

Report of: Head of Environmental Development

To: General Purposes Licensing Committee

Date: 3rd February 2009

Item No:

Title of Report: Language Testing and CCTV

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To inform the Committee of the position in respect of two items which came before the Committee at its last meeting.

Report Approved by:

Tony Payne	Environmental Development
Daniel Smith	Legal & Democratic Services
Andy Collett	Finance

Policy Framework N/A

Recommendation(s):

The Committee is RECOMMENDED to:-

Note and agree the contents of the report.

1. This report has been written to inform the Committee of the position in respect of two items which came before the Committee at its last meeting. (The draft minute from the last meeting is shown below)

Ask officers to investigate the most appropriate ways of testing the English language skills of applicants and to agree the method to be used with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee;

Language Testing

2. . The Licensing Officers accept the comments made at the last General Purposes Licensing Committee meeting.

3. The officers have purchased information and an example of the recommended test and found that for a number of reasons it would not be suitable for our purposes.

4. The examination appeared to be aimed either at further education or a higher level of employment than driving taxis, even the explanations on the test forms are complex.

5. The cost of taking the examination is quite high at £105 plus the cost of any practice materials.

6. It could take several weeks for an applicant to make an application, sit and receive the results of the test, during which time the licence application could not be progressed.

7. As councillors will probably recall, the object of introducing the test was to ensure that applicants for hackney carriage and private hire driving licences had language skills that were sufficient to enable them to converse with members of the public and officers, also to understand and deal with licensing requirements and correspondence.

8. The licensing officers are of the opinion that the present test is satisfactory, sufficient to ensure that candidates meet the minimum requirements and is relevant to the job. The test contains elements of colloquial English in the oral sections that a commercial test would not.

9. It would still be necessary for the applicant to be seen by officers to check the application forms and deal with the proofs required for the CRB check.

10. Officers are of the opinion that the test should be retained in its present form. They will continue to look for an alternative to be used as a form of appeal should a failed candidate not be satisfied with the outcome of the Council's test.

CCTV

11. There can be no doubt that there are many advantages to having CCTV fitted to both hackney carriages and private hire vehicles.

12. With the current economic situation and the consequent job losses, the numbers of both driver and vehicle licence applications have greatly increased, whilst for the same economic reasons the number of taxi journeys is likely to decrease. Experience has shown that many proprietors are reluctant to make an investment that does not show an economic return. It is probably not an opportune time, to make the fitting of CCTV compulsory.

13. The taxi licensing officers have been unable to find an authority that has made the fitting of CCTV compulsory but it is understood that in the near future licensing officers in another authority will be presenting a report proposing this. The situation there will be monitored.

14. An officer will be attending a trade exhibition to gain more information about the price and availability of suitable CCTV units.

15. The position in respect of grants is still being investigated, but any subsidy would need to be fairly large to have any encouraging effect. We have 535 licensed vehicles at the time of writing,

Name and contact details of author:

Philip Pirouet

Taxi Licensing Officer

Environmental Development

☎ 01865 252115

email: ppirouet@oxford.gov.uk

Background papers: none