

LICENSING COMMITTEE

Driver Recruitment Progress Report

25th August 2022

Report of Licensing Officer

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To provide members with an update on the progress of licensed driver recruitment.

This report is public.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) That the Committee note the report and the measures applied by licensing to encourage and recruit new drivers into the licensed trade.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 During the Covid-19 pandemic it became apparent that there was a shortfall in licensed drivers both locally and nationally. Feedback received from the public was that it was becoming increasingly difficult to access hackney carriage/private hire vehicles particularly in the early hours.
- 1.2 The reduced number of drivers was identified in the Licensing workplan for 2022/23. The workplan stated that the Licensing Service would promote the role of becoming a licensed driver and work alongside partners to assist applicants.
- 1.3 Licensing Officers have discussed the reason for the shortfall in drivers with several previously licensed drivers. The reason they gave for the reduced number of drivers was mainly the lack of work available throughout the pandemic.
- 1.4 Once restrictions had eased, and the world began to return to some normality, 91 drivers did not return to the trade. Many commented that they did not have the funds to renew or they had found alternative employment that offered more security.
- 1.5 Licensing Officers assisted private hire operators in registering for the Kick Start Scheme. The intention was to assist operators in recruiting new drivers. The Kick Start Scheme provides government funding to create new jobs for

16 to 24 year olds on Universal Credit. Unfortunately, the Kick Start funding application was rejected due to one of the application requirements being that the driver would be required to be supervised at all times. This would not be cost effective for private hire operators, it would also make a seat in a licensed vehicle redundant.

- 1.6 Licensing Officers supported local private hire operators at recruitment events at the Job Centre aiming to encourage people to join the taxi trade. During the recruitment events people did not show any interest in becoming a licensed driver. The main barrier was the application cost, it costs between £405 and £430 to complete an application

2.0 Report

- 2.1 On 10th March 2022 the Licensing Service was awarded funding from covid recovery funds to encourage people into the trade. Officers have spent at least 3-4 hours per week administering/managing the application process with applicants.
- 2.2 The amount of funding enabled Lancaster City Council to offer 49 new applicants/previous drivers a 1-year dual drivers licence.

The funding for each applicant was utilised to cover the following application requirements:

- Lancaster and Morecambe College Taxi Drivers Course
 - Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Certificate (DBS)
 - Practical Taxi Driving Test
 - Group 2 Medical
 - New 1 year dual drivers licence (for new drivers only)
 - Renewal 1 year dual drivers licence (for previous licensed drivers only)
- 2.3 Prior to advertising the funding available, the Licensing Service contacted all drivers that had expired during the pandemic. The purpose of contacting them was to encourage them to return to the trade. Officers informed the drivers of the funding available for a 1 year dual drivers badge and offered to utilise documents already on file. The Licensing Manager considered each application on a case by case basis, to determine what the application process would be for them (no driving test or college course if previously completed).

There have been 6 previously licensed drivers that have taken up the offer of funding to be relicensed.

- 2.4 Licensing Officers contacted Lancaster and Morecambe College in relation to the cost of the college course and they have reduced the cost from £225 to £100 per applicant. If an applicant is claiming Universal Credit/Jobseekers allowance then they can access the course free of charge.

2.5 The Licensing Team worked together with Inspira, an organisation who help local people into work, improve their skills and open up new opportunities. Licensing Officers assisted in setting up recruitment events alongside Inspira with Officers attending those events to talk the applicants through the application process and answer any questions they had.

2.6 Licensing Officers offered a one-to-one appointment to each applicant. The purpose of the appointment was to confirm the applicant had a clean driver's licence, no convictions that would trigger the Hackney/Private hire licensing policy, were medically fit and discuss the application process. Where an applicant was unable to access Morecambe Town Hall, Licensing Officers met remotely with the applicants within the district.

As well as the initial face to face appointment each applicant was given a contact within the Licensing Team throughout the application process if they required any assistance and support.

2.7 All 49 funded places have now been allocated and the funding option is no longer available.. The Licensing Service have granted 20 out of 49 driver badges to date. The aim is to have the majority of the applications granted by the end of October 2022.

2.8 There have been some delays due to applicants having to resit certain units of the college course, not passing first time around and applicants not registering to the DBS update service. (Which is a mandatory application requirement)

2.9 Public Safety has been the paramount consideration of the recruitment process and unfortunately there have been a small number of applications that the Licensing Manager has refused. This has been due to applicants having convictions that triggered the Councils Hackney/Private Hire licensing policy and or not meeting the medical standards.

3.0 History of Licensed Drivers

3.1 During the taxi working party members requested for this report to include: the number of new licences that have been granted and the total number of licensed drivers each year from 2017 – August 2022.

Year (1st January – 31st December)	Total of New Driver Licences Granted	Total Number of Licensed Drivers
2017	21 new driver licences	539
2018	22 new driver licences	515
2019	30 new driver licences	512
2020	12 new driver licences	521
2021	14 new driver licences	480
2022 (1 st January – 16 th August 2022)	34 new driver licences	441

3.2 Since January 2022 to the present day, the Licensing Service has granted 34 new driver licences. This is a significant improvement on previous years and a positive indication of an increase in recruitment to the trade.

4.0 Future Funding Options

4.1 All the covid recovery funding has been allocated, however, licensing have been made aware of other possible funding options that may be available to the unemployed or people on a low income

4.2 If an applicant is unemployed, they can register for a National Careers Service appointment and be assessed for suitability, this may determine what funding may be available to them through the Flexible Support Fund and/or Restart Funding.

4.3 The Licensing Team will communicate the other funding options available to applicants when we receive new driver enquiries and periodically through trade newsletters. The Licensing Service will keep on working with external organisations such as Lancaster and Morecambe College, Job Centre Plus and Inspira to encourage people to join the licensed trade.

5.0 Conclusion

5.1 During the pandemic it was identified that there was a shortfall in licensed drivers both nationally and locally. The Licensing Service received funding from covid recovery funds to aid the recruitment of drivers into the trade.

5.2 Applicants eligible for funding have been required to meet the same standard as any other applicant or existing driver. Public Safety has not been compromised by the introduction of the funding available.

5.3 All the funded places have now been allocated and the funding option is no longer available. The Licensing Service have granted 20 of the 49 driver badges to date. The aim is to ensure the majority of applications will be granted by the end of October 2022.

5.4 It has taken significant Officer resources to get to this position with the recruitment of drivers. Recruitment is not a statutory function of the Council, however it was identified as important if Lancaster City Council want to build a sustainable licensed trade.

<p>CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT (including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)</p>

<p>Applicants eligible for funding have been required to meet the same standard as any other applicant or existing driver.</p>
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FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial Services have not been consulted

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal implications.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

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