

## RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO LICENSING COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 7

meeting date: 29 NOVEMBER 2011  
 title: STEERING TO SUCCESS COURSE AND KNOWLEDGE TEST  
 submitted by: HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES  
 principal author: DIANE RICE

### 1 PURPOSE

1.1 To inform Committee about the way in which the Steering to Success and Knowledge test elements of the application process are working, and to seek Committee's views as to whether or not any changes should be made.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Council Ambitions - }
  - Community Objectives - }
  - Corporate Priorities - }
  - Other Considerations - }
- The Council aims to be a well managed Council. Clear and effective procedures contribute to this objective.

### 2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The requirement to pass the Steering to Success course and Knowledge test forms part of the application process and applies to both private hire and hackney drivers licences.

2.2 Hackney drivers are not allowed to obtain a licence until they have completed both courses, whereas private hire drivers are allowed to have a six month licence before completing Steering to Success course and passing the Knowledge test.

2.3 The Hackney Association have, in the past, raised the question as to whether or not it is equitable for private hire drivers to be able to obtain a licence without having to pass the knowledge test.

2.4 As the Steering to Success and Knowledge tests are central to the way in which the Council satisfies itself that the applicant is a fit and proper person, it is questionable whether it is appropriate to make a distinction between the two types of licence. The rationale for this historically has been the fact that private hire drivers have the ability to contact their operator should they have any difficulty finding a property, (in terms of the knowledge test) or require any advice about proper procedures and behaviour (in the case of matters covered by the Steering to Success course.

2.5 There is also some anecdotal evidence to suggest that licence holders obtain a licence in the period running up to Christmas and New Year to take advantage of the work available over the festive season without intending to continue in the Council's area and obtaining the necessary level of skill.

2.6 In order to ascertain the scale of the problem and to determine whether or not the Christmas period is particularly attractive to 'cone off drivers' some information has been obtained relating to single six month licences issued since February 2008, ie licences which were not converted to full licences.

2.7 The information obtained is interesting and shows the following:

Number of licences issued 77

Number of licence holders 74 (3 drivers had 2 x 6 month licences)

Number of the above licences which would cover the Christmas and New Year period 35

Number of the above which did not cover Christmas and New Year 42

Number issued per year:

2008 - 18

2009 - 22

2010 - 22

2011 - to date 15

These figures should be considered in context, namely the number of private hire and hackney drivers licences issued by the Council, eg the Council currently has 125 licensed private hire drivers and 62 licensed hackney drivers.

### 3 ISSUES

3.1 Committee will recall that when this requirement was introduced, the instruction from Committee was that the introduction should be pragmatic until the availability of college courses had synchronised with the increased number of applicants resulting from this Council adopting the Steering to Success course as part of its application procedure.

3.3 The Electoral and Licensing Officer is satisfied that there are now sufficient courses available to accommodate applicants for licences with Ribble Valley Borough Council. A sign has recently been placed in reception to inform licence holders that there will be no exception to the requirement that they complete the Steering to Success course within six months of being granted a licence, ie the licence will not be renewed until they have completed the course. The same rule applies to the Knowledge test.

3.4 In relation to the Knowledge test, the applicant is given four attempts at either a written or verbal test prior to the six month period expiring. Once the six month period has expired no other licence will be issued until the test has been completed.

3.5 We regularly receive requests to afford measure of flexibility to licence holders relating to the Steering to Success, either because the applicant has, perhaps several years prior to making his current application, worked as a taxi or private hire driver or because of individual circumstances.

3.6 The purpose of this report is to afford Committee an opportunity to consider the current arrangements and if Committee consider these arrangements are inappropriate to suggest alternatives, which could form the basis of consultation with licence holders.

3.7 Similarly, Committee Members may wish to consider whether the current practice of issuing a six month licence to private hire drivers before they complete the

course/pass the test meets the Council's obligation to be satisfied that the applicant is a fit and proper person.

- 3.8 In the event that Members are dissatisfied with the current arrangements, then it would be necessary to consult licence holders their views on any proposed changes. Members could adopt different arrangements for the 2 types of test (ie allow a six month licence after the Steering to Success course has been completed but prior to passing the Knowledge test).
- 3.9 The information provided is extracted from the Council's computer system, Members should, when considering the information at 2.7, note that the fact that licence holders have not gone on to renew their licence, does not in itself, indicate what their intention was when they took out the licence. Some of the licence holders may have gone on to hold hackney licences. Nor is there any evidence to suggest that new drivers give rise to complaints in any greater numbers than established drivers.

#### 4 RISK ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications
- Resources – None.
  - Technical, Environmental and Legal – Any changes would have to be considered fully after consultation with licence holders.
  - Political – None.
  - Reputation – None.

#### 5 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

- 5.1 Consider the current arrangements for the Steering to Success course and consider whether or not these should be revised to those current arrangements.
- 5.2 Consider the current arrangements for the Knowledge test and consider whether or not these should be revised.
- 5.3 Consider whether Members wish to consult licence holders about possible changes to the six month licence.

HEAD OF LEGAL AND DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

For further information please ask for Diane Rice, extension 4418.