

Agenda Item No: 6 **Report No:** 134/13
Report Title: Implementation of Computer-Based Taxi Knowledge Test
Report To: Licensing Committee **Date:** 30 August 2013
Cabinet Member: Cllr Nicholson
Ward(s) Affected: All
Report By: Director of Planning & Environmental Services
Contact Officers: Ian Kedge, Head of Environmental Health,
ian.kege@lewes.gov.uk 01273 484354
Robbie Clark, Hackney Carriage Licensing Officer
Robbie.clark@lewes.govuk – 01273 484276

Purpose of Report:

To seek approval to implement a computer based knowledge test for all new Hackney Carriage Private Hire licence applicants.

Officers Recommendation:

The Committee is recommended to approve the electronic knowledge test.

1 Reasons for Recommendations

It is anticipated that with imminent changes to personnel within the taxi licensing department a saving of officer hours is required. This new style of testing will facilitate this by reducing the time spent invigilating and marking tests and will also bring a broader selection of question to applicants.

2 Background Information

- 2.1** The current knowledge test for all new applicants for a Hackney Carriage/Private Hire Driver Licence was first introduced in 2002.
- 2.2** The current test consists of a written paper with a maximum of 100 marks with applicants having to gain a minimum of 85 to pass.
- 2.3** The test for Hackney Carriage applicants is split into four sections of questions which are:
 - 2.3.1** Routes within the four main towns of the district, Lewes, Seaford, Newhaven and Peacehaven.

- 2.3.2** The location of places of interest within the district, which also includes public houses.
- 2.3.3** A selection of questions on our current licensing conditions.
- 2.3.4** A selection of questions on periods of exclusion from holding a licence after disqualification/conviction at Court.
- 2.4** Under the current system the knowledge test is held on the last Tuesday of each month and this requires a member of staff to oversee the test which can last anything up to two hours.
- 2.5** This is then followed by each individual paper being marked and the results being telephoned through to each applicant. Depending on the number of applicants each month will obviously vary in the time element required.
- 2.6** Currently an applicant is given a pack which contains all the information required to pass the test. However it is possible for an applicant to learn the current test 'parrot fashion' to enable them to pass. It is now believed by the officers that a fairer and a more comprehensive package of questions, randomly selected, should be asked of applicants.

3 Proposal

- 3.1** Officers have recently been made aware of a knowledge based system developed by a company, Diamond.
- 3.2** At present in Sussex Crawley Borough Council have this system in place and their licensing team are very impressed with what the system can do and the results it has generated. It has proved to be a very effective tool in saving officer time and being a fairer and more objective way of testing.
- 3.3** Other Local Authorities, Brighton and Hove and Rother are also interested in adopting this system for their own knowledge tests.
- 3.4** On Tuesday 23 July 2013 a representative from Diamond came to Fort Road, Newhaven to demonstrate the knowledge system to officers.
- 3.5** The software can be loaded onto as many PCs or laptops as is required.
- 3.6** Questions are randomly generated from a pool of questions for each applicant so no two set of test questions will be the same.
- 3.7** The system gives the Council the opportunity to choose as many different categories as required and to select from which categories questions are asked.
- 3.8** Questions may include visual aids such as photographs of local places of interest, Highway Code symbols etc.
- 3.9** The test has the ability to be time controlled if required and will count down remaining time allocated and give warnings as to time remaining as desired.

3.10 Once the test is completed the candidate will know instantly whether they have passed as it will be automatically marked.

3.11 There is an instant ability to print a pass certificate if required.

3.12 The system will collate information such as pass rates, questions asked, ethnicity/gender/age of applicant or any other information as required for the process of drawing reports.

4 Additional Proposal

4.1 In our present knowledge test all the questions that are asked on roads etc are based within Lewes District Council area.

4.2 As a result of a recent complaint we were made aware that a newly licensed driver was unable to transport customers to Heathrow Airport as he did not know the route and had to be assisted by the passengers.

4.3 It is the intention of the officers that included in this new knowledge test system will be questions based on major routes based outside Lewes District Council area to ensure that applicants have a proper grounding in relevant topography.

5 Financial Appraisal

5.1 The cost of the system is £2,000 plus Vat with a further annual licence fee of £300 plus VAT to cover fixes and upgrades.

5.2 Currently applicants are charged £40 fee to sit the knowledge test.

5.3 From July 2012 to July 2013 a total of 37 applicants sat the knowledge test generating receipts of £1,480.

5.4 The cost of the software will be recouped from the fee income from applicants and will be paid for in less than two years, based on current levels of applicants.

6 Equality Screening

6.1 The facility is available if required to monitor the ethnicity, gender, age etc of applicants sitting the computer based knowledge test. I have completed the Equality Checklist form no AF29186 and there are no adverse equalities impacts.

7 Environmental Implications

7.1 The Environmental Checklist has been completed and there are no environmental implications to this report. Form no. AF29064.

8 Risk Assessment

8.1 I have completed a risk assessment. The changes/issues covered by this report are not significant in terms of risk. No new risks will arise whether or not the recommendations are implemented or rejected. Form No. LDC29065.

9 Background Papers

9.1 There are no background papers to this report.

10 Appendices

10.1 Appendix 1 – Overview of system downloaded from Diamond website.