



## Licensing and Environmental Protection Committee

### 25 April 2024

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Taxi Licensing Modernisation – Decision following Consultation</b>
<b>Cabinet Portfolio</b>	Economy, Business and Skills
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor Kate Groucutt
<b>Exempt Report</b>	No
<b>Reason for Exemption</b>	N/A
<b>Key Decision</b>	No
<b>Public Notice issued</b>	N/A
<b>Wards Affected</b>	None
<b>Report of</b>	Lisa Harris Executive Director Place <a href="mailto:lisaharris@sthelens.gov.uk">lisaharris@sthelens.gov.uk</a>
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<b>Borough Priorities</b>	Ensure children and young people have a positive start in life.	
	Promote good health, independence, and care across our communities.	
	Create safe and strong communities and neighbourhoods for all.	X
	Support a strong, thriving, inclusive and well-connected local economy.	X
	Create green and vibrant places that reflect our heritage and culture.	
	Be a responsible Council.	X

## 1. Summary

- 1.1 At its meeting on 21 February 2024, the Licensing and Environmental Protection Committee agreed to a period of consultation on proposed amendments to the service delivery model for taxi licensing. This report presents the responses to this consultation with licensed trade, relevant organisations and the public on the proposed amendments to the service.

## 2. Recommendation for Decision

**Licensing and Environmental Protection Committee is recommended to:**

- 1) **Note the outcome of the taxi sector and public consultation.**
- 2) **Adopt the proposed changes to Driver Training requirements.**
- 3) **Adopt the proposed changes to the Vehicle Testing and Compliance procedure.**

## 3. Purpose of this report

- 3.1 To seek approval from the Licensing and Environmental Protection Committee to adopt the proposed changes following a period of public consultation.

## 4. Background / Reason for the recommendations

- 4.1 On 21 February 2024 the Licensing and Environmental Protection Committee considered a report proposing changes to the process of becoming a licensed driver in St Helens. The Committee resolved to note the report and agreed to the commencement of a four-week period of consultation on the proposed changes to Driver Training requirements and Vehicle Testing and Compliance procedures.
- 4.2 The consultation period launched on 22 February 2024 for a period of four weeks. The proposal and invitation to respond was sent to all existing licence holders in St Helens and published on the Council's website. The consultation closed on 20 March 2024 and the responses have been collated and analysed and are presented to the Committee in this report.
- 4.3 There are 1106 licensed drivers, vehicle proprietors and operators in St Helens. In total 18 responses to the consultation were received from this sector. 17 of the responses were from the Hackney Carriage trade and 1 response was from the Private Hire trade. The responses can be viewed at **Appendix A**.
- 4.4 The number of responses represents a very low percentage of 1.6% of the total number of 1,106 over drivers, proprietors and operators. It should be noted that previous consultations have received no responses and therefore whilst the response rate is still very low it is an improvement and an indication of some positive engagement which does also allow a limited opportunity to consider the views of the sector. Licensing Services has also been engaging with the National

Private Hire Association to encourage meaningful, two-way communication from the licensed trade.

- 4.5 The responses received from the consultation period can be grouped by the following:

<b>Response</b>	<b>Total</b>
Total number of responses received	18
Hackney Carriage Trade responses	17
Private Hire Trade responses	1
Those in favour due to cost effectiveness, having additional options available to them, or other reasons	18
Those not in favour	0

- 4.6 The responses received from the consultation have highlighted a positive response to the proposed changes to the vehicle testing and overall, respondents were of the view that the changes would be beneficial to the trade in terms of cost, value for money and choice of location of vehicle testing.
- 4.7 The consultation also asked respondents to add any further suggestions that they would like the Council to consider. The responses received are included in the table below and these will be considered if future changes are brought forward.

<b>Response</b>	<b>Total</b>
An amnesty applied to the people who used to hold the 7 Hackney Carriage plates that Licensing have ear marked for reallocation under a potential future policy	1
The imposed limit of 63 on Hackney Carriage plates should remain	1
Licensing should continue to operate a policy of no age limits on vehicles.	1
Allow door signage to feature QR codes	1
Allow tints on vehicles without a restriction on the amount of light that is let through – <i>NB: this has already been introduced under the new conditions approved by Committee on 23 January 2024</i>	1

- 4.8 Based on the consultation feedback the following proposed amendments are proposed to be implemented:

**(i) Driver Training**

To change the training requirements from the Vocational Related Qualification (VRQ) in driver training and the Essential Skills Training, to one course covering the training set out within the Statutory Taxi and

Private Hire Vehicle Standards (Safeguarding training and an English Language Test) and the DfT Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing Best Practice Guidance (Disability Awareness training).

## **(ii) Vehicle Testing and Compliance**

To remove the requirement for a vehicle compliance test which includes an MOT at the Council's in-house testing station, to replace with a standard MOT from any VOSA approved testing station in St Helens.

To remove the additional environmental standard compliance element of the vehicle licence, to replace with environmental standard checks carried out by Licensing Services on all licensed vehicles by,

- Randomised weekly compliance checks carried out by the enforcement team, and
- A documented routine check of vehicle compliance prior to the issue of the taxi plate.

## **5. Consideration of Alternatives**

5.1 Committee may resolve to retain the existing arrangements for both vehicles testing and for driver training. However, the consultation process has demonstrated a small but positive engagement and support from the sector for the proposed changes. The report to the Committee in February 2024 outlined the potential benefits of modernisation. Therefore, the potential implications of retaining the status quo should be taken into consideration by the Committee.

## **6. Conclusions**

6.1 The results of the four-week consultation on the proposed service changes have been analysed and considered. They demonstrate support from the sector to the amendments to vehicle testing and driver training. It is proposed that the Licensing and Environmental Protection Committee adopt the proposed changes and progress with this modernisation of service delivery.

6.2 If the Committee approves the amendments they will be implemented during Summer 2024.

## **7. Legal Implications**

7.1 The proposals set out in this report are compliant with the requirements of the relevant legislation and the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards.

## **8. Financial Implications**

8.1 The proposed changes to training requirements and vehicle testing will result in savings to licence applicants in St Helens.

8.2 The proposed change to the vehicle licensing testing model is likely to result in a loss of £46,690 income (as of 2022/23) for the Council's Operations department. As drivers will be permitted to complete a standard MOT at any St Helens VOSA approved testing station. This loss of income will occur if licence holders choose to use an alternative testing station. The change could result in a revenue loss for the Council overall. Should this be the case this could impact staffing and result in redundancy costs for the Council.

## **9. Equality Impact Assessment**

9.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed in relation to this proposal and there are no identified impacts which require further action.

## **10. Social Value**

10.1 There are direct implications arising from this report.

## **11. Net Zero and Environment**

11.1 There are no direct implications arising from this report on Net Zero and the Environment.

## **12. Health and Wellbeing**

12.1 There are no direct implications emerging from this report.

## **13. Customer and Resident**

13.1 It is anticipated that the proposed changes will result in more applicants for taxi licences being granted within the St Helens Borough as opposed to other authorities. This will contribute to a greater level of protection for the public as Licensing Services will be responsible for completing checks of more drivers working within the borough.

13.2 Taxi licence applicants can also expect a safer, faster, more streamlined process which will benefit both the trade and passengers through greater choice and greater oversight from the Licensing Authority.

13.3 The proposed changes would result in savings for those seeking to be licensed in St Helens. It is estimated that a new applicant would save significantly on the cost of the training and vehicle testing. This could have a positive impact during the ongoing cost of living crisis and the financial pressures licence holders experience.

13.4 Licenced drivers are self-employed, and the proposals as anticipated will encourage more applicants to licence locally. This would result in more money being spent within the St Helens local economy by utilising local VOSA registered providers and streamlining processes.

## **14. Asset and Property**

14.1 There are no implications arising from this report that relate to asset or property issues.

## **15. Staffing and People Management**

15.1 There are no staffing implications for Licensing Services arising from this report. However, there is likely to be an impact on staffing at Hardshaw Brook Depot in the form of a reduction of one full time employee for those involved in Vehicle Compliance Testing. The Operations service have been made aware of this and will review the staffing structure as appropriate should the volume of work decrease. Consultation will take place with those affected by any proposals and any employees potentially at risk of redundancy will be supported and dealt with in accordance with the Council's policies and procedures.

## **16. Risks**

16.1 The impact of the changes introduced by the Deregulation Act 2015 have been outlined previously to the Committee in the report of 21 February 2024.

16.2 Section 4.2 of this report outlines how the service intends to mitigate the risk relating to vehicle standards by a revised approach delivered by environmental standards compliance checks. In regard to roadworthiness, the DfT Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing Best Practice Guidance sets out that the MOT standard is considered appropriate to ensure the mechanical safety of a vehicle.

16.3 The proposal has also identified a potential risk in a reduction in taxi testing at Hardshaw Brook Depot which may impact staffing and the budget position for this service.

## **17. Policy Framework Implications**

17.1 This report aligns with the Borough Strategy objectives of 'Create safe and strong communities and neighbourhoods for all', 'Be a responsible Council' and 'Support a strong, thriving, inclusive and well-connected local economy'.

## **18. Impact and Opportunities on Localities**

18.1 There are no implications arising from this report which impact on Localities.

## **19. Background Documents**

19.1 Report to Licensing and Environmental Protection Committee – 'Modernisation of Taxi Licensing' – 21 February 2024.

19.2 Statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards  
[Statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

19.3 Equality Impact Assessment - Changes to Taxi Licensing

19.4 Taxi and private hire vehicle best practice guidance

[Taxi and private hire vehicle licensing: best practice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-licensing-best-practice)

## **20. Appendices**

20.1 Appendix 1 – Consultation Responses