

Driver Training – Hackney Carriage and Private Hire



Report to: Licensing Committee

Date: 11 March 2025

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Executive Summary

A Department for Transport's Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards state drivers should be required to undertake safeguarding training and that it should include County Lines and Child Sexual Exploitation. The Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Licensing Best Practice Guidance also requires that drivers should be trained in disability awareness. This report aims to establish driver training standards for Harlow drivers and to tender for a training provider.

Recommended that the Licensing Committee recommends to Full Council that:

- A** The proposals in paragraphs 22-31 of the report for driver training standards and procedures be adopted.
- B** The driver training for licensees and applicants is outsourced to qualified training providers as proposed in paragraphs 32-36 of the report.

Reason for decision

- A** To establish a suitable driver training programme for licensees and applicants of the taxi and private hire trades.

Other Options

- A Where driver training in safeguarding (including child sexual exploitation and county lines) and disability awareness is not to be provided, a local authority should provide reasons why they choose to defer from DfT recommendations.

Background

1. In March 2016 and March 2017, this committee approved a roll out of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE or Safeguarding) awareness training and Disability awareness training respectively. Partial funding for this Safeguarding initiative was provided by the Essex Police and Crime Commissioner through the Safer Harlow Partnership.
2. The driver licence application form was amended to remind applicants on every application made that being a licensed driver includes a requirement to undertake periodic training to ensure drivers are trained and suitable to being a professional driver.
3. The courses were made available for drivers and applicants to attend by invitation, the courses covered the basics of either Safeguarding or Disability Awareness, attendance was mandatory but with no test. Invitation was also made to private hire operator licensees whom all attended voluntarily.
4. From the outset, licensed drivers were given 2 years to attend the training, and new applicants were attending the same courses as licensees. Both training courses ran approx. for 1.5 hours - 2.5 hours each.
5. As demand for the Safeguarding course reduced and not wanting either course to act as a barrier to the application process, in September 2017 it was agreed by the Committee that drivers and applicants had to attend any training within a reasonable time frame (ideally within 12 months of first being licensed where courses were available).
6. Exceptions to attend were permitted where a driver had attended a safeguarding or disability awareness course provided by another licensing authority and the course curriculum was equivalent to that provided by Harlow Council. Secondly, applicants that could demonstrate they had received training in another profession to a standard equivalent or higher than that offered by the Council within the preceding 3 years were also exempt, this was expected to capture persons working as teachers, social workers or similar occupations. Lastly, and on a rare occasion, where a driver was able to show exceptional circumstances why they were unable to attend a group training session, the Council provided a one-to-one training session with our designated Safeguarding Officer, with any additional cost borne by the applicant.
7. Between June 2016 and February 2019 safeguarding awareness training was provided to drivers and new applicants. Feedback responses were positive from attendees. During the Covid pandemic, the Licensing Team resourced and arranged three dates to offer an

online virtual classroom safeguarding course to new applicants. Any remaining new applicants will be picked up through the new and ongoing training arrangements.

8. Between May 2017 and February 2018, disability awareness training was provided to drivers and new applicants. Feedback from attendees was not very positive which hampered the number of courses being provided with discussions on course content taking place with the training provider, no further training was provided before Covid in March 2020. During the Covid pandemic, the Licensing Team resourced and arranged a date for an online virtual classroom disability awareness course. The course was not well attended including driver availability changing on the day, which in turn raised the cost per attendee at the Council's expense. Approximately 45% of drivers have never attended the disability awareness course and a permanent solution is sought through new and ongoing training arrangements.
9. In the absence of a current training programme, the Council is at a good moment in time to reconsider the provision of training to drivers and applicants. Reasonable time has passed (at least 3 years) and therefore all licensed drivers ought to be due training again, dependent on how often training should be.
10. Refresher training was initially discussed at implementation stage suggesting attendance every 3-5 years but was not brought back to this committee for a final decision.
11. Following discussion with Legal Services, training for drivers should be outsourced through the procurement process to allow training providers to apply to provide the driver training for Harlow Council. The tender is likely to last for 5 years, should refresher training be every 3 years then the tender will capture training provision for the bulk of drivers in the first year, and another refresher course 3 years later.

Issues

12. Driver training should be an integral part of the licensing process, a part of the overall requirement of being a safe and suitable person to hold a driver or operator licence. As with other industries, this training should be refreshed at reasonable intervals.
13. The Department for Transport recommends that all licensing authorities should require taxi and private hire vehicle drivers and operators as a minimum, to undertake safeguarding training (including CSE and County Lines) and disability awareness training.
14. Safeguarding awareness training looks at the role of the taxi and private hire industry can play in spotting the abuse, exploitation or neglect of children and vulnerable adults. Those within the industry can be an asset in the detection and prevention of abuse or neglect of children and vulnerable adults, but this is only the case if they are aware of and alert to the signs of potential abuse.

15. Following the Council's initial provision of delivering driver training, a permanent, ongoing solution is required, there are several options that the committee should consider:
 - a) New applicants - course content: To cover Safeguarding and Disability Awareness only? New applicants may be new to passenger transport and be interested in additional support.
 - b) Existing licensees – course content: To cover Safeguarding and Disability Awareness only?
 - c) To require that the licensees of a private hire operator licence and all their staff in customer facing roles and people managing service delivery should attend the refresher training.
 - d) Whether to include an end of course test?
 - e) Face-to-face, e-learning or online (virtual classroom)?
 - f) How often refresher training should be required?
16. Basic safeguarding and disability awareness training can be provided separately or combined; they require approx. 1.5 hours – 2.5 hours each. If provided together, the content is sufficient for a half day course, allowing time for registration and a short break i.e. approx. 09:30 – 13:30/14:00.
17. Training courses of this nature are traditionally 10-15 delegates per session.
18. Initial discussion with training providers has suggested that the option of a test is feasible but adds additional time to sit the test and for them to be assessed at the end. The courses previously provided by the Council worked well without a test; however, attendees are likely to be more focussed knowing they are being tested. Inclusion of a test would raise the fee of the course to cover additional time as well as drivers having to pay to re-sit the test should they fail (usually one additional attempt before resitting the whole course again).
19. Although not mandatory, training may also cover other important aspects of being a licensed driver, such as customer service, legislation / local policy or vehicle maintenance. Inclusion of any of these matters would then require a full day training course. It should be considered by the Licensing Team, that information regarding these matters can be provided using other methods, such as the sharing of information through communications or provided on the licensing pages of the website and expansion of the taxi licensing policy. There is also the potential for future courses on a mandatory or voluntary level.
20. The training may be face-to-face, e-learning or online via a virtual classroom. If the courses were face-to-face, the Council Chamber can be booked, alleviating the cost of an alternative venue, however, there would be a small cost to the Council arranging the bookings, which would include anticipated changes to bookings for insufficient attendance numbers and rebooking new dates. E-learning is an online course, that an individual would pay and complete the course in their own time and convenience. An online virtual classroom is essentially to be in a classroom, but without the need to travel,

there is also no venue hire costs and minimal administrative upkeep to accommodate any changes.

21. Neither the guidance nor best practice stipulates how often training should be provided, but state that drivers should be required to attend refresher training. Most licensing authorities require refresher training every 3 years in line with 3-year licences.

Proposals

22. The course(s) shall incorporate all the requirements of what is considered the basic elements of Safeguarding and Disability Awareness.
23. A safeguarding training programme helps the taxi and private hire trade to achieve provision of a safe and suitable service to vulnerable passengers of all ages, recognise what makes a person vulnerable and to understand how to respond or report safeguarding concerns and where to get advice.
24. A disability training programme helps the taxi and private hire trade achieve a better inclusive service by providing the industry with an understanding of appropriate behaviours, communication and assistance to passengers, whether that be with assistance dogs, wheelchairs or mobility aids, and understanding barriers that people face along with their legal obligations.
25. Officer recommendations for driver training:
 - a) New applicants:
 - i) Attend training course(s) online via virtual classroom.
 - ii) Minimum coverage: two topics - Safeguarding and disability awareness.
 - iii) Additional topics not essential: customer service, local policy/legislation, personal safety, basic arithmetic. Tender comment: Favourable weight scored for inclusion of additional items.
 - iv) Duration: a maximum of 1-day.
 - v) Test is not essential. Tender comment: Favourable weight scored for inclusion of a test.
 - vi) Refresher due 3 years after successful course completion.
 - b) Licensed drivers:
 - i) Attend training course(s) online via virtual classroom.
 - ii) Minimum coverage: two topics - safeguarding and disability awareness.
 - iii) Duration: ideally under 2.5 hours for each topic.
 - iv) Test is not essential. Tender comment: Favourable weight scored for inclusion of a test.
 - v) Refresher due 3 years after successful course completion.

26. It is felt regarding the training provision that the use of a virtual classroom can be just as good as attending in person, the quality of service is in the content and the delivery of the training, and so officers feel this option would be best suited. This helps retain a minimal fee without the need of venue hire and is also a more convenient way for drivers to attend without the cost of parking and transportation.
27. It is also considered important that drivers have an understanding of matters such as customer service, local policy and personal safety, but also that material is either already provided or will be available soon in the licensing section of the website and made available to new applicants, much of this extra content should also be covered by operator businesses when taking on drivers and is therefore desirable, but not essential.
28. It is recommended that the following be applied once the training is available:
 - a) All new applicants to attend driver training before a licence can be issued.
 - b) All licensed drivers and operator staff to attend the training within 12 months.
29. The 12-month 'window' for training will be communicated to all drivers once set.
30. Attendance at any future refresher course may be done so up to 12 months prior to due date whilst maintaining the same 3-year anniversary for the following refresher course after that.
31. It is not anticipated that there will be many, if any, exceptions to attending online training, however, cases will be considered on their individual merit, in particular for drivers who meet one of the two criteria below:
 - a) Able to demonstrate attendance of an equal to or higher-level course(s) that covers both Safeguarding and Disability within the last 3 years.
 - b) Able to demonstrate attendance of an equal or higher-level course provided by another licensing authority within the last 3 years.

Procurement of driver training

32. It is recommended that the Council procures the driver training by going through the necessary tender process. To ensure drivers get the best deal financially, the fees charged to drivers shall form 75% of the graded assessment, the other 25% of the graded assessment shall ensure any minimum requirements are met, the course content, having a test, trainer experience, booking arrangements, and any other added value.
33. Applicants/licensees will pay for the course direct to the outsourced training provider.
34. As part of the tender assessment, favourable weight shall be scored to training providers who have capacity to deliver a minimum of 300 licensed driver course spaces in the first 12 months.

35. As part of the tender assessment, favourable weight shall be scored for capability of providing at least one new applicant course each month. Even if cancelled for insufficient number of attendees.
36. Upon successful completion of the tender process, the first courses should be available within 3 months of the tender contract agreement.

Benchmarking

37. A benchmarking exercise was conducted of other licensing authority's driver training, which can be viewed in Appendix A.
38. An overview of training provided for new applicants by other licensing authorities is predominantly online, but a few do require face-to-face, most courses for new applicants include more than just Safeguarding and Disability Awareness, but with the fee reflecting this. Refresher training is almost completely delivered online. It also appears apparent that depending what training provider authorities have selected to deliver their training, has some influence whether a test is required.

Implications

Equalities and Diversity

An Equality Impact Assessment will be required before the training is commenced.

Climate Change

None specific.

Finance

Budget provision for training requirements are included within the medium term financial plan.

Author: Jacqui Van Mellaerts, Assistant Director – Finance

Governance

The Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards set out training requirements; including recommended training content. The proposed tender process for procuring a training provider complies with the councils Contract Standing Orders.

Author: Rebecca Farrant, Assistant Director – Corporate Services and Improvement

Appendices

Appendix A - Benchmarking of Licensing Authorities Driver Training Requirements

Background Papers

[Taxi and private hire vehicle licensing best practice guidance for licensing authorities in England - Department for Transport](#)

[Statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards - Department for Transport](#)

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

DfT - Department for Transport
The guidance - Statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards guidance – DfT
Best practice - Taxi and private hire vehicle licensing best practice guidance for licensing authorities in England - DfT