

TO: LICENSING AND SAFETY COMMITTEE
19th OCTOBER 2023

OUTCOME OF THE KNOWLEDGE TEST CONSULTATION
Service Lead – Public Protection

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To set out the outcome of the ‘knowledge test’ consultation which Members requested at the June 2023 meeting.

2 Recommendations

That the Committee

- 2.1 **CONSIDERS** the outcome of the consultation as summarised in Appendix A.
- 2.2 **DETERMINES** whether the geographic element of the ‘knowledge test’ is retained for Hackney Carriage Drivers and/or Dual (Hackney Carriage and Private Hire) Drivers and/or Private Hire Drivers.
- 2.3 **RESOLVES** to delegate to the Service Lead for Public Protection in consultation with the Borough Solicitor authority to amend the relevant conditions and guidance to reflect any changes to the status quo agreed by the Committee.

3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The necessity for a geographical element of the taxi trade knowledge test has been discussed for some time. The trade was divided in its views on the geographical element of the test. Some felt that sat navs meant that the ‘knowledge test’ was no longer needed, and others felt the test should be retained to continue to provide local knowledge.
- 3.2 The matter was discussed at the 22 June 2023 Licensing and Safety Committee where Members resolved that the future of the geographical aspect of the ‘knowledge test’ be consulted on and that the responses to the consultation be presented to this meeting for a determination.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 No further options were considered as a decision was made at the 22 June 2023 meeting that the findings of the consultation should be brought to this meeting for determination.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1 Following a discussion at the [22 June 2023 Licensing and Safety Committee](#) Officers were instructed to undertake a consultation about the future of the knowledge test in order to establish the local view on this matter. Members agreed that the consultation would run from the 07 June to the 28 June 2023. Officers wrote to all members of the local trade, elected members and town and parish councils and we consulted neighbouring licensing authorities. The consultation was published on the Council’s

and Public Protection Partnership's websites. It was supported with a press release and social media posts.

- 5.2 The outcome of the consultation is attached at Appendix A to this report. The Council received 38 responses to the consultation via the consultation hub and three responses were emailed directly to Officers. One of those responses was signed by 45 of the hackney carriage drivers and another by 14 private hire drivers. It is noted that some of these drivers also submitted individual responses via the online consultation process. The respondents identified themselves as follows: 25 were hackney carriage or private hire drivers, three were chauffeurs, two each of operators, officers, public sector authorities and residents, and one home to school driver. One respondent did not answer this question and three identified as other.
- 5.3 When asked if the geographical element of the knowledge test should be retained 65% of the 39 respondents to this question agreed or strongly agreed that the knowledge test should be kept while 28% disagreed or strongly disagreed with its retention. There seemed to be a clear divide between hackney carriage drivers wanting to retain it and private hire and chauffeur drivers wanting to remove this requirement. The view from officers and other public sector organisations appears to be a suggestion that it should be retained albeit perhaps in a different format.
- 5.4 Those respondents seeking to retain the test focussed on safety for passengers and drivers, the ability to identify alternative routes easily, knowledge of the area being a point of difference, the ability to avoid busy routes, improved customer satisfaction, improved customer engagement, sat navs not always identifying the shortest routes, technology not always being available especially at busy events, appearing professional, not being distracted by the technology and being aware of local facilities.
- 5.5 Respondents that sought to remove the knowledge test stated that the prevalence of modern technology meant that drivers did not need to have local knowledge, a large proportion of their journeys were outside the district and this was not covered in the test, technology could identify blockades and stoppages in advance which could then be avoided, reduced stress for new applicants, increased pass rates which would address driver shortages, would assist with the integration of real time traffic information, alignment with industry trends and most new cars have built in satellite technology reducing the reliance on internet usage.
- 5.6 When asked about alternative solutions respondents suggested differentiating between vehicles that could be hailed and those that had to be pre-booked, replacing the current verbal test with a written multiple-choice option (which would also be quicker to mark), combining the knowledge test and geographical test with 30 or 35 questions only and having up to 60 knowledge tests that could be selected at random, thus making crib sheets an unworkable cheat system.
- 5.7 If Members are minded to remove the requirement to undertake this aspect of the testing, for some or all drivers, the current Guidance Notes and Conditions for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Owners, Operators and Drivers (section 6 Knowledge Test) will need amending.

“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. “

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.

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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”)

5.8 In addition to changes to the guidance notes the decision of the Committee will also be reflected in the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy.

6 Options

6.1 The Committee:

- a) **RESOLVES** to remove the geographical aspect of the ‘knowledge test’ for some or all driver licensing regimes and amend the relevant conditions and policies to support this decision; or
- b) **RESOLVES** to retain the geographical aspect of the ‘knowledge test’ for all drivers except Home to School Transport Drivers.

Background Papers

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

Appendices

Appendix A the Outcome of the Knowledge Test consultation.

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