



## AGENDA ITEM: 7

Report for:	Licensing and Health & Safety Enforcement Committee
Date of meeting:	20 September 2016
PART:	I
If Part II, reason:	

Title of report:	<b>Driving qualifications for new taxi/PH drivers</b>
Contact:	Ross Hill – Licensing Team Leader, Legal Governance
Purpose of report:	As a result of the withdrawal of the driving qualification currently required by the Council for all new hackney carriage and private hire drivers, to establish a list of suitable alternative qualifications.
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That all candidates for the council's taxi and private hire driver knowledge test shall be required to produce evidence of successful completion of an advanced driving qualification included on a list of acceptable qualifications maintained by the Council as a component of successful completion of the test (replacing a previous requirement for the DSA taxi driver assessment); and</li> <li>2. That authority to add, amend or remove qualifications from that list be delegated to the Licensing Team Leader and the Solicitor to the Council.</li> </ol>
Corporate objectives:	<p>Safe and Clean Environment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a clean and safe environment</li> </ul>
Implications:	<p><u>Financial</u> There is no direct expenditure by the Council on these qualifications.</p> <p><u>Value for Money</u> The current DSA qualification costs applicants £79.66. By establishing a list of acceptable qualifications, it is envisaged that a range of priced qualifications will be included.</p> <p><u>Risk / Community Impact / Health And Safety Implications</u> None</p>
Consultees:	n/a

Background papers:	n/a
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. At a meeting on the 26<sup>th</sup> November 2013, the Licensing and Health & Safety Enforcement Committee resolved that, from the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2014, all applicants for new hackney carriage and private hire driver's licences must have completed the Driving Standards Agency's taxi driving qualification, to provide assurance as to their driving ability. Prior to the award of this qualification, drivers are assessed by a DSA driving examiner during a practical driving test, during which they are graded on their safe driving skills, ability to safely perform manoeuvres common to taxi driving including identifying safe pick-up/drop-off locations, and legal theory knowledge.
- 1.2. The Committee agreed that requiring a higher-level driving qualification than merely holding a car driving licence would be desirable in the interests of protecting the public, and that this requirement should therefore form part of the 'fit and proper person' determination that the Council must make prior to granting a driver's licence.
- 1.3. The Driving Standards Agency has since been merged into the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA), and the assessment now bears the new agency's name.

## 2. WITHDRAWAL OF QUALIFICATION

- 2.1. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2016, the Council received notification from DVSA that the taxi driving qualification was to be withdrawn from the end of 2016, as the agency intends to focus on its core business of providing standard car driving tests to reduce current waiting times. A copy of this notification is attached at Annex A.
- 2.2. Some confusion appears to have arisen around this announcement as a number of DVSA test centres have already ceased to offer any further test appointments for the taxi qualification, and the few remaining appointments are being taken up fast. At the time of writing (8<sup>th</sup> September), the situation is as follows:

Fully booked / no new appointments available	Test appointments still available (current earliest date)
St Albans Watford Luton Borehamwood Aylesbury Hendon Cardington Bishops Stortford	Barnet (27/10/2016) Stevenage (14/11/2016) High Wycombe (14/11/2016) Hayes (15/11/2016) Slough (18/11/2016) Letchworth (10/11/2016) Enfield (31/10/2016) Bletchley (02/12/2016) Isleworth (04/11/2016) Ashford, Middlesex (04/11/2016) Chertsey (09/11/2016) Tolworth (02/11/2016)

- 2.3. On behalf of numerous councils, the Local Government Association have raised concerns with the Department for Transport over the short notice given of this decision.
- 2.4. The apparent-immediate withdrawal of the taxi qualification from many local test centres could present a barrier to applicants wishing to become taxi or private hire drivers. If the Council is to retain the requirement that applicants for new hackney carriage and private hire driver's licences, it will be necessary to put in place alternate requirements as soon as possible.

### **3. ALTERNATIVES**

- 3.1. The DVSA's letter suggests that licensing authorities may wish to rely upon alternative qualifications as a replacement for the DVSA assessment. However, no providers are specified nor suggested by DVSA.
- 3.2. Prior to receipt of notification, officers had begun looking at a small number of alternate providers of driving assessments of a type suitable for taxi drivers and licensing purposes, as a result of growing concerns about lengthening waiting times for the DVSA tests. Possible providers include the Institute of Advanced Motorists, advanced driving instructors, and road safety charities. Officers intend to meet with a number of providers in the coming weeks to discuss the courses they provide.
- 3.3. It is suggested that, in the absence of a single recognised qualification provided by a national government agency, the Council maintains a short list of advanced driving qualifications which it considers suitable for licensing purposes; and that all applicants for new hackney carriage and private hire driver's licences be required to hold one of these qualifications prior to being considered for a first licence. This requirement shall additionally apply to any previously-licensed driver who has not been licensed by the Council within the last 12 months, as is the case at present.
- 3.4. It is further suggested that the maintenance of such a list, including addition and removal of qualifications, be delegated to the Licensing Team Leader and the Solicitor to the Council. This will allow for faster maintenance of the list if suitable new qualifications are identified or if concerns arise around a qualification previously listed, as opposed to repeatedly bringing reports to the Committee. In approving any courses officers would follow the Council's procurement standing orders.
- 3.5. When assessing qualifications for suitability, it is suggested that the existing DVSA test be used as a benchmark, and courses only be approved if they include content of a similar level of ability and difficulty, and that the DVSA qualification be included on the list, in case any future applicants have already undertaken that particular assessment.

### **4. RECOMMENDATION**

- 4.1. That all candidates for the council's taxi and private hire driver knowledge test shall be required to produce evidence of successful completion of an advanced driving qualification included on a list of acceptable qualifications maintained by the Council as a component of successful completion of the test (replacing a previous requirement for the DSA taxi driver assessment); and
- 4.2. That authority to add, amend or remove qualifications from that list be delegated to the Licensing Team Leader and the Solicitor to the Council.

## Annex A – Letter from DVSA



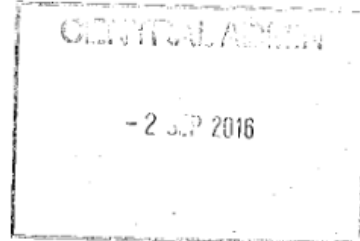
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31 August 2016

### **DVSA Taxi Driver Assessments**

DVSA (and previously DSA) have been conducting Taxi Driver Assessments for participating Local Authorities since 1999. Demand has increased over the years, with a throughput in 2015-16 of approximately 23,000 and a forecast of 28,000 for the business year 2017-18.

These assessments now require considerable examiner resource, at a time when the demand for statutory tests is at an all-time high. The Agency is under pressure to reduce car test waiting times and in order to achieve this, we need to prioritise our activities.

Regrettably, a decision has been made to withdraw the provision of Taxi Assessments with effect from 31 December 2016. We understand that this will be a disappointment and inconvenience to those Local Authorities who currently require their taxi drivers to pass the DVSA assessment.

The Agency also recognises the road safety benefits of such an assessment; therefore, we would point out that there are potential providers such as road safety charities and Driving Instructor representative bodies, who may be interested in providing an alternative service. Details of these organisations can be easily obtained by submitting a general internet search.

Yours faithfully

**Neil Wilson**  
Head of Driver and Driver Training Policy

Safety Standards Service