

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE LICENSING COMMITTEE
HELD AT THE TOWN HALL, PETERBOROUGH ON 19 JULY 2012**

Members Present: Councillors Thacker (Chairman), Peach (Vice Chairman), Serluca, Allen, Nawaz, Jamil, Saltmarsh, Miners and Davidson

Officers Present: Ian Robinson, Regulatory Officer
Gemma George, Senior Governance Officer

Also Present: Cheryl Thompson, Teacher - Peterborough Regional College

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hiller.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 April 2012

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 April 2012 were approved as a true and accurate record.

4. Taxi General Competence Course

The Committee received a report following a referral from the Licensing Department (Taxi).

The report requested Members to determine whether to amend the requirement of fitness to include the requirement for new applicants to undertake a general competence course, which would include an updated English reading and writing test.

As part of the application process the authority were required to establish that persons wishing to be licensed drivers were "fit and proper." Whilst there was no approved test to establish if an applicant was "fit and proper," factors such as the ability to communicate effectively in English, and to understand the relevant licensing legislation and conditions were taken into consideration.

At the current time, all new applicants were required to undertake an English reading and writing test. This test had been criticised by the licensed trade for being "too easy." It had been highlighted that some new drivers entering the trade struggled to communicate effectively with their customers and on occasion this had caused simple misunderstandings to escalate into more heated situations. In addition, Officers had also encountered communication problems despite applicants having passed the test.

The current test was facilitated by the Licensing Team's Regulatory Officers and on average; applicants took four attempts before successfully passing, which placed a considerable drain on the team's resources. As it stood there was no additional fee to re-sit the test and it was a common occurrence for applicants to attend multiple re-tests, without any preparatory work between each test, or any improvement shown.

If an applicant failed the current test, there was no resource or specialist help available to assist the applicant to reach the required standard to obtain a licence.

The new proposed "Taxi – General Competence Course" would involve applicants undertaking a day long training course, facilitated by the Regional College. The course would culminate in a new English reading and writing test. When conducting the current test, the Officer led the applicant through the process, step by step, often having to repeatedly explain what was required. The new test would require the applicant to read instructions and questions, thereby increasing the level of English required. The test would cover the topics taught during the day. The course would also include an initial assessment. If the applicant was identified as falling below the necessary standard, they could be diverted to various English and Numeracy courses, some of which would be free of charge, allowing the applicant to gain further transferable skills and reach the required level to undertake the course. The new applicant would be required to undertake and pass the course before they were eligible to submit an application to become a licensed driver.

It was anticipated that the cost of the course would be met by the new applicant and paid directly to the college. It would cost approximately £95.00 and those applicants who were unsuccessful in the first instance would be offered the opportunity of re-sitting the test at a cost of £25. There would also be an opportunity to complete a half-day refresher course at a cost of £60, if more help was needed.

Members were invited to discuss the recommendations and comments and responses to questions included:

- On average it took between four and five attempts for an applicant to pass the test;
- A consultation response received from the Peterborough Private Hire Driver Association had indicated that the cost of the course should be raised from £95 to £500. This would ensure a good quality of driver with good communication skills. It was advised that Officers would not wish the fees to be set so high;
- The proposed syllabus would include an input into the Equality Act 2010, and would include an overview of wheelchair users, people using guide dogs and equality law;
- There was no specification at the current time for drivers to be able to speak any language other than English;
- There was no further funding available for NVQ qualifications and the cost to undertake these qualifications privately was in the region of £1,500;
- There was no legal obligation for drivers currently working in the trade to undertake the training course. Existing drivers would be eligible to attend, however it would be entirely on a voluntary basis;
- Going forward, a full disability training course would be of benefit to the drivers;
- The current driver licences were valid for a period of one year;
- CRB checks were undertaken on all new drivers, with the cost being chargeable to the applicant;
- The course had been structured carefully so as not to include too much information for one day. Going forward, if the course was deemed inadequate in any way, it could be amended;
- A suitability screener could be introduced for the candidates applying for the course;
- The number of drivers applying each year could ultimately influence the number of times the course would run, however the likelihood of there not being an adequate number of regular courses to make it viable was slim;
- Huntingdon was its own Authority and therefore its drivers could not be requested to undertake the course in Peterborough;
- All driver id badges had a photograph of the driver's picture on it.

Following questions and comments, Members stated that the proposal to introduce the further requirement of fitness to the grant of a licence was an extremely good idea and was an excellent way of moving the service forward.

RESOLVED:

The Committee approved the introduction of a further requirement of fitness to be attached to the grant of a licence to include the wording “all new applicants, prior to applying for a Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Driver’s Licence, must undertake the PCC Taxi General Competence Course, provided by Peterborough Regional College”.

Chairman
7.00pm - 7.50 pm