

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILLICENSING COMMITTEE9 April 2024Report by Clerk to the Licensing CommitteeCHANGES TO DRIVER'S KNOWLEDGE TEST**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To seek Committee's approval to amend the current Knowledge Test by limiting it to a written test and to adopt the new process for all outstanding tests and those referable to new applications for driver licences for both private hire and taxis.

RECOMMENDATION

2. That the Committee authorises the Clerk to:
- i. revise the current Knowledge Test process and adopt a purely written test format; and
 - ii. Utilise the new written process for all outstanding tests and tests for new applications received in the future.

BACKGROUND

3. In March 2021, East Renfrewshire Council Licensing Committee agreed to improve customer service standards by introducing a process of testing to ensure that all new drivers (both private hire and taxi) had a good working knowledge of the local area. This process (known as the Knowledge Test) comprised two parts, a written and a practical element, the latter of which involved the applicant being asked to drive to certain locations across the authority accompanied by the Licensing Enforcement Officer.

4. Periods of long term staff absence since that time, allied to the labour intensive nature of this process, have resulted in a backlog of tests. As at the present date this backlog sits at approximately 120 tests. The total processing time for a single test has been calculated as 2.5hours. If the current process is retained, it is reasonably estimated that it will take approximately 300 hours over 3-4 months to clear the backlog

REPORT

5. The knowledge test is required to be taken and passed as part of the taxi and private hire driver application process. As a result of the issues outlined above and the desire to avoid unnecessary delays in processing applications, the current practice is to issue licences conditional on the test being subsequently passed by the applicant. Whilst the intention was to conduct these tests within 6 months of the licence being granted, there are now a number of applications where the delay exceeds this timeframe.

6. In order to clear the backlog, maintain service standards of drivers on the road and minimise future delays it is proposed to amend the process by limiting the test to a written examination. The removal of a practical element will reduce the processing time significantly, allow for multiple candidates to be tested at the same time and free the Licensing Enforcement Officer to devote more time to enforcement duties. This approach will also allow the backlog to be quickly cleared.

7. If the recommendations are approved, it is intended to produce a re-designed, fit for purpose written test which will be maintained by the Clerk through time to ensure it remains accurate and up to date. A revised bank of knowledge test questions will be written and validated. The tests will generally be conducted in an exam hall style setting but this approach can be easily adapted to address equality issues and meet any support needs of applicants (including 1-1 testing and or oral questioning) and does not need specifically skilled staff to oversee.

FINANCE AND EFFICIENCY

8. While some cost may be incurred in booking examination venues this is already absorbed in the test fee paid by applicants. It is expected that the proposal will also reduce the use of staff resources.

RECOMMENDATION

9. That the Committee authorises the Clerk to:
- i. revise the current Knowledge Test process and adopt a new written test format; and
 - ii. Utilise the new written process for all outstanding tests and tests for new applications received in the future.

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