

**Manchester City Council
Report for Resolution**

Report to: Licensing & Appeals Committee – 30 August 2011

Subject: Hackney Carriage and Private Hire driver training and assessment

Report of: Assistant Chief Executive, Neighbourhood Strategy and Delivery

Summary

The report provides information on the current training delivered to taxi drivers and seeks the Committee's views on whether a review of taxi driver training and assessment is required.

Recommendations

That the Committee decide whether a review of taxi driver training should be undertaken.

If a review is to be undertaken, that the Committee agree which of the elements set out in section 5 of this report they wish to be considered for inclusion in a driver training and assessment programme and advise officers of whether there are any other areas of training they wish to be considered.

That Members advise, on each element of training they wish to be considered for inclusion in a driver assessment and training programme, whether this is applicable to new applicants for hackney carriage and private hire driver licences, only or for existing licence holders too.

If a review is to be undertaken that a twelve week consultation takes place with the trade, and other interested parties after which officers will report back to committee with proposals for delivery of the training.

Wards Affected:

All

Community Strategy Spine	Summary of the contribution to the strategy
Performance of the economy of the region and sub region	Licensed private hire and hackney carriage drivers are often the first point of contact for business and leisure visitors. It is therefore important that they provide excellent customer service so that visitors get a good first impression of the city.
Reaching full potential in education and employment	Training, particularly that which leads to recognised qualifications, improves the job prospects for hackney carriage and private hire drivers and those wishing to enter the trade.
Individual and collective self esteem – mutual respect	Drivers who undertake NVQ's and other training gain improved confidence in their interaction with their passengers. Investing in driver training is likely to encourage the promotion of driving a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle as a career of choice leading to improved self esteem.
Neighbourhoods of Choice	<p>The taxi trade provide public transport to residents, visitors and businesses across all our neighbourhoods.</p> <p>The quality and provision of that service can impact on an individual's perception of their neighbourhood and the City as a whole.</p> <p>It is important that the City's hackney carriage and private hire drivers meet the expectation of their customers, in providing a service that is professional and efficient.</p>

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Risk Management
- Legal Considerations

Financial Consequences – Revenue

Financial Consequences – Capital

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Background documents

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

- Halcrow – Hackney Carriage Demand Survey 2007
- Report to Licensing and Appeals Committee 17 March 2008 including feedback from business consultation on the provision of hackney carriage services
- Stated Case: Darlington Borough Council V Kaye [2004] EWHC 2836(Admin), [2005] RTR 171, [2004] All ER (D) 89(Dec)

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 On 4 July 2011 the Licensing and Appeals Committee considered the results of a mystery shopper exercise. The report included information on the number of complaints received by the Licensing Unit during recent years. The Committee requested officers to consider solutions to deal with poor customer service, especially in relation to disability awareness.
- 1.2 At the Committee meeting trade representatives from the Airport Taxi Association and UNITE Union addressed the Committee. The representative from UNITE indicated that UNITE felt that the Council should look to re-introduce a driving test for drivers as part of the knowledge test. Such a test was in place until 2004 with the assessment being completed by Licensing Compliance Officers.

2.0 Background

- 2.1. Hackney carriage and private hire drivers provide an integral part of public transport within Manchester, and taxi drivers can be amongst the first people visitors meet when coming to the City which can impact upon people's impression of the City. It is therefore important that taxi drivers offer good customer service and have excellent knowledge of the City's geography.
- 2.2 In 2007, in accordance with legal requirements, the Council commissioned an unmet demand survey. The survey comprised various elements including consultation with customer groups which included hotel management and groups representing disabled people. The findings of the survey were reported to this committee at its meeting on 17 March 2008. In general terms customer groups identified a wish for an improved service particularly in relation to the hackney carriage trade.
- 2.3 The number of complaints received about the taxi trade has increased each year over the last 4 year period. Figures considered by the Committee at its meeting on 4 July 2011 show that approximately 2/3 of complaints relate to the hackney carriage trade and 1/3 to the private hire trade. **Appendix 1** provides a breakdown in relation to the nature of complaints in respect of both trades.

3.0 Liaison with the Trade

- Over the past 3 years officers have met regularly with representatives from the trade (both hackney and private hire). The trade liaison meetings were intended to discuss ways in which the service could be improved, future policy and to enlist the assistance of the trade in self-governing.
- 3.2 The vehicle inspection manual was developed in consultation with the trade following requests from them for guidance on the standards required for vehicle tests. The vehicle test manual was introduced in December 2008 and

provided the standards that are expected of vehicle proprietors' in respect of the maintenance of their vehicles. Since the introduction of the manual there has been a recognised fall in the number of vehicles failing on large numbers of vehicle defects, however, there are still 50% of vehicles failing their test. The introduction of the vehicle test manual was an opportunity for the trade to make a difference from within, but despite some success there are still significant numbers of vehicles not adhering to the standards and further regulatory measures have had to be taken in respect of vehicles over certain ages which are now required to take three tests per year.

- 3.3 Following issues highlighted by disabled users of taxis, a working party was set up to seek improvements. The working party included representatives from the trade. The disability groups highlighted some of their concerns mainly around customer care and the ability of drivers to safely put wheelchairs in and out of their vehicles.
- 3.4 As a result of these meetings officers requested Manchester College to design disability awareness training specifically for taxi drivers. The request was facilitated by the college, however, the course did not run as there was inadequate interest expressed by drivers.
- 3.5 The Committee will be aware from the "driver of excellence" awards that a number of drivers have undertaken NVQ or equivalent qualifications. Whilst this is commended and has been recognised by the Council in the development of the "driver of excellence" awards only a small proportion of the current 5000+ Manchester licensed drivers have undertaken this training. NVQ training has traditionally been available to most drivers at nil cost.
- 3.6 Following receipt of a complaint from a disabled passenger licensing officers visited the taxi rank at Piccadilly station and ascertained that most drivers on that rank claimed not to know that their vehicles were fitted with a swivel seat and ramps. It is the proprietor and drivers' responsibility to ensure that they are fully knowledgeable about the vehicle equipment. As a result of this observation some trade representatives spent time with drivers at the ranks in an attempt to raise awareness of disability features on hackney carriage vehicles.
- 3.7 The mystery shopping exercise focussing on disability awareness was undertaken after all the above measures had been taken.

4.0 Current Driver Training

- 4.1 All new taxi drivers are currently required to undertake a basic skills assessment (numeracy and literacy) and a knowledge test.
- 4.2 The skills assessment is currently undertaken by Council officers working in the Life Long Learning Centre. Any person not meeting the required standard is signposted to additional support/ training at Manchester College.

- 4.3 The knowledge test and associated coaching sessions (to assist drivers in their preparation for the knowledge test) are administered by the Licensing Unit.
- 4.4 The low pass rate for the knowledge tests (approx 30%), complaints from trade representatives and customers regarding driver route knowledge, and communication skills are recognised by officers, as signs, that the current training is inadequate.
- 4.5 Driver competency is not currently assessed as part of the licensing application or renewal process. Prior to 2004 driver skills were assessed by a compliance officer, who tested their route knowledge and basic driving skills, by physically taking a journey with the drivers. This was labour intensive and subjective, as compliance officers are not qualified driving instructors.
- 4.5 It is claimed by trade reps that drivers are no longer developing their route knowledge once they have passed their knowledge test and rely instead on satellite navigation technology for journey planning. This has been identified as problematic by the trade representatives who indicate that it is not unusual for fellow drivers to ask them for locations of popular Manchester landmarks.

5.0 Potential Way Forward

- 5.1 Having regard to the above information and the views expressed by both the Committee and trade representatives, consideration could be given to reviewing training and assessment for taxi drivers.
- 5.2 The basic skills assessment would appear to be an appropriate tool to assess drivers' numeracy, literacy and listening skills. The basic skills assessment has now been in place for over 3 years and a review of the format /level of the assessment is appropriate.
- 5.3 Consideration could be given to introducing more detailed training requirements for drivers, in an attempt to address the rising number of complaints and poor service identified in some of the mystery shopper journeys.
- 5.4 From officers' experience of Licensing Panels and members experience of Licensing and Appeals Sub Committee, the Committee may wish to consider whether it is appropriate for drivers to receive training and assessment on:
- Customer Care
 - Conflict management
 - Disability awareness
 - Driver assessment, (driving skills) outlined at **Appendix 2**
 - Legislative requirements
 - Requirements of licensing conditions and the implications of failure to abide by the legal requirements
 - Topography (route knowledge)

- Any other type of training not mentioned above which the Committee may consider necessary.

5.5 If Members are of the view that a review should be undertaken it is recommended that a twelve week consultation takes place with the trade, and other interested parties after which officers will report back to committee with proposals for delivery of the training

6.0 Legal implications

The matters outlined in paragraph 5.4 of this report, are matters which may be required prior to the grant of a licence and could form part of determining whether or not an applicant is a fit and proper person to be granted a licence.

7.0 Contributing to the Community Strategy replicate what is in the boxes at the start under contribution to community strategy in this section

(a) Performance of the economy of the region and sub region

Licensed private hire and hackney carriage drivers are often the first point of contact for business and leisure visitors. It is therefore important that they provide excellent customer service so that visitors get a good first impression of the city.

(b) Reaching full potential in education and employment

Training, particularly that which leads to recognised qualifications, improves the job prospects for hackney carriage and private hire drivers and those wishing to enter the trade.

(c) Individual and collective self esteem – mutual respect

Drivers who undertake NVQ's and other training gain improved confidence in their interaction with their passengers. Investing in driver training is likely to encourage the promotion of driving a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle as a career of choice leading to improved self esteem.

(d) Neighbourhoods of Choice

The taxi trade provides public transport to residents, visitors and businesses across all our neighbourhoods.

The quality and provision of that service can impact on an individual's perception of their neighbourhood and the City as a whole.

It is important that the City's hackney carriage and private hire drivers meet the expectation of their customers, in providing a service that is professional and efficient.

8. Key Policies and Considerations

(a) Equal Opportunities

The content of this report does not have any effect equal opportunities. A full equal opportunities impact study will be carried as part of any review of driver training.

(b) Risk Management

The content of this report has does not pose any risk to the Council. A full risk management study will be carried out as part of any review of driver training.

(c) Legal Considerations

There are no further legal considerations than those already addressed in the report

Year	Number of Overall Complaints	Type of Complaint																			
		Behaviour / Conduct		Dangerous Driving		Dangerous Driving / Conduct		Overcharge		Overcharge/Conduct		**Other		Route Dispute		Route Dispute/Conduct		Refuse to Hire		Refuse to Hire/Conduct	
2008	97	23	23%	14	14%	11	11%	8	8%	9	9%	28	28%	0	-	1	-	1	-	2	-
2009	90	23	25%	11	12%	14	15%	5	5%	8	8%	26	28%	0	0	1	-	0	0	2	-
2010	156	36	23%	8	5%	24	15%	8	5%	16	10%	58	37%	1	-	3	1%	0	0	2	-
2011	91 1 Jan – 31 July- equates to 2.67% of current drivers	24	26%	8	8%	14	15%	5	5%	0	-	30	32%	1	-	2	-	0	-	1	-

All % figures have been rounded down

**Other 2008/09 (Ply for hire, Ply for Hire plus conduct, Sounding Horn, Vehicle Condition, Assault on another driver, Operator compliant)

2010 (Assault, attempted ply for hire, complaint against operator, customer woke in hospital, no insurance, fly tipping, ply for hire, sounding horn)

Year	Number of Overall Complaints	Type of Compliant																			
		Behaviour / Conduct		Dangerous Driving		Dangerous Driving / Conduct		**Other		Overcharge		Overcharge/Conduct		Route Dispute		Route Dispute/Conduct		Refuse to Hire		Refuse to Hire/Conduct	
2008	170	40	15%	9	4%	14	5%	9	0	37	14%	30	11%	4	3%	6	5%	7	1%	14	2%
2009	219	55	25%	18	8%	20	9%	0	0	41	18%	35	15%	6	2%	13	5%	14	6%	11	5%
2010	329	114	34%	16	4%	40	12%	34	10%	42	12%	35	10%	15	4%	17	5%	6	1%	10	3%
2011	185 1 Jan – 31 July equates to 7.4% of current drivers	71	38%	7	3%	23	12%	16	8%	13	7%	36	19%	2	-	8	4%	3	1%	6	3%

All % figures have been rounded down

** Not detailed in 2008/09 - 2010 (Another HC took Fare, assault another driver, smoke in vehicle, fail to hand in lost property, fraudulent accident claim, HC picked up at front of rank, HC wanted payment up front, illegal rank, illegal plying, intimidating behaviour, kept customer mobile phone, no badge displayed, overload, parking, poor driving, criminal damage)

This Appendix is from an Extract from the DSA

Driver Competency Assessment

- 6.1 The Driver Standards Agency (DSA) is a Government Agency that conducts standard DVLA driving tests. However the DSA has developed an assessment package for hackney carriage and private hire drivers.
 - 6.2 The DSA has been conducting the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Assessment since 1999. Around 160 Licensing Authorities throughout Great Britain the assessment, although the manner in which it is used is not uniform in all authorities.
 - 6.3 The assessment is conducted from DSA driving test centres, by secretary of state approved driving examiners that are specifically trained to conduct this assessment. Local test centres can be agreed with DSA to meet the demands of the Licensing Authority.
 - 6.4 The assessment is designed for professional drivers and a higher standard of ability is expected than the statutory driving test. The DSA recommend that all candidates seek professional instruction before taking the assessment to ensure that their skills are as up to date as possible.
 - 6.5 The assessment includes a taxi manoeuvre (turn the vehicle to face the opposite direction using any safe and legal means), consideration for boarding and alighting passengers and questions specifically developed with the taxi driver in mind (Cabology).
 - 6.6 In order to prevent impersonation on test a full licence check is conducted prior to all assessments. In addition DSA have a bespoke fraud and integrity team to investigate allegations of impersonation.
 - 6.7 The assessment can be provided on a flexible basis to meet the needs of the licensing authority for:
 - new drivers
 - existing drivers
 - quality control in the event of repeated customer complaints
 - 1.8 Taxi drivers who pass the assessment receive a certificate and may be able to benefit from insurance discounts.
- ## **7.0 DSA - Wheelchair exercise**
- 7.1 A wheelchair assessment can be provided as an extension to the practical assessment for drivers of wheelchair accessible vehicles.
 - 7.2 The driver will need to demonstrate they can:
 - prepare the vehicle to board a wheelchair user
 - safely place the wheelchair in the vehicle

- secure the wheelchair using any brakes, seat belts, safety harness, wheel belts or clamps fitted to the vehicle or the wheelchair
- reverse the process and unloading the wheelchair user