

Amendment to Knowledge Test

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|---------------------------------------|---|
| Final Decision-Maker | Licensing Committee |
| Lead Head of Service | John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Community Services |
| Lead Officer and Report Author | Lorraine Neale |
| Classification | Non-exempt |
| Wards affected | All |

Executive Summary

This report proposes certain changes to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Topography Test in order to assist the overall pass rates for applicants.

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to review the knowledge test that new Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Drivers must pass before a licence is granted.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

The Committee agrees to one of the following recommendations:

1. That the pass rate for private hire applicants only be adjusted to a level agreed by the Committee.
2. That the Routes and Street element of the test for private hire applicants only be removed.
3. That both recommendations 1 and 2 be agreed.

Timetable

| Meeting | Date |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Licensing Committee | 15 April 2021 |

Amendment to Knowledge Test

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

| Issue | Implications | Sign-off |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Impact on Corporate Priorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No implications have been identified</i> | Lorraine Neale – Senior Licensing Officer 7.4.21 |
| Cross Cutting Objectives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No implications have been identified</i> | Lorraine Neale – Senior Licensing Officer 7.4.21 |
| Risk Management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No implications have been identified</i> | Lorraine Neale – Senior Licensing Officer 7.4.21 |
| Financial | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>There are no financial implications arising from this report.</i> | Lorraine Neale – Senior Licensing Officer 7.4.21 |
| Staffing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No implications have been identified</i> | Lorraine Neale – Senior Licensing Officer 7.4.21 |
| Legal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>There are no legal implications arising from this report.</i> | Lorraine Neale – Senior Licensing Officer 7.4.21 |
| Privacy and Data Protection | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No implications have been identified</i> | Lorraine Neale – Senior Licensing Officer 7.4.21 |
| Equalities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No implications have been identified.</i> | Lorraine Neale – Senior Licensing Officer 7.4.21 |
| Public Health | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No implications have been identified</i> | Lorraine Neale – Senior Licensing Officer 7.4.21 |
| Crime and Disorder | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No implications have been identified</i> | Lorraine Neale – Senior Licensing Officer 7.4.21 |
| Procurement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>No implications have been identified.</i> | Lorraine Neale – Senior Licensing Officer 7.4.21 |

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 Maidstone’s current Hackney Carriage/Private Hire Topography test format which is a multiple choice test was initially discussed at Licensing Committee in September 2016 and rolled out in July 2017. The Hackney

Carriage and Private Hire Policy (Taxi Policy) outlines the contents of the test and will require amending if any aspect of the test is changed.

2.2 The agreed test is comprised of 63 questions over 10 categories, 54 questions are randomly selected from the question bank and 9 are fixed questions which are made up of 7 compulsory and 2 safeguarding.

2.3 The Council website provides all the information and materials new applicants need to read and research in order to pass the test. The complete bank of questions is also provided online so that candidates know in advance what questions could be asked. The document is attached as Appendix 1.

2.4 The test was subject to amendment in February 2018 after reviewing feedback from applicants and the trade that the test was too difficult. The amendments included reducing the answers from 4 options to 3 increasing the odds of selecting the correct answer. Also the route answers were amended to assist making the correct answer more obvious.

2.5 Since those amendments made in 2018 there does not appear to be any significant improvement to the numbers of applicants passing the test and further thought has been given to adjusting the test further. Currently applicants have three attempts to pass the test, if they are unsuccessful, they must wait 6 months before they have the opportunity to take the test again. Most applicants that have passed the test have done so based on the overall result of all three tests they have taken.

2.6 The table below shows the number of tests that have been taken over the last three years and the average pass mark for each category.

| TOPOGRAPHY TEST | No of Q's | 2020 | | | 2019 | | | 2018 | | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | | HCD | Dual | PH | HCD | Dual | PH | HCD | Dual | PH |
| Test Type | | | | | | | | | | |
| No of Tests | | 4 | 5 | 28 | 16 | 7 | 35 | 9 | 3 | 28 |
| | | | | | | | | | | |
| Category and pass mark | | | | | | | | | | |
| Compulsory (100%) | 7 | 54.2 | 83.3 | 77.4 | 79.7 | 97.6 | 81.4 | 66.7 | 88.9 | 83.9 |
| Safeguarding (100%) | 5 | 70 | 80 | 80.7 | 90.4 | 82.9 | 88 | 75.6 | 100 | 86.1 |
| Generic Policy & Law (80%) | 4 | 60 | 84 | 78.6 | 74.8 | 82.9 | 81.7 | 71.1 | 80 | 80.9 |
| Highway Code (80%) | 5 | 45 | 80 | 75 | 74.8 | 85.7 | 75.4 | 57.8 | 73.3 | 82.2 |
| MBC Policy & Law (80%) | 5 | 65 | 60 | 75.5 | 74.8 | 77.1 | 82.9 | 71.1 | 80 | 82 |
| Places (80%) | 7 | 89.3 | 74.3 | 62.1 | 85.7 | 93.9 | 72 | 82.5 | 100 | 77.2 |
| Routes (80%) | 15 | 46.7 | 56 | 48.1 | 64.4 | 67.6 | 56 | 57 | 64.4 | 56.3 |
| Streets (80%) | 7 | 75 | 68.6 | 66.3 | 82.6 | 89.8 | 73.9 | 76.2 | 76.2 | 73 |
| Numeracy (80%) | 3 | 100 | 100 | 98.8 | 97.1 | 100 | 95.2 | 92.6 | 100 | 98.8 |
| Road Signs (80%) | 5 | 65 | 84 | 77.9 | 91.3 | 91.4 | 81.7 | 82.2 | 73.3 | 81.5 |
| | 63 | | | | | | | | | |

2.7 In comparison the numbers of applicants passed in those same years are 2 in 2018, 5 in 2019 and 1 in 2020.

- 2.8 Licensing have also received correspondence which express the trades concerns on the impact COVID has had on their businesses and the potential future impact in recruiting new drivers, correspondence has been received from J. Iandolo, owner of Express Taxis, Helen Grant on behalf of an anonymous Maidstone Operator and Mark Jones, owner of Sapphire Cars through Ilsa Butler, One Maidstone (Appendix 2). Operators will have lost drivers because of the lack of work and will need to replace some of them when business picks up. Some licensed drivers will return to the trade but others that have found permanent secure work will not.
- 2.9 The concern the trade have is the amount of time it takes for an applicant to become licensed, currently an applicant must pass the knowledge test before they can submit an application to the Licensing Department. Under normal circumstances the tests are held every 3 weeks with the maximum number of candidates tested being 6, which has now increased to 8. Additional tests are arranged if there is an increase in demand. Tests were held in 2020 when the restrictions were lifted on 8,15,22 & 29 September and then reduced to fortnightly on 6 & 20 October and 3 November, the tests were reduced as the demand was not there for weekly tests. The testing was suspended again in November 20 when the new restrictions were brought in.
- 2.10 After reviewing the comments in the correspondence received, it is not proposed to change the test but to adjust it to assist the trade in getting new private hire drivers licensed in a shorter time. The majority of first time applicants are private hire drivers and the argument has always been that private hire drivers are prebooked and can use SatNav or Apps on their phones to get to their destinations. One of the options we can consider is to remove the Routes and Street sections from the private hire test as it is those area that candidates consistently fail on. The sections will remain for the Hackney and Dual test as they are expected to know the area and not rely on technology. This could be implemented for an agreed fixed term and reviewed after 6 or 12 months. Any Private hire drivers that wishes to become a Dual or Hackney driver will be required to take the Routes and Streets test before they can change their badge.
- 2.11 The alternative option is to keep the test as it is and lower the pass mark for the Routes and Streets sections to an agreed percentage for private hire drivers only. We could consider lowering the pass mark for all candidates for all tests. However, a higher standard is generally expected from Hackney and Dual drivers, also a lot of private hire drivers tend to become Dual drivers at a later date, they do quite well with the routes and streets section of the test because they have gained experience and knowledge of the area while working as a private hire driver.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 An alternative option would be to continue to run the test as it is however in order to get new drivers licensed it is evident that the test needs to be adjusted to assist with that.

4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 That the Routes and Streets sections is removed from the private hire test and the impact of the change reviewed in 6 – 12 month. This will be the most beneficial option for the trade and will assist the majority of drivers in passing first time. The Taxi Policy to be amended to reflect the change to private hire driver testing.

5. RISK

- 5.1 Failure to amend the test to assist the trade could result in a shortfall of Maidstone licensed drivers. This could see an increase in out of town drivers being in Maidstone illegally cashing in on the employment gap and ultimately causing enforcement issues for the Licensing Department.

6. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 N/A

7. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 Should Members approve amendments to the knowledge test then some time is required to make the adjustments to the private hire test before any test dates are arranged.

8. REPORT APPENDICES

- 8.1 Appendix 1 - Knowledge test Question Bank.
8.2 Appendix 2 - Correspondence- John Iandolo, Helen Grant & Mark Jones

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None