

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE AFFAIRS AND BUSINESS
TRANSFORMATION**

**DRIVING QUALIFICATIONS FOR NEW (AND EXISTING) HACKNEY
CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE DRIVERS**

Responsible Officer: Tom Keating, Lead Licensing Officer

REASON FOR REPORT

1. Mid Devon District Council requires all new hackney carriage and private hire driver's to complete a Driving Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) Driver Assessment as part of the application process. Existing drivers are sometimes required to take this test if there are concerns about their standard of driving.

The DVSA have recently notified the licensing authority that this test will be withdrawn from 31 December 2016, although it appears from the relevant website that bookings can no longer be made. As a result, the licensing authority needs to research and establish suitable testing alternatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **That all applicants for a hackney carriage / private hire driver licence be required to produce evidence of successful completion of a driving qualification which is included within a list of acceptable qualifications maintained by the Council (replacing the previous requirement of the DVSA taxi driver assessment).**
2. **That authority to establish a list of acceptable qualifications is delegated to the Public Health and Professional Services Manager and the Lead Licensing Officer. This will also include the authority to add, amend and remove qualifications from the list.**

RELATIONSHIP TO CORPORATE PLAN

1. There are no direct links to the Corporate Plan. The licensing process does however contribute to the public safety of our community and visitors to the district.

FINANCIAL, LEGAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLICATIONS

Any financial, legal and/or risk assessment implications are set out below:

Financial	There is no direct expenditure by the Council for these qualifications as the applicant / licence holder is required to arrange and pay for them themselves. However, the options available must not be unreasonably expensive and it is hoped that the alternative options available are similar in cost to the DVSA test that has previously been available.
Legal	None
Risk Assessment	The Council must ensure that licences are only granted (and remain in the possession of) those considered fit and proper. This test contributes to this assessment by ensuring that individuals can drive safely.

CONSULTATION CARRIED OUT WITH:

1. N/A

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Mid Devon District Council currently requires all applicants for new hackney carriage and private hire driver's licences to have completed the Driving & Vehicle Standards Agency Taxi Driving Assessment.
- 1.2 This qualification provides an additional measure in assessing an applicant's standard of driving, beyond merely holding a driving licence. The test essentially helps to ensure that applicants can drive in a manner that is appropriate and safe. Furthermore, should concerns ever arise about the driving ability of an existing licensed driver (i.e. they receive penalty points) the licensing authority could require them to take this test.

2.0 WITHDRAWAL OF QUALIFICATION

- 2.1 On 2 September 2016, the Council received notification from the DVSA that the Taxi Driving Assessment will be withdrawn from 31 December 2016. This is because they intend to focus on their core business of providing standard driving tests. A copy of this notification is attached as Annex 1.
- 2.2 Although the notification states that the qualification will be withdrawn from 31 December 2016, the website for booking these tests already states that '*You can't book a new taxi assessment with DVSA*'. It would appear from speaking to other authorities that some testing stations are still available while others have stopped offering the qualification already.

2.3 On behalf of a number of Councils, the Local Government Association has raised concerns with the Department for Transport over the short period of notice given of this decision. It was initially hoped that this would lead to a temporary extension of the existing qualification, however it does not look like this will now be the case.

2.4 In order to ensure that the licensing process can carry on with as little disruption as possible, especially to new applicants, it is important that alternative options are put in place as soon as possible.

3.0 ALTERNATIVES

3.1 The letter from the DVSA suggests that authorities may want to rely upon alternative qualifications as a replacement for the DVSA assessment, however no providers are specified.

3.2 It is suggested that, in the absence of a single recognised qualification provided by a national government agency, the Council maintains a list of appropriate driving qualifications which it considers to be suitable for licensing purposes. Applicants for new hackney carriage and private hire driver’s licences will then be required to select from this list and pass a relevant qualification as part of the application process. Similarly, those existing drivers required to take a qualification for enforcement purposes can choose from the list.

3.3 It is further suggested that the maintenance of such a list, including the addition and removal of qualifications, be delegated to the Public Health and Professional Services Manager and the Lead Licensing Officer. This will allow the list to be updated faster and help to ensure that in future, delays are kept to a minimum should the qualifications available be altered.

4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 That all applicants for a hackney carriage / private hire driver licence’s be required to produce evidence of successful completion of a driving qualification which is included within a list of acceptable qualifications maintained by the Council (replacing the previous requirement of the DVSA Taxi Driver Assessment).

4.2 That authority to establish a list of acceptable qualifications is delegated to the Public Health and Professional Services Manager and the Licensing Lead Officer. This will also include the authority to add, amend and remove qualifications from the list.

Contact for any more information	Tom Keating, Lead Licensing Officer (4618) Simon Newcombe, Public Health and Prof. Serv. Manager (4615)
Background Papers	Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy 2016 / Correspondence from the DVSA
File Reference	Licensing/Hackney Carriage and Private Hire
Circulation of the Report	Regulatory Committee