



Committee and date  
Strategic Licensing  
Committee.  
  
1<sup>st</sup> December 2011

Item  
  
8  
  
Public

## DRIVERS KNOWLEDGE TEST

### Responsible Officer

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### 1. Summary

All new applicants for a driver's licence are required to take and pass a written knowledge test (taken in English) prior to obtaining a licence. Members requested that a report on the content of the driver's licence knowledge test be considered by the Strategic Licensing Committee.

This report proposes amendments to the current knowledge test, which was produced on the formation of Shropshire Council, to include landmark knowledge and an assessment of their ability to write a receipt in English. The purpose of these amendments is to improve public safety by providing a more rigorous knowledge test.

### 2. Recommendations

That the Committee:

Approve the proposal to amend the Drivers' Knowledge test to:

- a) Expand the local knowledge section of the test and include an additional element to assess the applicant's ability to write a receipt in English. Where an applicant fails the knowledge test three times the application will be refused, subject to the Licensing Officer having authority to permit a further test or tests where s/he considers the circumstances warrant it. Applicants will then only be able to reapply after 12 months.
- b) Charge applicants for any resit tests.

## REPORT

### 3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

Risk:- The amendments to the knowledge test will reduce risks to public safety which could exist if licences are granted to drivers who do not have this knowledge.

Equality Assessment for drivers:- The level of literacy required for the knowledge test is relatively low. It is felt that it is important that drivers can communicate in English if they wish to provide this service. Assistance with tests will be offered for those with difficulties in reading the questions.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

The amendments to the knowledge test will not significantly affect the Council's costs.

#### **5. Background**

5.1 All councils must license taxis and their drivers. In granting a taxi driver's license the council is required to satisfy itself that the applicant is a 'fit and proper' person. This expression is not defined in statute and its interpretation is for each council to decide. Shropshire Council has adopted conditions of fitness that only allow for drivers and vehicles that meet the following criteria:-

- A criminal record check
- A comprehensive knowledge test
- A DVLA driving licence check
- A medical and
- A driving test

5.2 Each Local Authority is able to devise its own knowledge test but the common things found on the syllabus are:-

- a) A list of routes that the taxi driver will be expected to memorise, identifying the roads between the starting point and final destination and naming landmarks along the way.
- b) A list of locations: estates, pubs, train stations etc and the names of the roads these are on.
- c) Taxi Bye-laws and Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle Licence conditions.
- d) Highway code
- e) Disability awareness.

5.3 A number of Local Authorities have extensive tests which consist of 100+ questions and last for two and a half hours whilst others do not have any knowledge test requirement.

5.4 The Shropshire knowledge test presently addresses the following areas, and the pass marks for each is given in brackets. There is a time limit of 45 minutes for the test.

- a) A simple knowledge test of the area, (3 out of 4 = 75%)
- b) the Council's conditions of licenses and some questions assessing the numeracy ability of the applicant (9 out of 13 = 70%)
- c) the highway code traffic law (7 out of 10 = 70%)

The present pass mark therefore being 19 out of 27 = 70%

- 5.5 Shropshire Council issues joint driver badges rather than a separate Hackney Carriage Driver's badge and/or a Private Hire Vehicle Driver's badge. The knowledge test therefore needs to be suitable for all drivers without being unnecessarily burdensome for private hire vehicle drivers. The test will be set at a standard suitable for Private Hire Drivers.
- 5.6 As Hackney Carriage drivers provide a public service from taxi ranks and can work alone, reliant solely on the instructions of the passenger, it is generally recognised that they may be required to take a comparatively stringent knowledge test to private hire vehicle drivers. This requirement is less essential for private hire drivers as not only are they pre-booked but also have contact with an Operator, who would be available to assist with particular problems.
- 5.7 Landmark knowledge is not presently included in the test and therefore there is no check on the applicant to ensure that they have a good understanding of the area, landmarks and places of interest.
- 5.8 It is proposed that the knowledge test is amended to include more questions on the local area. A candidate will be expected to have knowledge of the Shropshire Council area including the towns and main roads and be able to identify places of interest.

#### ENGLISH SPEAKING

- 5.9 The DVLA makes provision for applicants sitting their driving theory test who are either dyslexic, have reading difficulties, or whose first language is not English. This is done by providing voiceover in either English or their native language.
- 5.10 The drivers knowledge test is provided only in English to ensure that applicants have an acceptable understanding of English. Where applicants have a reading difficulty an oral test will be given by a Licensing Officer which is again given in English to those who request it.
- 5.11 It is proposed to also include an element in the test to assess the applicants ability to write English to an acceptable level by requiring the applicant to write a receipt for a customer. This element is particularly relevant to private hire drivers as they do not have meters that provide automated receipts.
- 5.12 It is to be noted that the Licensing Department have received no complaints in 2011 regarding drivers lack of local knowledge or ability to speak English, however there have been a number of complaints regarding their standard of driving.

### 5.13 PASS MARK AND RETEST FEES

It is proposed that the type and number of questions on the knowledge test be increased along with a higher pass rate for certain elements of the test and where an applicant fails the knowledge test three times the application will be refused. The later condition being subject to the discretion of the Licensing Officer where he/she considers the circumstances warrant it. The proposals are summarised in the following chart with the current arrangements for comparison.

<b>Current Criteria</b>	<b>Current Pass Mark</b>	<b>Proposed Criteria</b>	<b>Proposed Pass Mark</b>
A simple knowledge test of the area	3 out of 4 (75%)	Routes and Locations	10 out of 12 (83%)
The Council's conditions of licences and some questions assessing the numeracy ability of the applicant	9 out of 13 (70%)	The Council's conditions of licenses  Numeracy	9 out of 12 (75%)  5 out of 6 (83%)
The Highway Code traffic law	7 out of 10 (70%)	Highway Code	8 out of 10 (80%)
Overall pass mark	19 out of 27 (70%)	Overall pass mark	32 out of 40 (80%)

5.15 It is proposed to charge a fee of £20.00 for any resit, for the administration of each test. This cost will need to be reassessed each year in line with current Council procedure.

## 6. Conclusions

The knowledge test can be amended to respond to concerns that the test needs to be more rigorous. In order to ensure that the drivers being licensed with Shropshire Council have all the required skills and knowledge to provide this service, the knowledge test can be expanded to test local knowledge and the ability to write a receipt. It is also proposed to limit the number of resits.

### **List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

#### **Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)**

Cllr Steve Charmley

#### **Local Member**

Covers all areas of Shropshire

#### **Appendices**

None