

Licensing Committee

11 October 2023

Taxi Licensing Policy - Restricted Licences for School Transport

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr L Beddow, Culture and Communities

Local Councillor(s): All Cllrs

Executive Director: J Sellgren, Executive Director of Place

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Report Status: Public

Brief Summary: To consider whether to allow Restricted Licences for school contract drivers with a reduced application process and restrictions on licence use.

Recommendation: To adopt a scheme that allows a school contract provider to badge drivers under a Restricted Licence where they solely undertake school contract work.

Reason for Recommendation: To allow for a quicker turn around for school contract drivers who fulfil the Council Contracts to transport children to school or other centres.

1. Background

- 1.1 A request has been received from one of the largest school transport providers to consider the issuing of Restricted Licences for private hire drivers who solely do school runs in licensed private hire vehicles.
- 1.2 Restricted Licences are used in some authorities to make it easier to licence drivers who do only school runs. Some councils also issue restricted vehicle licences for the vehicles that are only used for school transport.
- 1.3 It is vital to ensure that the safety of our most vulnerable passengers is not compromised by this scheme in any measure.

2. **Other Council Schemes**

- 2.1 After consulting with 24x7 Ltd who requested that this was considered, the names of the councils they had current schemes with were requested. These councils were contacted for details of the schemes they ran for this purpose.
- 2.2 Oldham Council indicated that they have removed some of the requirements from the application process and issue different badges to school contract drivers.
- 2.3 Blaby District Council told officers that they removed the requirement to undertake a knowledge test and require proof that the driver will only be undertaking school contract work. They also indicated there had been a lot of interest in their scheme from operators.
- 2.4 Derbyshire Dales District Council said that they had a system whereby the operator carried out certain checks rather than the Council, they also apply a Restricted Licence for the vehicles being used, whereby the plates were not displayed and six-monthly checks on the vehicle were not required. The drivers still need to sit a knowledge test, but the operator is responsible for completing the DBS check and the medical checks.
- 2.5 The Dorset School Service Manager for Travel Operations was also contacted for what his thoughts on such a scheme would be. He indicated that anything that could streamline the process would be a benefit as long as it doesn't compromise the assessment of a driver's suitability for school work in any way.

3. **Current Requirements for Private Hire Drivers**

- 3.1 As per the Dorset Council Taxi Licensing Policy (the Policy) checks are made on the applicants: -
 - a) Right to work in the UK
 - b) DVLA driving licence record
 - c) Criminal record
 - d) Medical history
 - e) Driving ability
 - f) Ability to speak and understand English
 - g) Knowledge of the law and the DC Taxi Policy
 - h) Knowledge of the area
 - i) Understanding and awareness of CSE
 - j) Tax awareness.
- 3.2 For vehicles, checks are made on the V5 Registered Keeper Document, insurance, and the vehicles are inspected at an approved garage at first licence and at six months if they are more than a year old.

4. Proposal

- 4.1 Officers consider that it would be a mistake to reduce any safety checks for drivers or vehicles as they are transporting children to school. The potential areas however where officers believe relief could be given is in the requirement to undertake a Knowledge and Suitability Check and the Driving Assessment.
- 4.2 A version of the knowledge test could be supplied to a company that solely does school contract work, focussing on what their drivers need to know. That company could facilitate the test to make sure their drivers have a clear understanding of the law relating to Private Hire. There would be no requirement for a geography element of the test to be undertaken as drivers will only be undertaking set routes. The driving assessment could also potentially be undertaken by the employer directly rather than as a third party assessor as any complaints about a driver can be more easily made with a contractor.

5. Benefits and Risks

- 5.1 The potential benefits to a school contractor would be that they can administer the tests in their own time, they can focus on their routes and requirements for passenger safety/comfort. There would also be a cost benefit as they would not have to pay for the driving assessment with current providers.
- 5.2 There is a risk is that Dorset Council may see an increase by other operators who may seek to take advantage of a simpler licence regime. This would however be mitigated by restricting it only to companies who solely do school contract work within the Dorset Council area.
- 5.3 If badges are subject to a reduced fee there is a risk that drivers not undertaking school contracts may claim they will be unable to take advantage of the reduced fee. This could be avoided by charging the same amount for the badge, and if the school contract driver then wanted to undertake ordinary private hire work they would be required to undertake a Council run knowledge and suitability test and a driving assessment.
- 5.4 Restricted driver badges would be produced in a different colour to full private hire badges red and conditions would be attached to their licences to restrict them to undertaking school contract work only.
- 5.5 The restricted licences would only be available to operators under a service level agreement which can be withdrawn if a licensed driver is found to be undertaking private hire work.
- 5.6 Drivers could also be required to sign a declaration that they understand if they wish to transfer to a full licence they will need to undertake a knowledge test and take a driving assessment.

6. Officers are not currently proposing to make any changes to the vehicle licensing regime but operators could be required to mark the vehicles as “School Contract Only” or other suitable wording under the service level agreement.

7. **Financial Implications**

If the fee were to remain the same there would be no financial risk to the Council.

8. **Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**

None

9. **Well-being and Health Implications**

None

10. **Other Implications**

None

11. **Risk Assessment**

HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Low
Residual Risk: Low

12. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

N/A

13. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Dorset Council Taxi Licensing Policy

Background Papers

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976