

CORONAVIRUS SERVICE UPDATE

Executive Summary

As a result of the Covid19 Pandemic it has not been possible for many licence holders to complete such requirements as the BTEC or the Operators Knowledge Test and so extensions to these requirements should be formally agreed.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That

- (i) The deadline for existing drivers to complete the BTEC (or equivalent) be extended to the 31st of March 2023, and
- (iii) The implementation of the requirement for Operators to complete their Knowledge Tests before renewal be delayed until the 31st of March 2022.

The Committee has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

Background Papers: None.

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 On the 8th of February 2018 a proposal was passed at Full Council (having already been to Licensing Committee) to introduce a requirement for all licensed drivers to undertake and achieve the nationally recognised qualification of a Level 2 Certificate in Introduction to the Role of the Professional Taxi and Private Hire Drive (or similar alternative).
- 1.2 In order to bring this about fairly, existing licensed drivers were given three years from the date of implementation in which to complete the course, leading to a deadline of 31 March 2021.
- 1.3 On the 8th of October 2019, a decision was made at Licensing Committee to introduce the requirement for all Private Hire Operators to take and pass a Knowledge Test.
- 1.4 In order to bring this about fairly, existing Operators would be required to complete the Knowledge Test prior to being reissued a licence.
- 1.5 There are currently 622 licenced Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Drivers in the Borough. Of these 622, only 284 have completed the course – despite being given three years in which to complete it – meaning a total of 338 drivers have not completed the course.

2.0 Coronavirus

- 2.1 As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic there has been much disruption – resulting in businesses closing down or temporarily ceasing trading, and increased awareness of the importance of social distancing measures.
- 2.2 Consequently it has not been possible for drivers to get the BTEC (or alternative) completed, nor have Operators been able to carry out the Knowledge Tests prior to the renewal.
- 2.3 As a temporary measure the Licensing Authority has allowed Operators who have not completed the Knowledge Test to renew regardless, as we feel it would be unfair and not in the public interest at this time to prevent them from working through no fault of their own.
- 2.4 The Licensing Authority also is aware that the deadline for the BTEC completion is fast approaching and the last year has been a difficult time for drivers.

3.0 Proposal

- 3.1 The proposal therefore is to extend the requirement to complete the BTEC by two years, which would give the existing drivers until the 31st of March 2023 in which to finish it by.
- 3.2 In our experience, many of the drivers will leave it to the absolute last minute to get these tests completed (as evidenced not just by the number of drivers who have not yet completed it in the last three years, but also from looking at the amount of work required to get drivers to complete the free CSE training) It is therefore important not to extend it any further than that as it will not benefit the drivers or the travelling public. The department feels that two years would be fair on the grounds that it is not merely a year that the drivers have lost as a result of Covid, but also many have suffered financially and this should sufficient time to complete the course.
- 3.3 The Operators Knowledge Test as a requirement should be extended by one year so that its implementation and requirement will take place from the 31st of March 2022. The Operators test is a lot easier to book and complete than the BTEC and should present less of a struggle for the Operators.

4.0 Implications

Financial

4.1 There are no financial implications to this proposal.

Human Resource/Training and Development

4.2 There are no HR/Training implications to this proposal.

Community Safety

4.3 The aims of the BTEC and Operators Knowledge Test are aimed to improve professionalism and thus enforce public safety – however the Department must be flexible and realistic during this unprecedented time.

Risk Management

4.4 There are no Risk Management implications to this proposal.

Sustainability

4.5 There are no Sustainability implications to this proposal.

Equalities

4.6 There are no Equalities implications to this proposal.

Safeguarding

4.7 As the BTEC and the Operators Knowledge Test both raise standards in relation to safeguarding, the delay of the full implementation of these requirements may affect drivers attitudes or understanding of safeguarding. .

REPORT ENDS