

In terms of Standing Order 9.1 the following item had been included on the agenda by reason of special circumstance. The special circumstance was that there was a shortage of taxi and private hire car drivers which had raised concern regarding the provision of home to school transport. The report providing the recommendations from the policy development panel had not been available when the agenda was issued.

EX7. Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982 - New Private Hire Car Driver Licences

The Executive considered a report by the Director of Corporate and Housing Services which sought approval for a temporary change of policy in relation to the requirement for new Private Hire Car Driver applicants to pass the Knowledge Test prior to grant and the temporary waiving of an application fee for a temporary Private Hire Car Driver licence where a new full application was simultaneously submitted.

The civic licensing policy development panel had met on 24 September 2020 and considered a request from a local taxi firm that consideration be given to streamlining the application process for private hire car drivers. The current policy position required all new taxi/private hire car applicants to sit and pass a Knowledge Test to demonstrate that they had knowledge of the area of operation.

The panel heard anecdotal evidence that drivers had, during the period of the pandemic, left the taxi trade. Although the Service had not fully substantiated/verified the position as there had not been a corresponding drop in the number of licences being renewed. The view of Transport Planning had been sought regarding school contracts. It was confirmed that there were issues with non-availability of taxis at peak times. Covid-19 had placed some restrictions on the capacity of school taxis. The reduced capacity in taxis by at least one possibly two depending on the size of the vehicle had resulted in a number of additional taxis being required for school contracts. There was a shortfall in taxis of approximately 55 per day.

All new taxi/private hire car driver licence applications were subject to a statutory consultation period which precluded the grant of any licence within 28 days of the licence being submitted. Such a wait would not address the immediate shortfall in private hire car drivers to fulfil school transport contracts. This was not the case for a temporary licence however which may be granted once a consultation response from Police Scotland had been received. The licence could be granted for six weeks, however, if a full application was submitted within this period then the licence continued to have effect.

The temporary licence fee was set at £143, and a full taxi/ private hire car driver application was £206. It was proposed that the fee level for the temporary licence be waived as long as the full application was submitted simultaneously to encourage uptake of the fast track process.

Decision

The Executive agreed:-

- (1) a temporary change in policy to allow new Private Hire Car Driver applicants not to have to pass the Knowledge Test prior to grant to be applied immediately and for a period of 6 months, but that they must pass the knowledge test within 12 months of the licence being granted, and**
- (2) the temporary waiving of the application fee for a temporary private hire car driver licence where a full application has been simultaneously submitted.**