

Report to Place, Economic Growth & Environment Scrutiny Board

LICENSING UPDATE

Portfolio Holder:

Councillor Taylor, Cabinet Member for Housing & Licensing

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Reason for Decision

The reason for this report is to update Scrutiny on the activities and work plans in relation to the Council's statutory licensing functions.

Recommendations

Members are asked to note the report.

LICENSING UPDATE

1 **Background**

- 1.1 The Council, acting in its role as Licensing Authority, carries out a range of statutory functions, including taxi and private hire, alcohol, entertainment and late-night refreshment, gambling, and street trading licensing.
- 1.2 This report sets out the activities of the licensing team since April 2024, and also outlines the challenges and demands on the service.

2 **Alcohol, Entertainment and Late-Night Refreshment**

- 2.1 The team continues to advise, issue, and ensure compliance with a range of premises licences issued under the Licensing Act 2003.
- 2.2 Officers continue to respond to complaints about licensed premises and undertake inspections to ensure compliance with conditions.
- 2.3 Officers continue to work in partnership with Greater Manchester Police and undertake visits to licensed premises to ensure compliance with conditions and meet new premises supervisors. Officers also attend Pubwatch meetings to discuss current issues with the licensed trade, aim to address issues and agree the implementation of best practice. This scheme also provides a forum to discuss changes to policy, legislation and to provide guidance for implementation.
- 2.4 There has been further promotion of the 'Ask Angela' scheme which aims to protect the vulnerable in licensed premises.
- 2.5 Officers further await the implementation of new legislation around the Government's 'Protect' agenda, in order to protect visitors to public venues from terrorism. The Security Industry Authority will become the enforcing body for this new system.
- 2.6 A welcome development is the Government's promise to review Licensing Act 2003 fees, which have not been reviewed since the legislation commenced in 2005. These fees are set by Ministers via Regulations and the majority of licensing authorities report working at a loss due to the passage of time and increased costs of enforcement and service delivery.

3 Taxi and Private Hire

- 3.1 There have been circa. 900 new applications received for dual driver licenses since April 2024.
- 3.2 The total number of licenses now in force are detailed below with comparative figures from May 2023.

Licence Type	December 2024	May 2023
Dual drivers' licence	3384	1305
School contract drivers	86	95
Private hire vehicles	1883	1030
Private hire operators	92	38
Hackney carriage vehicles	85	85

- 3.3 The increase in applications commenced following a change to policy in June 2023 when the Licensing Committee removed the requirement for a driven test in order to obtain a licence together with the removal of the lower age limit of first licensing a vehicle.
- 3.4 This has seen a significant shift in licensed drivers moving to licence more locally from other licensing authorities such as Wolverhampton. This has been further strengthened by lobbying from the Mayor of Greater Manchester to the Department for Transport to stop the process of 'licensing shopping' where applicants travel elsewhere in the country in order to acquire a licence due to cost or an easier application process.
- 3.5 As Members will see from the above figures, the significant increase in licensed drivers has placed an additional burden on Officers within the team. A recruitment exercise is underway to bolster the team with the additional Officers needed in order to meet demand, including extending opening hours of our service reception.
- 3.6 The additional vehicles being licensed has also meant an increase in testing capacity at our testing station at Moorhey Street. A third bay will provide extra capacity and installation is almost complete (at the time of writing this report). In addition, a waiting room and CCTV viewing of the testing bay has been installed for the comfort and safety of all visitors to the site.
- 3.7 Officers are working towards the implementation of a new service database and front facing driver application and account system which is due for delivery in 2025. This will improve efficiency and speed of processes and hopefully make it easier for service users to handle their applications.

3.8 Current statistics for vehicle tests since April 2024 are as follows:

Hackney Carriages	Pass = 49 (64%)	Fail = 28
Private Hire	Pass = 1098 (64%)	Fail = 627
Main reasons for failure	Brakes Suspension Tyres Condition of interior	
Missed tests	140	

3.9 The current pass rate of 64% still needs to improve although it is noted that the figure has increased from 51% in 2021, 52% in 2022, 56% in 2023 to the current figure.

3.10 Since April 2024, there have been 36 hearings before the Drivers Panel. The breakdown of outcomes is detailed below.

Applications granted	Applications refused	Licences Suspended	Licences Revoked	NFA
4	21	3	7	1

3.11 In addition, there have been 4 delegated revocation decisions made by Officers for urgent matters.

3.12 One of the above delegated revocations followed a successful prosecution on 19 September 2024, of an unlicensed driver who was disqualified from driving by the court for 2 years and ordered to pay a fine and costs totaling £4,671.

3.13 In July 2024, a vehicle compliance operation was undertaken in partnership with Greater Manchester Police and VOSA. The results of that operation are outlined below:

Total vehicles checked.	18
Hackney carriages checked	2
Private hire vehicles checked	16
Pass	5
Fail for minor defects	10
Failed and Licence Suspended	3

4 **Future Planned Activities**

4.1 In addition to ongoing service improvement, ensuring compliance and resident safety, the coming year will see Officers focusing on the following priorities and projects:

- Reviewing hackney carriage ranks and the limit on vehicle numbers.
- Implement dementia awareness into our new driver training course.
- Procure a new licensing database to improve effectiveness and customer experience.
- Work more closely with the trade to improve vehicle testing results