

MEETING:	General Licensing Regulatory Board
DATE:	Wednesday, 22 February 2017
TIME:	2.00 pm
VENUE:	Reception Room, Barnsley Town Hall

MINUTES

Present

Councillors C. Wraith MBE (Chair), J. Carr, Cave, Clarke, S. Green, Daniel Griffin, Hampson, W. Johnson, Lamb, Markham, Millner, Richardson, Saunders, Shepherd, Tattersall and Wilson

7 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interest from Members in respect of items on the agenda.

8 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 26th October, 2016 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

9 Alternative Driving Assessments - Update

The Service Director Culture, Housing and Regulation submitted a report on the appointment of two alternative driving assessment providers following the withdrawal of the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) as a result of the need to re-prioritise their activities.

The outcome of the DVSA decision was that from 31st December, 2016 all applicants for taxi licences had been unable to undertake the practical driving test assessments required as a condition of licence conditions and the Authority had, therefore, been unable to issue any new licences.

In order to address this issue the Authority had invited two companies which provided such services to tender for the Barnsley contract. Two companies, the Blue Lamp Trust and Taxi Driving Solutions had responded and had been appointed both of which undertook tests to the same standard as the DVSA, details of which were outlined.

The Blue Lamp Trust provided practical driving assessment tests (excluding the wheelchair element) to a number of local authorities in a location convenient to the applicant. Waiting times were currently 15 working days and the cost per test was £85. Taxi Driving Solutions provided a similar assessment but with the option or undertaking a wheelchair element. Tests were undertaken at a testing centre within Barnsley and current waiting times were approximately 5 working days. The costs involved were £65 for the standard test and £80 for the test with the wheelchair element.

It was noted that both providers had been delivering this service for approximately 2 months without issue or complaint.

In the ensuing discussion, the following matters were raised:

- It was noted that some drivers had been required to undertake driving tests out of district since the withdrawal of the DVSA
- The rationale for adopting two providers was referred to. It was felt that this provided greater flexibility, options and choice for applicants
- Reference was made to the need to scrutinise providers to ensure that standards were being maintained. It was noted that this would be undertaken via an annual review with the possible introduction of 'mystery shop' (in association with officers from Smithies Lane Depot) in the intervening period. An assurance was given that such actions would be undertaken as and when resources permitted
- It was noted that the wheelchair element was not a compulsory requirement unless drivers wished to operate accessible vehicles
- The costs charged by these companies was not massively different from those charged by the DVSA

RESOLVED that the report be noted and action taken to appoint companies to undertake driving tests be supported.

10 Theory Test Fees

The Service Director, Culture, Housing and Regulation submitted a report seeking approval to the introduction of revised theory test fees.

The current theory test comprised a total of 80 questions focussing on the Highway Code, Disability and Customer Care, Conditions of Licence (including Safeguarding), Places of Interest and Numeracy and Literacy with 16 questions in each section. The pass mark was 75% with a requirement to pass a minimum of 12 in each section.

The current fee for undertaking the test was £10 which, following an analysis had been found to be significantly less than actual cost of delivering the service.

The report outlined the legislative background to the setting of fees and indicated that whilst there was no statutory requirement to publicise any changes to the level of fees, consultation had, nevertheless, been undertaken with the trade on the proposed changes.

In calculating the proposed fee structure, details of which were outlined within an appendix to the report, account had been taken of:

- All activities required for the delivery of the theory test
- Staff costs associated with supporting the service
- Support provided by other parts of the Council to the Licensing Team

The new theory test fees, if approved, would be set at £65 (including the mandatory safeguarding training) or £60 (candidate resit – exclusion of safeguarding training as this would have been received at the previous test). In addition the new fees would enable the service to recover the costs of operating the service which would otherwise be borne by the local tax payers.

In the ensuing discussion, the following matters were raised:

- It was hoped that the revised fees would encourage candidates to be better prepared and informed and, thereby, reduce the churn rate of repeat applicants and reduce the bottleneck in the waiting lists especially for resit applications
- If agree, the new test fees would become applicable immediately following the Budget Council meeting to be held on the 23rd February, 2017
- The way in which applications were dealt with was explained. It was noted that the Service currently held two waiting lists; one for new applications and one for resits. The Service also kept a record of the number of times an applicant took the theory test
- It was pleasing to note that the council would be recouping the actual cost of operating the service
- There was a discussion of the possibility of introducing, at some future date, an online theory test system and arising out of this discussion reference was made to the itinerary and arrangements for the test 'days'
- Information was provided about Safeguarding training which was delivered by Sheffield Futures. Drivers were required to undertake this mandatory training every two years
- It was confirmed that applicants had to undertake both a theory test and a driver assessment prior to the granting of a licence. The Service also undertook any necessary audits to ensure that these processes remained robust
- Details of the current waiting lists for tests was provided. It was pointed out that if the number of applicants reduced or increased the Service would examine the fees structure further to ensure that the council was not making either a profit or loss. In response to specific questioning about the rationale for the fees structure particularly in relation to the rounding up/down based on the number of new applicants versus resits, an assurance was given that further analysis of this would be undertaken to ensure that the structure was correct

RESOLVED that the revised fee structure be approved for immediate implementation if approved as part of the Budget at the meeting of the Council to be held on the 23rd February, 2017.

Chair