

AGENDA ITEM: 6

SUMMARY



Report for:	Licensing Health & Safety Enforcement Committee
Date of meeting:	27th November 2012
PART:	1
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	Driver Licence Verification Checks
Contact:	Ross Hill – Licensing Team Leader, Legal Governance
Purpose of report:	To review the use of the DVLA driver licence verification service for taxi driver licence applicants, and propose use of an alternative service
Recommendations	To require applicants for taxi driver licences to undergo a driving licence verification check through an appropriate agency selected by the council (set out in full at section 4)
Corporate objectives:	Dacorum Delivers <ul style="list-style-type: none">The proposal should see this aspect of the current taxi driver application process resolved much quicker and with greater reliability than is currently the case.
Implications:	<u>Financial</u> The proposed check is slightly more expensive than the current option. It is proposed to continue to recharge the cost of the check to applicants as part of the licence application fee. <u>Value for Money</u> Officers believe that the faster response times and the greater level of support offered justify the increased cost.
Risk Implications	No new implications arise as a result of this proposal.
Equalities Implications	No new implications arise as a result of this proposal.

Health And Safety Implications	No new implications arise as a result of this proposal.
Consultees:	n/a
Background papers:	
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. At a meeting on the 25th November 2008, the Licensing Health & Safety Enforcement Sub-Committee resolved to introduce a DVLA Driving Licence check, to be carried out on all applicants for private hire and hackney carriage driver licences (both on first application and on renewal), with effect from the 1st February 2009.
- 1.2. The check is currently carried out directly through the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). Applicants are required to complete a data protection mandate, permitting the release of their data. This is then posted to DVLA, who return a printout listing the subject's driving entitlement, licence details, and where applicable, disqualifications or endorsements following offences. Each such check incurs a cost of £5.00, which is recharged in full to applicants.
- 1.3. The printout is matched against the details shown on the driving licence produced by applicants at the time of application, and prevents the fraudulent use of forged, superseded or unendorsed licences in connection with applications.
- 1.4. Since the Council agreed terms with DVLA and commenced use of this system, there has been a steady decline in response times for the return of driver's information, with many checks now taking more than 6 weeks to be returned, leading to considerable delays in the determination of applications for licences. In addition, the level of support offered as part of the service has also decreased – both a fax service for faster responses, and a dedicated telephone enquiry line for resolving issues have recently been discontinued.

2. ALTERNATIVE SERVICES

- 2.1. In recent years a number of commercial companies have begun offering similar services to that provided by DVLA. Although aimed primarily at companies operating vehicle fleets, these services are also used by a number of councils as a direct replacement for the DVLA service. The companies providing these services generally have direct access to the DVLA databases through commercial data links, the costs of which are prohibitive to organisations carrying out a comparatively small number of checks. This does however mean that they can provide electronic access to

driver records in a much quicker time period than the DVLA postal service supports, with data generally being returned via a secure web interface.

- 2.2. It is therefore proposed to discontinue use of the DVLA postal-based system, and switch to an alternative electronic-based system from a commercial provider. Although these generally incur a slightly higher cost, they can be resolved in a much shorter time (indications are that most enquiries are answered within 3 working days), and offer the support services and query resolution that have now been discontinued by DVLA. The switch to an electronic service would also greatly support the current work to move council services to a paperless basis.
- 2.3. The matter has been returned to the Committee as the previous resolution explicitly referred to the DVLA service. If the Committee are minded to accept the proposal, it is suggested that a generic resolution which does not refer to a specific provider is passed. Officers will commit to undertaking a regular review of service providers to ensure that the provider remains the most cost-effective and adheres to agreed service levels.

3. OPTIONS

- 3.1. Discontinuing use of a verification service altogether may expose the Council to fraudulent use of licences as described in paragraph 1.3, potentially putting the public at risk. For this reason, the use of a licence verification service remains highly recommended.
- 3.2. Officers have approached three companies about the service they provide, and believe that the Data Check service provided by Intelligent Data Systems represents the preferred option based on ease of use, support and pricing. Checks carried out via this service would incur a cost of £5.75 (excl VAT).
- 3.3. At present, a single check is undertaken on receipt of an application, with licensed drivers being required to declare any subsequent disqualifications or motoring endorsements during the validity period of their licence under a licence condition. One provider suggested that carrying out annual checks during the validity of a licence would offer an additional degree of protection to the council and the public, by ensuring that unreported disqualifications and endorsements were discovered and appropriate action taken prior to the next renewal. While desirable, it must be pointed out that following a recent case considered by the Sub-Committee and discussed amongst the trade a number of drivers have come forward to declare motoring offences, suggesting a lack of awareness of the declaration requirement rather than any meaningful intent to deceive the council. Annual checks would result in much higher costs, both in terms of payments to the service provider and officer time to inspect and process the results of such checks.
- 3.4. Officers therefore recommend that at this time, the frequency of checks is kept at on application only, with increased publicity to be carried out about the need to report convictions and offences as they occur. Officers will monitor this situation, with a view to returning this matter to committee for reconsideration if it transpires that a significant proportion of motoring offences are not being declared.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1. That, with effect from the 1st January 2013, any applicant for a private hire or hackney carriage driver licence, both on first application and on renewal, shall be required to undergo a driving licence verification check, carried out through the council by an appropriate verification agency. Applicants must give consent to the release of driving licence data as a prerequisite to the consideration of an application;
- 4.2. That officers shall periodically review the performance of the verification company providing this service, considering performance against agreed service levels and pricing in comparison to other service providers;
- 4.3. That the cost of the driving licence verification check be recharged in full to applicants;
- 4.4. That the preceding paragraphs shall supersede the resolution of the Licensing Health & Safety Enforcement Sub-Committee on the 25th November 2008 in respect of DVLA checks.