

## **Report to the Cabinet**

**Report reference: C-098-2009/10**

**Date of meeting: 19 April 2010**



**Epping Forest  
District Council**

**Portfolio: Legal & Estates.**

**Subject: New Licensing Officer Post.**

**Responsible Officer: Alison Mitchell (01992 564017).**

**Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).**

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### **Recommendations/Decisions Required:**

**That the Cabinet approve the addition of a new part time post in the licensing team provided that the post can be self funded**

### **Executive Summary:**

At its last meeting, the Licensing Committee decided that the Authority should introduce a 'knowledge test' for new applicants for a Hackney Carriage and Public Hire Drivers Licence ('Taxi Driver's Licence') and indicated that they would consider it desirable if the drivers had some disability awareness training.

In order to implement the decision it is necessary to employ a member of staff to administer and carry out the tests and show the drivers a suitable training DVD. The Authority will charge the applicants who sit the test and this money would be used to fund the post.

This is not a key decision. The Best Value Performance Plan 2008/09 states that the Council will promote equality and diversity and promote Disability Schemes. If the drivers have a better understanding of the needs of persons with disabilities this will remove some barriers which some customers may feel when they wish to use a taxi.

### **Reasons for Proposed Decision:**

To meet the requirements of the Licensing Committee that the applicants for a Taxi Driver's Licence have:

- a knowledge of the area,
- knowledge of the highway code and road safety issues,
- an awareness of the requirements of persons with disability

### **Other Options for Action:**

To decide not to hold the driver's tests and not to give the disability awareness training.

### **Report:**

1. At its meeting on 14 October 2009, the Licensing Committee decided that the Council should join the Quality Taxi Partnership with Essex County Council and introduce a 'knowledge test' for taxi drivers. Essex County Council through the Partnership provided funding to enable the District to purchase the computer software and additional hardware requirements so that the knowledge test could be introduced. It was also reported to the Committee that it was intended to show the drivers a training DVD regarding disability awareness immediately prior to the test.

2. The Committee indicated that provided the post was self financing an additional member of staff should be employed to administer the tests as the work could not be undertaken from existing resources. Any further work in the licensing team would likely to lead to delays in issuing licences and non-compliance with statutory time limits.

3. The Disability Equality Involvement Group has identified as one of their objectives that the Directorate investigate the introduction of an accredited disability awareness programme for licensed cab drivers. The Group has asked that the Senior Licensing Officer looks to introduce awareness training and include relevant questions as part of the knowledge test. The Senior Licensing Officer has acquired a recognised training DVD using funding from the Partnership and is including disability awareness questions as part of the knowledge test.

4. At present, it is expected that it will be necessary to hold two tests every month but to start with these may be held more frequently until staff are familiar with the requirements of the drivers. The introduction of a test may lead to the number of applicants decreasing or could lead to additional test dates being required because of the need to undertake retests. There may also be language or reading difficulties and the computer skills of the applicants may differ. This means that the size of the groups taking the test will have to be kept under review as the help required by individual applicants will differ. There will be additional paperwork associated with each test and the questions on the computer will periodically be added to or changed. This uncertainty means that it is intended to employ someone on a permanent contract but the hours would be as agreed depending upon work load.

5. The Council's procedures do not allow the salary for this post to be assessed under single status until the need for this post has been agreed. However, it is expected that it will fall within Grade 3 £14,545 to £15, 848 pro rata plus London weighting. If the post is approved and the salary assessed the cost of the tests will be calculated so that the charge to the applicants can be calculated and there will be no cost to the Authority. The licensing legislation does not permit the Council to make a profit from running these tests. It is hoped to introduce the tests in April 2010.

#### **Resource Implications:**

Nil. The tests are intended to be self financing and will be within existing finances.

#### **Legal and Governance Implications:**

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1974 permits the Council to introduce this test as part of its enquiries as to whether a driver is a fit and proper person.

#### **Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:**

The introduction of the test and showing the video will mean that the drivers have some greater knowledge of the requirements of persons with disabilities.

#### **Consultation Undertaken:**

Consultation was carried out with drivers and reported to the Licensing Committee. Discussions have taken place with Essex County Council and the Quality Taxi Partnership.

**Background Papers:**

None.

**Impact Assessments:**

Risk Management

There is some risk to continuing to grant licences to drivers who do not have this knowledge.

Equality and Diversity:

The Disability Equality Involvement Group has identified the introduction of disability awareness training as one of its objectives.

*Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications?* Yes

*Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken?* Yes

*What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?*

Customers using the taxi service in the area

a) Improving accessibility of the service to all users,

b) Improving the standard and quality of the service

Applicants for Driver's Licence

c) Disincentive to applicants on low incomes because of cost

d) Disincentive to some applicants who are unhappy to take a test

e) People with literacy or learning difficulties

f) People with dyslexia

g) People who are not familiar with computers

*How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?*

The drivers.

Assistance with tests will be offered for those with difficulties in reading the questions.

Help will be offered to those who are not familiar with computers.

The cost will be kept low.

Prior to taking the test a leaflet and information will be provided as to the sources used in developing the tests so that the applicants can undertake research.