

**ADOPTION OF THE DRIVING STANDARDS AGENCY (DSA) DRIVING TEST FOR
PRIVATE HIRE AND HACKNEY CARRIAGE DRIVERS
(Report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services)**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 and the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 create a statutory duty for Local Authorities to licence Private Hire and Hackney Carriage drivers and to ensure that the service to the public is accessible and safe.
- 1.2 The Council currently provides in-house driver testing conducted by an officer. To maintain high driving standards it is proposed to replace the current in-house system with the nationally recognised test provided by The Driving Standards Agency (DSA) which is specifically designed for Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Drivers.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The DSA is the Government appointed agency charged with setting driving standards and delivering consistent high quality driving tests to ensure safe driving. It conducts approximately 2 million driving tests in Great Britain each year, addressing all types of drivers.
- 2.2 Since 1999, the DSA has offered an assessment that is independent, standardised and specifically tailored to Private Hire and Hackney Carriage licensing. The DSA conducts approximately 15,000 taxi assessments each year on behalf of 176 local authorities who have already adopted this test for prospective Private Hire and Hackney Carriage drivers. The DSA considers it has the experience to deliver a test with credibility, targeted at improving the standards of taxi drivers which provides assurance of driving skills to the licensing authorities and the general public.
- 2.3 A booklet providing more details of the Agency (now out of print), the fees and the driver test is attached at Appendix A. Details are also available via the business link website www.businesslink.gov.uk/taxi Tests are conducted by specifically trained Secretary of State approved driving examiners, take 35-40 minutes and the nearest test centres are at Peterborough, Bedford, Cambridge (Cowley Road) and Cambridge (Chesterton Road). Any applicant who fails the DSA test has a right of appeal through the DSA.
- 2.4 The grant of a DSA pass certificate does not automatically give the holder a right to obtain a licence with this authority and any application is still subject to the Council's other normal procedures and checks, including a criminal records check and a satisfactory medical check .

- 2.5 It is not intended to introduce the test retrospectively for existing drivers, so provided existing drivers do not allow their licence to lapse, they will not be subject to the new testing requirements, unless there are serious concerns as to their fitness to hold a licence due to driving problems. Where these concerns are held, it would be for the Head of Legal and Democratic Services to determine whether the test should be undertaken and in each case decided on its individual merits and upon consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Panel.
- 2.6 The Council does not charge separately for the in-house driving test as it currently forms a part of the service included in the overall charge for a new licence of £70. No change is proposed to this fee. There is a considerable amount of officer time allocated in the arranging and undertaking of each test. Although the DSA test will be at an additional cost to the applicant (£79.66 during normal hours or £96 on Saturdays/ evenings), it will cover additional areas not currently provided by our in-house testing. The fee will be paid by the applicant direct to the DSA and there will be no administrative costs to the Council.

3. CONSULTATION

- 3.1 Prior to submission of this report, the Council has consulted with the trade by means of a letter which was sent to 668 individual licence holders, proprietors and operators. Recipients were given 6 weeks to respond. No responses were received.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Public safety which includes the maintaining of high driving standards is of paramount importance. The adoption of the above proposal will help maintain high standards of driving and at the same time provide a consistency of approach through one standard, impartial and nationally recognised qualification supplied by an executive agency of the Department of Transport. It will ensure that all applicants have achieved a high standard of driving relating the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Vehicles.
- 4.2 Outsourcing to the DSA removes the risk of not having a qualified officer available to undertake in-house testing and consequently being unable to provide the present in-house service. Adoption is also less likely to leave the Council open to challenge on driver standards with possible financial implications and legal proceedings.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 It is therefore
RECOMMENDED
- (a) that the existing in-house driver testing arrangements be replaced with a requirement that an appropriate formal driving qualification be undertaken and obtained for all new applicants for Private Hire and Hackney Carriage driver's badges and for cases where there are serious concerns as to the fitness of an existing driver to hold a licence due to driving problems;
 - (b) that the appropriate qualification be the DSA driver's assessment for Private Hire and Hackney Carriages, or future equivalent;

- (c) that the new requirement be brought into effect for new applications from 1st January 2012; and
- (d) that delegated authority be given to the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, after consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Panel, to determine whether a test should be undertaken in circumstances where there are serious concerns as to the fitness of an existing driver to hold a licence and that each case should be considered on its individual merits.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

DSA Private Hire- Hackney Carriage Assessment

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Filepath: <http://teams.huntsdc.gov.uk/admin/Democratic%20Services/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx>