

**REPORT FROM: REGENERATION SERVICES
ENGINEERING & SPECIAL PROJECTS MANAGER**
TO: TAXI LICENSING COMMITTEE
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TAXI TESTING PROCEDURES

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To consider a request for the taxi testing procedure used by Reigate and Banstead Council to be adopted by Pendle.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the current arrangements for taxi testing continue

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To maintain control over the standard and safety of licensed vehicles.

BACKGROUND

1. At a meeting of this Committee in November 2011, a request was made for this Council to adopt the taxi testing procedure used by Reigate and Banstead Council. The matter was deferred to this meeting for further information.
2. Reigate procedures are set out below and additional information from their Senior Licensing Officer is attached as appendix 1:-
 - An MOT certificate, which has been issued within 28 days of the vehicle being licensed, is accepted in lieu of a separate taxi test.
 - Officers carry out additional checks regarding meters, signage, bodywork etc. This is carried out by 1.5 members of staff, by appointment only, and an additional charge of £34 is made.
 - They currently have 80 hackney carriages and approximately 700 private hire vehicles.
 - The age limit for their vehicles is less than 4 years old at first licensing and can continue until 7 years old if in an immaculate (factory showroom condition). Wheelchair accessible can continue until 9 years old with the same conditions.

- Due to staffing implications they are about to start the process of changing to inspections at their depot. This will release 1 licensing officer position so to free up time to deal with drivers and enforcement.
3. Pendle procedures are set out below:-
- A taxi test is carried out at one of the appointed garages. A certificate of compliance and a pass sheet is issued once the vehicle passes. The pass sheets, application form, V5 and certificate of insurance are submitted to the Taxi Licensing office and the vehicle licence and plate is issued.
 - At the request of the trade a certificate of compliance was introduced in November 2008 and replaces the requirement for an MOT subject to the vehicle being licensed and only used for private hire or hackney carriage work.
 - Pendle has approximately 214 private hire vehicles and 71 hackney carriages.
 - The age limit is no older than 7 years when first licensed and continue until 9 years old with the exception of wheelchair accessible vehicles which can run until 12 years.
 - Tests are required once a year for vehicles up to 3 years old and twice a year after that. Vehicles that fail the taxi test on steering/suspension, braking system or tyres are required to have 3 tests a year.
 - The taxi test cost £35 with an additional £10 for an MOT test.
4. The issue of replacing the taxi test with an MOT test has previously been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel in 2007, who agreed that the testing arrangements should continue, with approved garages carrying out the tests. It was also considered by this committee in 2009 and again it was agreed to continue with the appointed garages.
5. As from 1st January 2012, the approved garages are P & M Motors and Norfolk Street Garage both based in Nelson.

ISSUE

6. At the last meeting members of the trade asked for the appointed garages to continue carrying out the taxi test and have the Reigate system as a third option.
7. The options would therefore be either a taxi test at one of the appointed garages or the acceptance of an MOT certificate, no older than 28 days, and additional checks carried out by the taxi licensing staff.
8. The additional checks not covered by an MOT are:
- Internal cleanliness
 - Window operation
 - Glazing
 - Door operation/locking
 - Boot/luggage space and condition
 - Testing of the taxi meter and roof sign
 - First aid kit and fire extinguisher
 - Signage
 - External condition
9. Approximately 581 tests were carried out in 2011, this does not include retests.

10. The current staffing levels in the taxi licensing office are 1 admin staff who works 15 hours over three days, 1 full time Enforcement Officer and the Taxi Licensing Manager who works 22 hours over four days.
11. The office hours are 10.00am – 11.00am for CRB and knowledge test appointments and from 11.00am until 2.30pm for all other enquiries.
12. An additional member of staff or increased hours of at least 15 hours over five days would be required for the additional checks to be carried out. As there is no funding for these extra hours the costs would have to be passed on through either an increase in the licence fees or a charge for each test.
13. The cost of an additional member of staff or extra hours would be £11008.90 which would equate to a charge of approximately £36.70 per test if 300 tests an annum were carried out by officers and 300 by the garages.
14. The appointed garages are willing to carry out the additional check for £15.

CONCLUSION

15. Licensed vehicles are subject to much higher annual mileages and more arduous driving than normal private vehicles. Therefore, in the interest of passenger and other road user's safety, a more stringent maintenance and testing regime is required in addition to an MOT test.
16. There seems to be no obvious benefit to the trade to change the current testing procedures, as the additional checks, either by officers, or one of the appointed garages, will see an increase in either licence or testing fees.
17. The checks would be on an appointment only basis, at set times of the day, so there would still be the requirement to ring ahead, as there is now, to make an appointment.
18. A four monthly testing procedure was introduced in September 2011, where a vehicle which fails on steering/suspension, braking or tyres has to be tested and licensed every four months. This was aimed at vehicle owners who did not maintain their vehicles during the course of their licence. There would be no system in place to keep a record of this; therefore, the four monthly tests would only apply to vehicles failing spot checks. Since the introduction there are a vast number of vehicles now on a four month test.
19. This request has been considered previously in 2007 and 2009 and both times it has been agreed to carry on with the testing of vehicles at the appointed garages.

IMPLICATIONS

Policy: Tests are carried out once a year for vehicles less than three years old and twice a year for vehicles over three years old. Three tests a year are required for vehicles failing the taxi test on steering/suspension, braking or tyres.

Financial: The Reigate and Banstead scheme could not be implemented within existing resources and an additional member of staff may be required if licensing staff carried out the test rather than the garages at a cost of £11008.90.

- Legal:** The contract was awarded to P & M Motors and Norfolk Street Garage for 2 years as from 1st January 2012. Three months notice must be given by either side to terminate the contract.
- Risk Management:** None arising directly from the report.
- Health and Safety:** A suitable building or a dedicated parking area would be required for the vehicle checks if carried out by licensing staff.
- Sustainability:** None arising directly from the report.
- Community Safety:** None arising directly from the report.
- Equality and Diversity:** None arising directly from the report.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Notes from Reigate and Banstead on their licensing procedures.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

2007 Scrutiny review of taxi age limit and testing arrangements.

Appendix 1

RE: Questions surrounding taxi and private hire vehicle testing at Reigate & Banstead Borough Council

Further to your request for information, please find the following answers to your questions regarding the testing of vehicles at Reigate and Banstead Borough Council.

1. What items do your officers test when carrying out a taxi test (please forward a test sheet if you have one)?

I have attached one of our interim inspection sheets for your information that detail the checks carried out during an inspection. The driver must provide an MoT from any garage that had been done within the 28 days preceding the appointment or renewal date and original insurance documents.

2. How many MOT tests and signage tests are required in a year for each vehicle?

The number of MoTs required varies depending on the age of the vehicle. If the vehicle is under three years old it requires MoT testing annually on renewal of the licence and at first licensing if it has more than 1000 miles on the odometer. Vehicles over 3 years old require MoT testing every 6 months. Vehicles over 7 years old (exceptional vehicles as we have a 7 year age limit) require testing every 4 months. Signage is checked at the interim inspections and at renewal. We have a different process for advertising on vehicles.

3. Do you carry out a road test to check hackney carriage meters?

Yes, when the rate is changed or a new meter is fitted or an old meter fitted to a new vehicle. Each check and seal takes approximately ½ an hour.

4. How many different officers do you have to carry out taxi tests?

We have two licensing officers (1.5 FTE) that carry out the inspections as part of their duties.

5. Have they had any mechanical training/qualifications?

No

6. How many tests do you carry out in a day?

Based on 720 vehicles, some of which that have 2 or 3 inspections a year we undertake approximately 1000 inspections a year. This equates to around 4 every working day.

7. Where are the tests carried out and do you have a designated building or parking spaces?

The tests are carried out in the car park at the Town Hall, we do not have a specific area or any designated parking.

8. Do you have an appointment system for the checks and if so what times of the day?

Yes we will not see a vehicle without an appointment unless the circumstances are exceptional e.g. an accident requires a replacement vehicle from an insurance company. All of our appointments are undertaken on Monday, Wednesday and Friday between 1300 and 1600 and on Tuesday and Thursday between 0900 and 1600. The last appointment available on any given day is 1530.

9. I believe the charge for the taxi test is incorporated in the licence fee. How much of the licence fee is for the test?

Each inspection is £34

10. How much do you charge for a missed appointment?

A missed appointment fee is £34

11. Does your system of officers checking the vehicles work well, if no what problems do you have?

The system of officers checking the vehicles does have the benefit of a great deal of driver/officer interaction however it is a wasteful and expensive use of a trained resource. The main and very serious problem we have had is that drivers would turn up at an appointment without the correct paperwork, without money to pay for the licence, something missing from the vehicle or just not turn up.

To address this we introduced a system of forwarding all of the paperwork to the office for checking before giving an appointment but still we are provided the wrong information despite our best efforts.

12. Are you looking at changing this system, if yes what are your proposals and when do you envisage them being introduced?

Yes, we are in the process of drastically changing the inspection system.

- We will require all vehicle inspections to be carried out at our depot where an MoT will be undertaken where relevant. The depot does not propose to charge for this service as they will be gaining the MoT fee.
- Licensing officers will not be inspecting the vehicles unless there are exceptional circumstances e.g. may need to go to a Committee or is over the age limit.
- We will no longer accept cash or cheques as a form of payment.
- The licence fee is to be paid for at the time of booking by credit or debit card, if the vehicle fails or if paperwork is incorrect or if there is a no show then another appointment is needed for which a fee would be payable.
- Licence administration is to be undertaken automatically

We expect to start phasing this in from April next year with a full transfer to the depot by September. Appointments will be handled by our customer services team.