

Report to Regulatory Panel

Agenda
Item:

A.1

Meeting Date: 12th November 2014
Portfolio: Finance, Governance and Resources
Key Decision: Not Applicable:
Within Policy and
Budget Framework No
Public / Private Public

Title: Taxi and Private Hire Driver Knowledge Test
Report of: Director of Governance
Report Number: GD.53/14

Purpose / Summary:

To seek the approval of The Regulatory Panel to change the way the taxi and private hire driver knowledge test is conducted from a written test to a verbal test.

Recommendations:

That members agree to change the taxi and private hire knowledge test from a written test to a verbal test.

Tracking

Executive:	
Overview and Scrutiny:	
Council:	

To the Chairman & Members of the Regulatory Panel on the 12th November 2014

BACKGROUND

Carlisle City Council first introduced “knowledge tests” to prospective taxi and private hire drivers in 2001. The tests include the drivers knowledge of streets, routes and public buildings in Carlisle and the surrounding rural area. It also includes a test to ensure the driver understands the terms and conditions attached to their licence and that they have a basic knowledge of handling cash transactions and understand the various tariffs.

This test has been updated over the years and a disability awareness test was added in 2010. This was further improved in 2012 by requiring all licensed drivers to attend a disability awareness course and to pass a “multiple choice” test to ensure they understood the course content.

CURRENT SITUATION

As Carlisle develops into a modern and multi racial city we have received applications for taxi and private hire driver licences from numerous people born outside of the UK and who’s first language is not English. These countries include, Turkey, Bangladesh, Poland, Afghanistan, Cyprus, Portugal, Bulgaria, Romania and The Czech Republic. All of these applicants are required to pass our written knowledge tests.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Occasionally, complaints have been received about the quality of some of the non UK driver’s spoken English where passengers have needed to converse with them. Complaints are often difficult to investigate and these drivers have been known to bring their English speaking partners with them to assist in an investigation. Obviously, during any dispute between the driver and their passenger, this cannot happen.

Some Councils have introduced a basic English Language test.. Most carry out the test “in-house” but some have “out sourced” the test to an independent training provider. This tends to be in cities where immigration is high and there can be a cost of approximately £50.

PROPOSED CHANGES

Although it is not yet thought to be a significant problem in Carlisle it is felt that the communication skills of all applicants need to be assessed. We believe that this can be achieved by changing our current knowledge test from a written test to a verbal

test. The test can be “duel” marked, one for accuracy and one for clarity. This would also assist applicants whose written skills are poor or who were perhaps dyslectic.

This test would only apply to new applicants but should the language skills of an existing driver be called into question The Regulatory Panel may require them to also undertake and pass this test.

COST IMPLICATIONS

Currently no fee is charged for the knowledge test as officer time is minimal. Under the proposed scheme an officer will have to be present during the whole test. It is proposed therefore that a first attempt at the test is free but upon failing, any future tests would incur a fee of £10. It is also proposed that there should be a 10 day interval between tests to ensure applicants are adequately prepared. This is a similar time period that the DSA use for their taxi driving tests.

APPEAL PROCEEDURE

Should an applicant be refused a licence because of inadequate communication skills they would have a right of appeal to The Regulatory Panel and then if necessary to The Magistrates Court..

Cumbria Adult Education run English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses at Trinity School and applicants would be advised to contact them for advise.

TAXI ASSOCIATION

The views of the local Taxi Association have been sought and their Chairman was in favour of the proposed changes.

LEGISLATION

The Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 states that a District Council shall not grant a person a licence to drive a private hire vehicle or hackney carriage unless they are satisfied that the applicant is “fit and proper”. The Council can attach any test to ensure the applicant is fit and proper providing the test is reasonable. Currently these tests include medicals, criminal record checks, driving tests, knowledge tests and DVLA licence verification.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1 That members agree to change the taxi and private hire knowledge test from a written test to a verbal test.
- 2 That the first test be free but subsequent tests incur a charge of £10
- 3 That a minimum of 10 days elapse between tests.

- 4 Where instructed by The Regulatory Panel, existing licensed drivers may be required to undertake and pass the test where their English language skills have been brought into question.

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Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: