

TO: **REGULATORY COMMITTEE – 11 APRIL 2005**

SUBJECT: **TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING**

FROM: **MEMBERS' SERVICES**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform members of and obtain authority to implement initiatives to improve the administration of the private hire and hackney carriage licensing.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The new Licensing Enforcement Officer, Mr David Davies, has been reviewing the administration of the various aspects of hackney carriage and private hire licensing and has suggested some initiatives which would improve efficiency in administering the licenses and would improve the service offered to the public.

- 2.2 The following initiatives are put forward for consideration:-

(A) Disability Awareness Training

- (i) The Committee did agree sometime ago to introduce disability awareness training for new applicants from April 2005 and for all drivers from 2006.
- (ii) It would now appear that the County Council, who would be providing the training, will only do so for a large group of people. This would mean that new applicants would have to wait until a number of applications had been received and enough applicants were available to fill a course.
- (iii) In practice this would cause difficulties as applicants might have to wait up to two months to attend a course which would delay the granting of their licence.
- (iv) It is suggested therefore that the training be deferred until next year when arrangements can be made for all licence holders to attend the training in groups of sufficient number to satisfy the County Council.

(B) Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Drivers Licences

- (i) At present separate licences are issued for hackney carriage drivers and private hire drivers and are in force for one year from the date of issue.
- (ii) It is suggested that a combined licence be issued to cover both hackney carriage and private hire which would replace the separate licences now in force. The qualifications for both the licenses are identical. This would be more efficient and would be helpful to applicants.
- (iii) Under the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976 the Council can issue hackney carriage and private hire licences for periods of up to three years and a number of Councils are now doing this.

- (iv) Three years coincides with the period between Criminal Records Bureau checks and it is suggested that licences be issued for three years to coincide with the date when the Criminal Records' Bureau check is due.
 - (v) New applicants would be straightforward but existing licence holders would be required, initially, to renew their licences for various periods so that they eventually coincided with their CRB check. Pro rata fees would be charged for these shorter licences
 - (vi) It is proposed that the licence fee for the three years should be three times the annual fee in force when the initiative is introduced.
 - (vii) Such an initiative would obviously improve the efficiency of the administration of the function but would also remove the need for licence holders to apply for renewal each year.
- (C) Driving Tests
- (i) In order to promote the Council as a safe and caring authority it is suggested that a driving test of 30 minutes be introduced for all new applicants for hackney/carriage/private hire licenses. A number of authorities now require this to ensure that their licensed hackney carriage drivers are competent drivers. Most authorities require applicants to undergo a Driving Standard Agency Test at a cost to the applicant of approximately £50. The Licensing Enforcement Officer is qualified to undertake such tests and it is suggested that he does so and a fee is charged to the applicants to cover his time. The Licensing Act 2003 is at the moment putting pressure on the Licensing Enforcement Officer and he would not be able to introduce the driving test until the initial rush of applications are dealt with.
- (D) Condition of vehicles
- (i) Many private hire and hackney carriage vehicles, whilst passing the mechanical tests do leave something to be desired. It is proposed therefore that a five year old or newer limit be introduced for all changes of vehicles and new licence applications. No vehicle will therefore be able to be licensed unless it is less than five years old (except in exceptional circumstances). If existing vehicles are replaced it will have to be by one of the same year or younger but in any case no older than five years. This policy has been adopted by a number of authorities and would help to improve the condition of vehicles licensed by the Council.
- (E) MOT and Plating of Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Vehicles
- (i) The vehicle examinations are at present carried out by the Warwickshire County Council garage in Montague Road, Warwick. It is understood that the garage is shortly to introduce the facility for carrying out MOT testing. It is suggested therefore that all licensed vehicles are required to have their MOT tests done at the County Council garage. The additional test required for the Council with regards to the general condition of the vehicle and checking for fire extinguisher and first aid kit could then be carried out at the same time at a small additional fee to the Council. If the vehicle failed the MOT or the additional test by the Council work would have to be carried out

by another garage. This would prevent any fear from owners that vehicles were being failed in order to gain more work for the garage.

- (F) All vehicle licences at present expire on the 30 June each year and this makes considerable work at that time of the year. Licences could therefore be issued to coincide with the MOT expiry date. Initially, this would mean some licenses being issued for a shorter period but would result in licences expiring throughout the year rather than all being concentrated in June. Such an initiative would ensure that all vehicles have a current MOT and would spread the load on the Licensing Section by distributing the renewals throughout the year rather than all on the same date.

3. **DECISION REQUIRED**

- 3.1 Members are asked to authorise the officers to implement the above initiatives as and when possible bearing in mind the time available to the Licensing Enforcement Officer.

Colin Tubbs
Senior Committee Services and Licensing Officer

BACKGROUND PAPERS NIL

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