

Update on PH Driver Bespoke Knowledge Test Update

Licensing/Ali Haydor

Test has been written but lockdown has stopped all tests currently. RH is waiting for IT to install the test on our machines. This will be done when we re-start tests. Both tests will remain under review. (IT are under considerable pressure keeping SCC functioning with huge increase in home working and other IT demands).

Role of a Taxi/PH Rep (At the last consultation meeting on January 21st 2020 I asked a question, "you did not vote for us, so we will not put forward any of your questions?" This obviously does not apply to you Les but others in the group. Could we have a proper clarified answer, so we know where we stand?)

We are hoping to publish a code of conduct soon to address this.

The Brighton consultation process was forwarded to Mr Bates for his perusal. His answer in an email dated 3rd August 2020 was "Thank you for the Brighton arrangements. We have two more years to run with the current set up. We will no doubt review the process nearer that time." Les, can we make sure that this is minuted please?

Current system runs until 2022. Last election will be in 2021. Then review during 2021/22

Can SCC licensing reassure the Southampton trade that if a driver/proprietor is in financial difficulty caused through COVID 19, they will be sympathetic to that persons' requirements? They have put the extension on plates, which we welcome and have been extremely helpful in these awkward times to re-licence drivers and vehicles whilst working remotely but we might need to put other measures in place?

Primary purpose of licensing is to protect the public. Will look at each case on its merits and be flexible where possible. However, it's not possible to hold plates or issue licences without checks.

In March 2020 the Institute of Licensing (IOL) held a meeting in Oldham which I believe Mr Bates attended? The IOL has realised that some of their paragraphs in the Guidance Document which was approved by SCC licensing councillors in July 2019, needs to be altered. Will this be happening and can we be afforded the same rights as the Eastleigh trade have? For example, they have wanted changes made to this document and SCC have agreed to this when attending the Eastleigh's consultation meetings.

The IoL do not feel the document needs amending and still stand by it. SCC will review policy against the DfT standards document which has adopted the IoL paragraphs on convictions with the exception of the 7 points and 5 years element, the same as SCC adopted in 2019. There has been no agreement in EBC but a discussion that needs to continue in light of the DfT standards.

The latest government document Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicles Standards, which even James Button comments is misleading in a number of ways. Is SCC going to follow Grant Shapps' view (Transport Secretary) on having a DBS check carried out every six months, which we would disagree with? Also is this council going to apply stronger methods to check if private hire drivers/operators' are working under the triple lock system?

James Button does have issues with the DfT document however I am not aware he is against 6 monthly checks. We need to demonstrate and justify why we intend to deviate from the recommendations in the document. This can easily be achieved by the DBS update service. When there is evidence to support such breaches we will investigate.

Under this present consultation system, the council have conveniently forgotten the investment that hackney carriage proprietors, private hire operators' and taxi companies in Southampton, have spent and are spending in their trade. We do not seem to have the incentive for qualifying individuals to attend these meetings?

We are committed to this process for a further two years. We will review it as it approaches the end of that time.

Transport – Cycle Lanes in Avenue and Bassett Avenue. Feedback has been the Bitterne road bus and taxi lanes have been working well. Please could licensing speak to Transport to see if they could look at similar set up for The Avenue and Bassett Avenue. Currently only cycle lanes are here. But there is enough room for Bus/taxi lanes. Will also entice people to use public transport instead of driving.

This request from taxi trade has been heard, however, please note that currently success of the scheme is being monitored daily, and we are due for an announcements regarding the Avenue cycle lanes.

Portsmouth removed sticker signs due to vehicles getting damaged, drivers should get a choice between stickers and magnet signs.

Magnetic signs are easily removed from licensed vehicle by those with criminal intent and assist them in disguising an unlicensed vehicle as a licensed one placing the public at risk. SCC officers will not support the use of magnetics.

6 month cooling off period, if drivers licence expires...if driver has clean history he/she should not going through some of the process new applicant have to.

We treat each case on its merits and have allowed applications as suggested however a lot of the steps are mandatory such as Safeguarding training, DBS/DVLA checks etc. so there is not much that we can give other than driving assessments, medicals and knowledge tests. We have to ensure that we can justify why we have stepped outside of policy.

Pause issue of Private Hire plates until coronavirus is under control, jobs have dried out.

We can only refuse a licence for a private hire vehicle if it does not meet our conditions. We cannot limit the number of private hire vehicles.

Flexible payment for licence fee spread over 3 months or more

This increases the admin cost in processing the additional payments, the only method of recovery monies by those that fail to pay is by way of civil debt adding more to the process and this will all be factored in any fee review. The fee is a small amount in comparison to other costs associated with running a licensed vehicle.

Council provide reusable mask and gloves to all drivers

This is not a legitimate cost against the fees so would have to come from other funding. There was central government funding to assist Highways and Transport but this was restricted to other forms of transport. It did not include taxis. I did ask and was refused on this basis. The council does not have the funds to support this.

Electric car charging points updates

Both points, Lances Hill and Southbrook, are working. The NO2 plan only required two points, however officers are in discussions about further charging points for electric taxis. Also looking at plans for more charging points for all.

In-house Council English Test Update

Work on this has stalled during lockdown. Also the need to get a new DBS system up and running has taken priority. RH will be looking to implement a better English test and is aiming to have it in policy and up and running before the end of 2021.

Emergency issue of plate in place, if broken or missing after coming off. Especially its needed after 5pm Friday

We currently will issue a replacement plate immediately during office hours. Any delay would only be caused by a driver fitting a new plate holder. We have no plans to have weekend office cover for administrative purposes. We tend to have a very low rate of plate loss. No more than one a month out of 1300 vehicles.

Extension of Above Bar Taxi rank to allow more vehicles to use the rank by removing the small area adjacent to the cycle barriers at the front of the rank and extending slightly into the bus lane.

There are plans regarding the Above Bar under TCF schemes, although request from taxi trade is reasonable, I would recommend to hold this request, just based on the fact that we will spend tax payers money at a location where there will be more investments in the future and such expenditure now will be waste of funding.

Above Bar street Taxi Rank (opposite Switch nightclub) to be made into a 24hr rank to allow excess Taxis to safely park there and use as a feeder rank for the Above Bar Taxi rank.

We can look into this location as discussed previously.

Bus & cycle lanes, at present all the major routes into & out of the city are affected by the cycle lanes already on a daily basis we are seeing increasing high levels of traffic at peak times. This will be a huge problem when the Schools & education establishments open up. Causing longer waiting times in traffic ultimately costing the consumer who will be hit in the pocket which will have a huge effect on our trade. Does the council have any suggestions or plans in place to tackle this which will also have a knock on effect on the clean air initiative?

Similar to the Avenue scheme, performance of this scheme is monitored regularly. Decision will be made based on the data collected.

Admin charges. During Covid we strongly oppose of the ten pounds administration charge being occurred by drivers who change their address upon informing the council. At a time when every penny counts again drivers are being hit in the pocket. Even the banks are showing compassion in these difficult times.

We set fees to recover the cost of the process. The fees are ring fenced to that regime and cannot be used to cross subsidise other functions. Banks are not so restricted.

Out of town Taxis & Private Hire vehicles - We are seeing a ever increasing number of out of town vehicles being licenced for example in New Forest. Where a vehicle can be purchased for around three or four thousand pounds, no cctv required, as long as its mechanically sound is then being used in the City by working for Private hire City based company's clogging up the roads & air. Yet SCC expect us to spend tens of thousands of pounds on Hybrid or Electric vehicles. This is completely unjust and is forcing good drivers off the road due to rising every day costs and the huge drop in work.

The vehicle requirements are part of the Green Charter plan agreed with central government to combat air pollution. SCC face substantial fines if we do not comply. CCTV is a safeguarding necessity. We are waiting for an update on whether bus lane use will be restricted to SCC only. This approval needs to come from central Government.