hire on Street Inspections / Pre-Planned Inspections

- 459 vehicles inspected
- 60% Fault Free – 147 vehicle defect notices issued, 53 stop/suspension notices issued.

4.4 Lighting, bodywork, interior condition, wheels and tyres remain the most common faults.

5. Prosecutions

5.1 During the year the Council carries out targeted enforcement exercises to deter rogue drivers from illegally plying for hire. Offenders are typically 'non-Sefton' hackney carriage vehicles plying for hire within Sefton or private hire vehicles taking a fare without a pre-booking. In 2019/20 there were no prosecutions for plying for hire compared with 6 prosecutions the previous year. There are currently 2 prosecutions pending relating to unlicensed operators and drivers.

6. Requests for Service

6.1 The service dealt with 1,621 various requests for service, complaints or enquiries. Below is a summary of the main subjects dealt with;

- 85 new operator enquiries & checks
- 26 exemption certificate applications & enquiries
- 137 general requests for advice
- 85 document irregularities
- 44 unlicensed activity complaints
- 144 driving style complaints
- 208 complaints regarding driver conduct or appearance
- 20 lost property enquiries
- 375 vehicle advice requests
- 21 overcharging complaints
- 148 vehicle accident reports
- 12 notification of convictions
- 161 public body enquiries
- 2 guide dog refusal complaints
- 4 solicitor enquiries
- 36 plate/livery enquiries

7. Impact of Coronavirus

7.1 **Vehicles.** The One Stop Shops closed to the public at the end of March 2020 but continued to process vehicle licence and plate renewals. This was possible due to the invaluable support and co-operation of the vehicle testing stations. All new and renewal vehicles licences can now be issued by the One Stop Shop.

7.2 **Drivers.** All driver licences were automatically renewed for a further 6 months but we are currently unable to accept applications for new driver licences but this will hopefully be resumed shortly.

7.3 **Operators.** All operator licences were automatically renewed for a further 6 months.

7.4 **Payments.** Due to the automatic renewal of licences, there are a number of licences that still have an outstanding payment. New telephony software allowing staff to process payments from home is now in place so these outstanding payments are being collected.

8. Summary & the Year Ahead

8.1 The proactive approach adopted by the Taxi Licensing Unit is the key factor in ensuring the quality of hackney carriage and private hire vehicles and hence the safety of the travelling public.

8.2 The service will continue its 'plying for hire' exercises and will target vehicle defects by carrying out district vehicle checks when possible.

8.3 Service provision will need to be modified due to coronavirus restrictions and work is underway in relation to online applications, appointment only interviews, electronic payments and a range of other modifications. The current priority for the council is to resume its normal services in the safest way possible and the trade will be advised of how we aim to achieve this.

8.4 Further reports will be presented to the Licensing & Regulatory Committee detailing any service enhancements as they take place.