

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
MISCELLANEOUS LICENSING SUB COMMITTEE
THURSDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 2014

INTRODUCTION OF DRIVER ASSESSMENT FOR HACKNEY AND
PRIVATE HIRE DRIVERS AND CANDIDATES
REPORT OF THE SHARED HEAD OF PUBLIC PROTECTION AND
REGULATION SERVICES

(Contact: Ron Spurs Tel: (01993) 861633)

(The sub-committee decision on this matter will be a resolution)

1. PURPOSE

To consider the introduction of a driver assessment for new existing hackney carriage and private hire drivers as an alternative to the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) Taxi and Private Hire drivers test. (Drivers and new candidates will still have the option of taking the DVSA Taxi and Private hire Test).

2. RECOMMENDATION

That, the sub-committee adopts the introduction of a driver assessment as an alternative to the DVSA Taxi and Private Hire drivers test.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1. In January 2012 West Oxfordshire District Council introduced the requirement for new and existing licensed drivers to successfully pass a DVSA driving test to verify their driving ability. New applicants are required to pass the test prior to a licence being granted. Existing drivers who have not passed the DVSA are required to have passed it by the end of January 2015.
- 3.2. When the requirement for the DVSA test was introduced the authority's officers agreed with groups representing drivers and proprietors to keep the process under review. Officers have been contacted by a number of existing drivers requesting that consideration is given by the authority to introduce a local driving test conducted by a professional supplier as an alternative to taking the DVSA test. The Licensing team have estimated that approximately 145 existing drivers have not taken the DVSA Taxi and Private Hire Test. These drivers are currently required to pass the DVSA test by 31st January 2015.
- 3.3. An informal consultation process was carried out by officers. All drivers and proprietors were informed of the proposal to introduce an alternative assessment. A total of 36 proprietors and drivers responded to the letter requesting their views, 28 supported the introduction of the alternative assessment, 4 did not support the introduction and 4 responses pertained to unrelated matters. (A copy of the responses is shown at Appendix 1).
- 3.4. A consortium of Advance Driving Instructors has agreed to work with the council to provide a driver assessment which is similar to the items

covered by the DVSA Taxi and Private Hire Test. Additionally, this assessment will be in two stages over a single two hour period. During the first stage of the assessment lasting one hour, the driver's performance will be marked. The driver will be advised of those areas which are of concern and during the second part of the assessment the driver is re-assessed to determine if there is an improvement.

- 3.5. A copy of the proposed assessment is shown at Appendix 2.
- 3.6. Should an existing driver be assessed as RED "Dangerous" then on the grounds of public safety the Shared Head of Public Protection and Regulation Services in consultation with the chair of the Miscellaneous Licensing Sub-Committee may wish to consider utilising their powers under Section 61 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 relating to the suspension and revocation of drivers' licences.
- 3.7. Where a new applicant is assessed as unacceptable/dangerous they would not be granted a licence by the council until they have been re-assessed and been marked as "acceptable".
- 3.8. The cost of the DVSA taxi and private hire test is £79.95p. This increases substantially for evening and weekend appointments. It is proposed that a fee of £70 is charged for the assessment. This would be paid directly to the assessor by the applicant. Assessments would be available during the day, evening and weekend at the same cost. The booking process and assessment reports would be managed by the assessors. There are no costs to the council in setting up and monitoring this scheme.
- 3.9. Benefits/Weaknesses
 - By introducing an alternative to the DVSA Taxi Private Hire test the authority is evidencing its commitment to respond to the concerns expressed by members of the industry whilst maintaining a meaningful driver assessment to maintain public safety.
 - The proposed assessment is in two stages – assessment, advice then second assessment whereas the DVSA test is a pass fail with no advice or problem rectification.
 - The consortium of assessors will provide candidates a service over a 7 day period at a fixed fee.
 - The introduction of the assessment will enable the licensing authority to manage drivers who are considered to be below an "acceptable" safety standard.
 - The provision of the assessment by local companies will promote local businesses in West Oxfordshire.
 - The introduction of the assessment offering an alternative to the DVSA test will provide existing drivers (approximately 148), with a quicker local assessment than the DVSA, therefore reducing the likelihood of a significant number of drivers not having passed the test by the 31st January 2015 deadline and possibly having their licences revoked.
 - The DVSA Taxi and Private Hire test is "portable" in that it is recognised by a number of other local authorities and is a government run scheme whereas the proposed assessment will only be recognised by West Oxfordshire District Council.

4. ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS

The sub-committee can decide not to introduce an alternative driver assessment.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications for the authority. A small amount of officer time will be spent administering the process.

6. RISKS (INCLUDING WEATHER RISKS

None identified

7. REASONS

7.1.

Kate Bishop, Shared Head of Public Protection and Regulation Services

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Date: 18th August 2014

Appendices

- 1 Result of informal consultation
- 2 Copy of proposed driver assessment form

Appendix I
Responses to informal Consultation

For	Against	Unrelated matters
28	4	4

Thank you for your email concerning the DVSA Test. As professional drivers who have lived in this area for a very long time.

My Husband was born in the Area nearly 70 years ago .he has also held a HGV licence during his years with a local Brewery delivering around Oxfordshire. I would certainly welcome an alternative to the DVSA test as I think re taking the test doubts our intelligence and professionalism.

As a private hire operator with 21 years experience in this field I am proud to say that I have never had any points on my licence and believe that a DVSA test for local drivers who have more than more than 20 years experience and a clean licence in this field should not be subject to a DVSA test. I suggest that this could be for the new drivers to this industry.

As I understand, Coach drivers do not have to take extra tests they have additional hours of instruction and they are also professional drivers carrying passengers. We are on the roads and motorways with our airport transfer business far more than local drivers just driving in and around locally. Which means that we have more road awareness deal with a vast amount of traffic and road users and different road structures daily.

We look forward to hearing the decision that the local authority make in due course.

Dear Sir

I have just had an opportunity to read your e-mail re: DVSA Taxi and Private Hire Test after visiting family in Australia.

I am somewhat confused by the need to take and pass another driving test! Surely the standard required was achieved before the licence was issued in the first place!

However, I do understand the need for high standards of driving for one's own safety as well as others, and as a professional driver whose livelihood depends on high standards of driving it goes without saying.

My question would be, are these tests that are being offered of a higher standard than that required by the Institute of Advanced Motorists? May I suggest that the minimum requirement be the DVSA, and anybody who takes their profession seriously would go for the IAM test.

In my opinion I think that it would be a good idea to have an open meeting on this matter before anything is introduced, so owners, operators and drivers can voice their opinions and have a clear picture as to what is going to happen.

Dear Ron

Sorry for the delay in reply for DSA alternative. We are very interested in this alternative due to cost and distance also being local. Thank you for arriving at this alternative.

Regards

Dear Mr Spurs,

Having read your proposal I feel that if the change goes ahead and the standard required is downgraded to an assessment then myself and others have been short changed by this council. I find it grossly unfair that having now completed the test; that the council are considering changing the goalposts to make it easier. The real situation is that time and money have now been spent by drivers and operators alike to reach the criteria set out by this council and it would appear off of the back of complaints (which have been received from Drivers who cannot make the grade with the DVSA) the council are backing down. Not only does it make us look stupid; the ones that have already done the test, but it also makes WODC licensing department look like the biggest load of idiots for setting up a standard that was deemed necessary in 2012; then rolling over after spending time and effort defending their policy and deciding to do away with it. A prime example of weak leadership mixed up with blithering incompetence.

I sincerely hope WODC decide to keep the driving test. It was a useful exercise and actually taught me a lot. It is also a professional test conducted in a fit and proper environment. I do not feel that an assessment at a local level can match this; plus who is designing the local assessment? If this gets altered to a local assessment will it be a farce like the knowledge test where the local council couldn't even spell the names of the streets correctly and armed us with a road map? West Oxon should leave the whole lot alone; they finally plumped for a test which was of a national standard and nothing that comes out of Elmfield Office will even come close to being as professional or well thought out. If it's not broken don't fix it!!!!!!!

Yours sincerely

Dear Ron

Thank you for your letter regarding the DVSA Test, and the alternative you have suggested! As a taxis proprietor I think the idea of an alternative assessment would be much better route to go down, than the Present DVSA test.

Yours Sincerley

Dear Mr Spurs

With reference to your local dvsa taxi i think it is a very good idea and would be willing to take it. Can you please keep me informed.

Dear Mr Spurs

Thank you for your email.

Allowing us to take the test locally is a good idea as:

- a) we will not have the loss of time having to travel to a test centre
- b) overall costs will be lower for us, in terms of cost of the actual test and fuel saving not going to a test centre
- c) there will be a community benefit as the local provider doing the testing will benefit rather than the DSA

I propose that this is put forward to the Miscellaneous Licensing Sub-Committee as a matter of urgency and hopefully thereafter be approved.

Yours sincerely

Dear Ron,

I think this is the way forward, with an introduction of an assessment at West Oxon, making everyone a bit more comfortable with doing what the Council require in terms of testing.

I am sure the end result will be positive and certainly forming a closer relationship with the Council.

Kind regards

Dear Mr Spurs,

I fully support a Local Assessment allowing me the renewed possibility of possibly being able to employ new drivers.

I also write this support of a local assessment on behalf of ten of my drivers who do not have access to computers or email.

Will it also be possible for you to consider in the future to drop the knowledge test for school transport private hire operators as this is still a large reason for not being able to employ new part-time drivers.

Dear Mr Spurs,

I would like the DSA test to remain as a key element of the process, for one it provides a true level of driving standards that this industry requires, I have witnessed comments from some of the more longer serving taxi drivers who are of the opinion that they do not need to be tested but I feel that everyone needs to meet & obtain the standards required by the licencing authority, any re-view should be done after the original deadline set by the WODC so that everyone concerned either meets or fails the required standard, I do not consider any soft options an advantage to this industry at the present time.

Kind Regards

Dear Ron

Donald Johns received a letter about the alternative assessment test for private hire and taxi drivers.

We would just like to say that we think that this sounds like a good idea.

Best wishes

Dear Ron

I am fully in agreement with this and our wheelchair vehicles are 'Ambulance' sized and a provider who can assess these would be great.

Thank You

I have little or no interest in doing this test. I only have a licence so that I can drive the vehicles owned by the company for my own personal use. No doubt this reason will not alter your decision, however it will alter my bank balance. If the council insist on this test could it not be part of the renewal fee.

Dear Ron

This sounds like an admirable suggestion, the added value in receiving useful driving tips and observations from the person is to be particularly welcomed. Needless to say I am in favour of this scheme.

Best regards

With reference to letter dated July 2014 yes I think an assessment would be a very good alternative to the test. You have my full backing on this. Hope it is introduced ASAP.

Dear Sir,

This looks like a better option to me.

Regards

Dear Ron

Thank you for your email.

I think this option sounds like a good idea.

Kind regards

Hello Ron

As I understand it these last 3 years of making changes in Taxi and PH licensing is about the safety of the fare paying public and making the service fit for purpose. The cutting out of needless regulations to date is to be applauded.

With the question of driver testing in mind. We test the licensed cars to a government department standard, the Ministry Of Transport Test. We have a medical done by an NHS doctor, regulated by the Department of Health. We have a check on our criminal records. The Disclosure and Barring Service I believe is part of the Home Office.

So why should licensed Taxi / PH drivers be at any skill standard other than a Government Department Standard the DVSA test? Surely, after the all the other aspects of testing (above) anything else is just a watered down version.

After saying that, I do feel strongly that the DVSA test does NOT need to be re-taken every 5 years. There are NO other other vocational driving licenses, to my knowledge, that need to be re-taken periodically for no good reason. It is both needlessly costly for the driver and in my opinion do little to improve public safety. However, if there was a complaint to the council about a licensed drivers style of driving, the council could and should require the test to be re-taken within a reasonable period.

For your information PCV and LGV license holders only had to pass their driving test once but do have to complete 35 hours of classroom training courses every 5 years to keep it valid. I do not notice poor driving from Bus and Truck drivers very often.

So, my vote goes to DVSA Hackney & PH taxi test and if there really has to be re-testing, no more frequently that every 10 years without good reason.

In my opinion if an Hackney or PH driver cannot pass the DVSA test (once) they shouldn't be driving the public for Hire or Reward.

Thanks for the opportunity to comment.

Dear Mr Spurs,

Having lived in North Leigh for forty seven years and been an established driver for fifty years, during which I have driven hundreds of thousands of miles, I consider myself to be a competent driver and don't really see the point.

However if the test becomes compulsory I suppose I have no option but to comply.

It would be interesting to learn of your reasons for introducing what appears to be a watering down of the DVSA test. I have previously queried the necessity of making existing holders of a taxi or private hire licence submit to a further fresh examination and I do so again. It is, I agree, in your interests to make sure that new applicants for whichever licence pass a relevant test. To require existing taxi/private hire licence holders is a possible threat to their livelihood. Some would say this is unjustified and I am inclined to agree. You have been happy to grant these licences in the past so what has changed your mind? It makes me think there is a hidden agenda. You have asked us to make a judgement or opinion on the DVSA or its local equivalent without providing us with any detail. How can we do this?

Dear Mr. Spurs,

Thank you for your e:mail concerning the DVSA Test. As a professional driver who has lived in this area all of his life, I would certainly welcome an alternative to the DVSA test. As a private hire operator with approximately 30 years experience in this field I am proud to say that I have never had any points on my licence and believe that a DVSA test for local drivers who have more than more than 20 years experience and a clean licence in this field should not be subject to a DVSA test; only new drivers to this industry.

I look forward to hearing the decision that the local authority make in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Hi Ron,

Thank you for your email regarding the driving test. At last sense is to provale. I have been a taxi driver for the past 10 years in the Witney area, I have driven H.G.V class I trucks for 30 years previous to that all over the country, I hold a national C.P.C in road haulage, a Hazchem Certificate for Hazardous Chemicals, to be told by the W.O.D.C taxi board I have to take a driving test. I would have surrendered my taxi badge before I take a driving test.

So yes that is a very good idea, I will probably keep quite a few taxi drivers in a job.

Thank You

Dear Mr Spurs,

Thank you for your message.

Is there any more detail about this proposed change?
For instance what is the scope of the test, how long is it valid for and what cost.

For me, a local test meets my needs and would seem to be more convenient than being tested in Aylesbury, which I gather is the nearest DVSA test centre.

Yours faithfully,

Thank you for the email

XXXXXX has taken his but I have not. A local one would be good for me as I do not intend to move or do work out of the area.

Regards

Good afternoon Ron

Regarding the test,

I think having a less formal assessment as suggested is a good thing, it puts less stress on the candidate allowing them to drive more relaxed and (hopefully) to a better standard, also it seems less of a threat to their livelihood although the reasons are the same and the necessity to do well are no different.

Having operated as a Driving Instructor myself for 20 years prior to starting my Chauffeur business I can honestly say the current Instructors in this area are of a very high standard and can be relied on to ensure that local Taxi drivers are also of a good standard.

To have the facility to be tested locally is convenient for the drivers, it also generates a little extra work for the local Instructors

I personally would also like to have the option on doing an advanced test like the IAM or ROSPA conduct, this is the route I will take as not only would it satisfy the council, it could also be used for marketing.

I hope my comments have been useful, If I can help in any way further please feel free to contact me.

Kind regards

Hi Ron

The more I think about this the angrier I get.

This to me is a complete joke and a back track, you need to stick to your guns.

If these drivers can't meet the DSA standard they should not be at the wheel of a taxi.

This should have been implemented from day one three years ago, you can't move the goal posts now because some firms are struggling to get second rate drivers through an easier test. As I said before by doing this now your making yourselves into a complete joke shop.

Regards

Hi Ron,

Definitely in favour of the "alternative" local testing

Regards,

I would welcome the local test if instead of the DSA test for my drivers, I struggle to get quality drivers due to the council red tape so would definitely welcome an easier option.

Kind regards

Ron,

Firstly, as you should be aware, i have been given permission to be exempt from any test due to my current police advanced driving standard amd previous driving qualifications.

Who would the 'local providers' be and to what standard would a driver be expected to meet at a local assessment?

I am also an examiner for the IAM and if i can be of any assistance then i would be more than happy to discuss with further with you.

Appendix 2

Page 1 Assessment form sample

Occupational Driver Assessment



Driver details		Reference no.	
Trainer details		Course date	
Vehicle make		Venue	
Model		Reg no.	

Vehicle checks / = satisfactory X = unsatisfactory

F	L	O	W	E	R	Y	Dents/damage
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	--------------

List any defects in this box

Eyesight Inserting 'X' means that NO driving can take place

Risk assessment 1 = low 2 = acceptable 3 = unacceptable 4 = dangerous

Each category must be marked. Enter 1, 2, 3 or 4 in relevant column

	Initial assessment					Final assessment			
	1	2	3	4		1	2	3	4
Seating position									
Moving off									
Stopping (inc Safe Legal Convenient)									
Steering									
Gears									
Other controls									
Use of mirrors/blind spots									
Use of signals									
Appropriate use of speed									
Dealing with junctions									
Following distance									
Dealing with other road users									
Out of town/rural									
Dual carriageways									
Motorways									
Hazard perception/commentary									
Planning and awareness									
Eco-safe driving									
Use of MSM									
Manoeuvring/parking									
Totals									

Specific objectives See fault analysis overleaf

1	
2	
3	

Grading Insert 'X' in appropriate box

Initial grade	Green	Amber	Red	Final grade	Green	Amber	Red
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For grading details and trainer's report see reverse

Trainer's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix 2

Page 2 Assessment form sample



Grading details and trainer's report

Vehicle check	FLOWERY provides a simple way of remembering to check the following: Fuel Lights Oil Water Electrics Rubber (tyres and wiper blades) Yourself	
Assessments	Entering the marks in individual columns gives an instant visual guide to problems	
Grading	The formula for the grading is as follows:	<i>Regardless of the total mark, any mark of 3 will put a candidate in Amber grade and any mark of 4 automatically puts a candidate in Red grade</i>
Green	00-20 marks (and no marks of 3 or 4)	
Amber	21-30 marks (and no marks of 4)	
Red	31-80 marks	

Fault	
Analysis	
Remedial action	

Fault	
Analysis	
Remedial action	

Fault	
Analysis	
Remedial action	