

CHANGES TO TAXI LICENSING NEW & RENEWAL SCHEME

Community Services Committee – 22nd June 2021

Report of: Alison Boote, Executive Lead Communities

Purpose: For decision

Publication status: Unrestricted

Wards affected: All

Executive summary:

- Local Authorities are responsible for issuing hackney carriage and private hire licences that may last for 1,3 or 5 years. The Council currently issues each type of driver, vehicle and operator licence so that it expires at the same time of year. For example, a hackney carriage vehicle licence will always expire at the end of January, whilst a private hire vehicle licence will always expire the end of March. Licence fees are not charged pro rata and are non-refundable.
- It is proposed to move to a process whereby a licence will expire on the anniversary of the grant date (e.g. a full year, or multiple thereof). This change will be fairer to applicants who will benefit from the full licence term irrespective of when they apply. Revised licensing procedures will allow individual licences to be renewed at any time through the year without creating significant additional burdens on the authority.

This report supports the Council's priority of:

Supporting economic recovery in Tandridge

Contact officer Jeannette Pickles, Taxi Licensing Officer
jpickles@tandridge.gov.uk

Recommendation to Committee:

That the Committee approves the change in procedure so that all new hackney carriage and private hire licences expire at the end of the full licence term on the anniversary of grant in line with majority of local councils in the county of Surrey.

Reason for recommendation:

This change will assist the Council to support economic recovery in Tandridge as it will assist new applicants to benefit of a full term of the licence when paying the fixed licence fee. This could encourage new applicants to apply for a licence with the Council.

Introduction and background

Current Scheme

- 1.1 The Council grants licences for Hackney carriage drivers, Hackney carriage vehicles, Private hire drivers, Private hire vehicles and Private hire operators.
- 1.2 There is published guidance for the licensing of the above which sets out fixed durations of licences, as follows:

3. Duration of licences
Hackney Carriage Vehicle Licences 1 February – 31 January annually
Hackney Carriage Driver's Licences 1 January – 31 December annually
All Private Hire Licences 1 April – 31 March annually
- 1.3 As a result if a licence is applied for part way through the licence period, the licence will only be granted until the end of the period listed above.
- 1.4 For example, a driver who applied for a Hackney carriage driver licence in September would only be granted a licence to expire on 31st December.
- 1.5 All fees are not pro-rata'd and are non-refundable therefore the applicant would pay for a full year and be granted a 3 month licence. This is unfair to new applicants or for individuals who let their licence lapse and renew later.
- 1.6 For new applicants to be licensed as a new hackney carriage or private hire driver, they must complete several steps which are costly. This is before paying for the driver licence. The steps to apply for a driver licence are attached as Appendix 'A' for reference.
- 1.7 The licensing new and renewal process has remained unchanged for many years. This process allowed the Council to bulk process renewal application in a cost efficient manner at specific months of the year. However, this is a strain on Council resources, as currently peak periods often require additional resource allocation.

- 1.8 Because of the pandemic and the resultant economic downturn a number of licence holders chose to allow their licences to lapse rather than pay for a licence they would not use. As the situation improves, applications will be made to reinstate licences at the standard licence fee, however due to the current fixed expiry point, these licences will be granted for a period less than a year.

Proposed Scheme

- 2.1 It is proposed for a change to a more business friendly process where a licence granted at any time during the year will thereafter be renewed on the anniversary of the start date.
- 2.2 This change is possible as a result of Environmental Health and Licensing recently investing in new software which will assist Officers to manage licence renewals effectively.
- 2.3 The new software will allow for automated renewals reminders to be sent by text, e-mail or post at any time of the year.
- 2.4 It is recognised that there will be no impact to the current licensed individuals who renew before the expiry of their current licence and are continuously licensed.
- 2.5 There will be minimal financial implication to the Council as this will only affect new applicants or individuals who allow their licence to lapse and renew later. These applications would represent a relatively small part of the licence applications processed each year, however the benefit felt by the individual licensee may be considerable.
- 2.6 Over time it is hoped that these changes will eventually reduce the high intensity period of licence renewals as the licence renewals slowly spread more throughout the year. This will allow resources to be allocated more effectively, reducing the additional resource requirements at current peak periods.
- 2.7 The taxi trade has suffered considerable difficulties during the COVID pandemic where lockdowns have halted business. Now that places are re-opening it is expected that individuals who allowed their licences to lapse to apply for new licences as they look to return to work.
- 2.8 The 'Taxi Licensing Fees 2021-2022' are attached as Appendix 'B' for reference to the cost of each licence.
- 2.9 If this proposal is agreed, the change will have an immediate effect for any future applications and the guidance will require a minor amendment to reflect this change.

Other options considered

- 3.1 Alternatively, to consider to keep the renewal periods the same but to allow for the fees to be pro-rata'd. This option is not preferred as the majority of the costs incurred by the Council occur prior to or at the commencement of the licence, and short term licence at reduced fees risk the Council being underfunded.
- 3.2 Another option is for the current system to remain the same until a future review of the published guidance is completed. This option is not preferred as the proposed changes represent an opportunity to provide some limited financial benefit to the licensed trade at a time when they are will have suffered hardship as a result of the lockdown to businesses.

Consultation

- 4.1. This proposal has been discussed with the taxi trade and operators in the district who are in support of this scheme.
- 4.2. All local councils in the county of Surrey have been contacted and 8 out of the other 10 local councils have responded and they all licence on a flexible basis.

Key implications

Comments of the Chief Finance Officer

The recommendations of the report will cause a timing difference in the year of change when we collect the cash in from licensing but as the amount of cash collected in is relatively small in the context of how much overall cash the council collects in a year it will not have an impact on the Councils cashflows. It is not expected that the recommendations will cause any changes to revenue.

There are no capital costs associated with this recommendation.

Comments of the Head of Legal Services

There are no legal implications arising from this report. The report outlines that the Licensing team have undertaken a "lean review" to maximise efficiency in the taxi licensing processes, with emphasis in respect of the renewal application process. The proposed harmonisation as set out in the report would benefit the Council resources.

Equality

This report does not disadvantage or discriminate against any different groups with protected characteristics in the community. The proposed scheme will benefit individuals to become licenced without a financial disadvantage.

Climate change

There are no significant environmental / sustainability implications associated with this report.

Appendices

Appendix 'A' - Steps to apply for a new private hire or hackney carriage driver licence

Appendix 'B' – Taxi Licensing Fees 2021/2022

Background papers

None.