Report to Licensing Committee
Date of meeting: 14 October 2009

Subject: Consultation undertaken with regards to Taxis in the District and Quality Taxi Partnership

Officer contact for further information: Kim Tuckey

Committee Secretary: Adrian Hendry

**Epping Forest
District Council**

Recommendation:

1. **That the Council joins the Quality Taxi Partnership which has been set up by Essex County Council.**
2. **To note that a Knowledge Test be introduced for Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Vehicles Drivers who are to licensed for the first time**
3. **To note that Taxi companies were asked to allow the Council to put their details on the website if they had a specially adapted vehicle for wheelchairs but only two firms took advantage of this offer.**
4. **To note that all new taxi drivers will be required to view a DVD issued by Go Skills "This Time Every Time" at the same time as they undertake the Knowledge test.**
5. **To take no action with regards to imposing conditions on vehicles relating to green issues.**

Report:

1. At its meeting on the 15th April 2009 the Licensing Committee resolved :

   ▪ That officers consider the Consultation report and the Quality Taxi Partnership proposals, taking into account the issues of disable access and deployment of information on the Council's website and merge the two into one report and make recommendations accordingly; and that

   ▪ The report relating to the consultation regarding taxis be submitted to the October 2009 meeting of the Licensing Committee. A copy of this report is attached.

Quality Taxi Partnership

2. Officers have met with Andrew James the Transport Strategy Officer at Essex County Council to discuss the Partnership and its aims. The County Council wish to assist Districts by sharing good practice and by giving funding for initiatives to improve the service to the public.

3. Andrew James has agreed to meet with the Licensing Officers periodically to review and assist working practices.

Knowledge Test

5. The report that was before the Committee in April 2009 recommended against the

introduction of a Knowledge Test. This was on the grounds of cost of the purchase of the software and computer terminals together with the lack of resources in the licensing team to administer the test. Essex County Council have agreed that if the District joins the Partnership it will fund the cost of the system of £1,950. Mr. James indicated at the last Committee meeting that the County would pay the first years annual maintenance fee which would amount to £300. The continuing maintenance fee would be the responsibility of the District..

6. The Committee indicated that the officers should make further investigations and look at the costs of employing another member of staff whose salary would be funded by the fees to be charged.

7. The Senior Licensing Officer carried out further research and looked at the ways in which other Councils administered the tests and their views as to the success of the tests. Other authorities in Essex use both the paper based tests and computerized tests. Research shows that a package called Diamond is used and recommended.

8. Following discussion with the IT service it was agreed that the IT training room could be made available for holding the tests and that meant that up to eight candidates could take the test at one time helping to reduce costs. After research of other authorities it is likely that the time taken including setting up the test and marking it will be approximately two hours. If the current level of applications continued and with predicted numbers of re-tests it is expected that it would be necessary to employ a new member of staff for two half days a week.

9. It is expected that a temporary member of staff would be employed to cover this work at first because the number of applications may fall once the test requirements become known.

10. Government Guidance does recommend that a topographical test is introduced for taxi drivers but considers that as private hire vehicles are hired in advance this is not required in the same detail. There will be approximately 40 questions and an additional 10 questions for applicants who have applied for a Hackney Carriage Drivers licence. However, some of the respondents to the consultation exercise considered that with the introduction of SAT Navs a topographical test may not seem appropriate. This point is acknowledged and any test will not be detailed but will require a knowledge of this area.

11. The cost of the test will be set at a figure to cover its costs and will be kept under review by the Director of Corporate Support Services. It is estimated to be in the region of £30 per test and £17.50 for re-tests.

12. If the District were mindful to introduce a competency test, Mr Andrews from Essex County Council recommended that the Council considers introducing the PATS test. A PATS test costs £80. There are also other courses, however, they tend to be done on an NVQ level and would take drivers weeks or months to attain.

13. Members may wish to consider whether this would be desirable as it would further add to the cost for the driver of obtaining a licence.

Accessibility for Disabled Persons

14. Since the last meeting of the Committee the Senior Licensing Officer wrote to all 'Operators' who indicated that they operated taxis that were wheelchair accessible

and offered to place details of their service on the Council's website. Only two such operators took up the Council's offer.

15. Go Skills has issued a DVD called "This Time Every Time" that encourages drivers to look at the needs of their passengers especially when dealing with disabled people. It is proposed that this should be shown to the drivers at the same time as they are taking the test

Green Vehicles

16. The results of the consultation exercise were set out in the previous report and no recommendations for change have been made.

17. The Licensing Service have been enforcing against the holders of taxi licences who do not attend to have interim checks carried out on their vehicles ensuring that not only are the vehicles safe but they are running efficiently.