

**TO: LICENSING AND SAFETY COMMITTEE**  
**22<sup>nd</sup> JUNE 2023**

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**THE FUTURE OF KNOWLEDGE TEST**  
**Public Protection Manager**

**1 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To set out options with respect to the training requirements for licensed taxi drivers in relation to the 'knowledge test'.

**2 Recommendations**

That the Committee

- 2.1 **CONSIDERS** the options set out in 6.1 below.
- 2.2 **RESOLVE** to adopt one of these options or such other option as the Committee determines.

**3 Reasons for Recommendations**

- 3.1 It has previously been suggested by the Licensing and Safety Committee and the Joint Public Protection Committee that the requirement to undertake the geographical element of the 'knowledge test' be removed due to the prevalence of satellite navigation systems.

**4 Alternative Options Considered**

- 4.1 The options are set out in paragraph 6.1

**5 Supporting Information**

**Introduction**

- 5.1 All drivers involved in any kind of hire or reward work need to be licensed. During the licensing application process drivers are required to undertake various checks and assessments. This includes for example a medical assessment, a practical driving assessment, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and proof of eligibility to work. Drivers are also required to undertake specified training including safeguarding and disability awareness and a 'knowledge test'. The cost of a new licence includes initial tests, safeguarding and disability training.
- 5.2 In terms of the 'knowledge test' applicants are tested on two elements, firstly the laws relating to the type of licence that they have applied for and the conditions attached to the licence. Secondly they are tested on their geographical knowledge of locations in the area. In addition, Hackney Carriage drivers are given an oral test of specific routes to destinations in the Borough based on map work. The cost of the initial test is included in the licence but if the applicant fails the test (a pass mark of 80% is required), they can retake the test but are charged for doing so. This is due to the fact that all fees are set on a cost recovery basis and this is a relatively time consuming activity for officers to administer.
- 5.3 One of the issues that was raised during the discussion about the 2023/24 fees was that the Members wanted Officers to revisit the requirements around the 'knowledge

test'. The cost of a knowledge test increased from £74 to £80 this financial year. On re-take the full fee is payable even if they only have to re-take one element of the test

- 5.4 Members of the Joint Public Protection Committee (JPPC) and Members of both West Berkshire and Bracknell Forest Council's Licensing Committees queried if the second part of the test (i.e. the geographical knowledge) was still needed given the prevalence of satellite navigation systems available to drivers. They asked that consideration be given to removing this element of the test, thereby reducing the time needed for the test which would in turn mean that the cost could be reduced.
- 5.5 Officers explained at the time that it would be possible to remove the geographical element should Members be minded to agree this. It was agreed that a report would be brought back to this meeting for a discussion to agree a way forward in advance of the fee setting process for 2024/25.
- 5.6 One of the issues that Members may also wish to consider is if the retention of the geographical element of the test helps to ensure that drivers have a comprehensive grasp of the local area that they work in thereby inspiring public trust in the local trade. Removal might also create a disparity between those that have already undertaken the test and those that have not. It remains a requirement in many local authorities.
- 5.7 Officers are therefore proposing that in order to establish the local view and in the interests of openness and transparency it would be useful to undertake a short consultation exercise. It is proposed that the consultation would run from the 07 June to the 28 June 2023. We would write to all members of the local trade, elected members, town and parish councils and include the consultation on the website and support it with a press release and social media posts. The outcome of the consultation would then be factored into the fee setting process and a report would be brought back to the October Licensing and Safety Committee meeting alongside the fees proposed by the Joint Public Protection Committee.
- 5.8 If Members are minded to make this change the current Guidance Notes and Conditions for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Owners, Operators and Drivers (section 6 Knowledge Test) will need amending. Pending the outcome of the consultation Officers will draft amendments to the notes, if necessary, as set out below for members to consider at the October meeting:

"6.1 All new drivers will be required to take and pass a written knowledge test. Chauffeur driver and Home to School driver applicants will be exempt from the geographical section of the knowledge test only.

*LG(MP)A s51*

6.2 All applicants will be tested on the laws relating to the licence that they have applied for, the conditions laid down in the Guidance Book, and their geographical knowledge of locations in the area. In addition, Hackney Carriage drivers will be given an oral test of specific routes to destinations in the Borough. If the applicant fails the test, they may re-take it but will be charged for any subsequent test. A pass mark of 80% applies to all sections.

*BF(LC)*

6.3 Any new private hire operator licence applicant who is not already a licensed driver, or applying to be a licensed driver, must pass the private hire knowledge test (theory section only) prior to an operator licence being granted.

*BF(LC")*

5.9 During discussion on changes to the draft revised Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy Members did agree that Home to School drivers should be excluded from the requirement to undertake a knowledge test in recognition of the nature of the work undertaken by them in any event. The decision taken by the Committee on hackney carriage and private hire drivers will be reflected in the revised policy too.

## 6 Options

6.1 The Committee:

- a) **RESOLVES** to remove the geographical aspect of the 'knowledge test' and amend the relevant conditions and policies to support this decision; or
- b) **RESOLVES** to retain the geographical aspect of the 'knowledge test', or
- c) **RESOLVES** to consult of the future of the geographical aspect of the 'knowledge test' and determine the matter at the October 2023 meeting of the Committee having considered any consultation responses.

### Background Papers

[Bracknell Forest Guidance Notes and Conditions for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Owners, Operators and Drivers](#)

### Appendices

None

### Contact for further information

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