

1 February 2023		ITEM: 7
Licensing Committee		
Taxi Licensing Policy- Language Proficiency Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key	
Report of: Paul Adams, Licensing Manager		
Accountable Assistant Director: Leigh Nicholson, Assistant Director Planning, Transport and Public Protection		
Accountable Director: Mark Bradbury, Interim Director of Place		
This report is: Public		

Executive Summary

The Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy came into effect on the 1 October 2022. The policy contains a language proficiency requirement. This report seeks to amend the requirement to include an additional in-house assessment. This is in response to difficulties of applicants obtaining documentary evidence of other assessment options.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1. That the Licensing Committee agrees to amend Appendix E of the Council's Taxi Licensing Policy, as detailed in Appendix 1 of this report.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 The Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy came into effect on the 1 October 2022. The policy contains a requirement for an applicant for a driver's licence to meet a language proficiency requirement.

2.2 To meet the requirement under the policy a driver must provide documentary evidence of either:

- a qualification (whether or not the qualification was obtained in the United Kingdom) on the basis of which the Council is satisfied that the applicant's level of proficiency in the English language is equivalent to level B1 or above on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), or

- a certificate from one of the Council's Secure English Language Test (SELT) providers confirming the applicant's level of proficiency in the English language is at level B1 on the CEFR.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 In implementing the policy, it has quickly become apparent that it is difficult for many applicants to evidence that they meet the language proficiency requirements. The main issue is applicants locating qualification certificates that could demonstrate a relevant qualification, particularly where they were taken decades ago. Whilst replacement certificates are possible to obtain from examining boards, the cost of doing so is between £50 and £100 and is taking many weeks, if not longer, to obtain.
- 3.2 The additional option of obtaining a Secure English Language Test (SELT), was included as an alternative assessment process for anyone that had not sat any form of educational exam in any subject that had been taught in English. The SELT is also used with visa or citizenship applications. These tests cost in the region of £150.
- 3.3 Because of the potential cost and delays in obtaining certification, we have developed an alternative option, namely an English comprehension assessment as a supplementary section of the existing Knowledge Test. This can be sat separately from the full test or as part of the full test for new applicants, where certification cannot easily be provided. There would be no additional charge for this test.
- 3.4 Appendix E of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy has been revised to include the option of an English comprehension assessment as a supplementary section of the Knowledge Test. The revised policy appendix is attached as **Appendix 1**.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 The suggested Policy amendments to include the new assessment option for language proficiency needs to be agreed by this committee.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 There has been no consultation on this amendment to the policy. The amendment has arisen following feedback from applicants following the policy implementation.

6. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 6.1 None.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Laura Last**
Senior Management Accountant.

There are no financial implications for Thurrock Council.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Simon Scrowther**
Principal Lawyer

The granting of licences is a legal function of the Authority and the introduction of the national standards by the Department of Transport must be applied to the Council's policies and procedures unless there is good reason not to do so. This amendment to the policy is still in line with those standards.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**
Team Manager, Community Development and Equalities

This revision of the policy does ensure that that all applicants have equal opportunity to prove their language proficiency, regardless of how long it has been since they were in education.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, and Impact on Looked After Children

- None

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Appendix E of the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy.

Report Author:

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