

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND OPERATIONS

ORIGINATING SECTION: PUBLIC PROTECTION SERVICE

REPORT TO : LICENSING COMMITTEE DATE: 23 January 2024

TITLE : English language skills assessments

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to make a slight amendment to the previously agreed fees and charges.

2. RECOMMENDATION

To require payment of £25 from all candidates taking the driver English skills assessment.

3. KEY ISSUES

- 3.1** On 17 October 2023 Members of this Committee agree a schedule of revised fees and charges in respect of driver, vehicle and operator licensing, following a detailed review by officers of the costs and processes involved in administering the taxi licensing regime.

The proposed Vehicle and Operator fees were published in the local press as required by the legislation and discussed at meetings with representatives of the three local driver Associations. Details were also sent directly to all sixty-nine Licensed Operators.

One Operator who is licensed to operate a single private hire vehicle responded on the day the email was sent as follows: "Thank you for the email, just for the record we object to the rise in fees, given the facts and businesses struggling after covid we would and shortage of drivers, prefer the fees to be lowered as discussed on few meetings in past. However we will respond in due course again. this email is for the record."

No further communication has been received from that Operator or from any other person and so the proposed schedule of fees was implemented on 1 January 2024.

The agreed fees included a charge of £25 for the English Skills assessment payable by applicants who live outside the Borough, to recoup the payments the Licensing service is making to Adult Learning Services. The cost of providing the assessments to Blackburn with Darwen residents was being met by Adult Learning Services.

Unfortunately Adult Learning Services can no longer subsidise the assessments for Blackburn with Darwen residents and so all the costs are now being met in full by the Licensing Authority.

The skills assessment is only requirement for those prospective drivers who are unable to provide evidence of any other qualifications which would satisfy the Authority of their competence in English.

Because it is not a requirement for all applicants, it would not be equitable to include that expenditure in the actual licence fee payable by all applicants, but the proposed fees agreed by this Committee in October 2023 will need to be amended slightly to make the £25 payable by all applicants booking a skills assessment.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Para 3.8.4 of the Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy will be amended to read as follows:- Applicants who do not hold any formal qualifications in English, must pass a skills assessment provided by Blackburn Adult Learning service.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The additional income will cover the costs incurred by the Licensing service for Adult Learning Services to undertake English skills assessments.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None

7. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

None

8. CONSULTATIONS

None

9. CONTACT OFFICER

Niky Barrett – Principal Licensing Officer