



Report

1 February, 2024

To the Chair and Members of the Audit Committee

Report Title: An update on the Hackney Carriage/ Private Hire Licensing service review/ Rapid Improvement Project.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This report aims to give members of the Audit committee with an update on progress of the Hackney Carriage/Private Hire licensing review and identified outstanding audit actions.

EXEMPT REPORT

2. This report is not exempt.

RECOMMENDATIONS

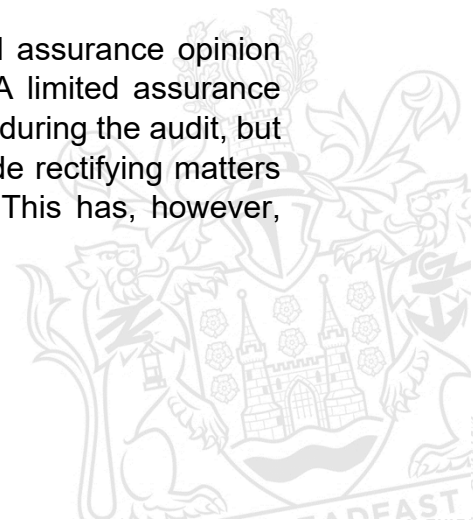
3. There are no specific recommendations, members are asked to consider the updated information provided in the report.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE CITIZENS OF DONCASTER?

4. The review of the Hackney Carriage/Private Hire (HC/PC) licensing process will improve the service delivered to the citizens and those individuals in the trade in Doncaster.

BACKGROUND

5. The audit report undertaken in June 2022 provided a partial assurance opinion over the Hackney Carriage/Private Hire Licensing Service. A limited assurance opinion would have been given, due to weaknesses identified during the audit, but this was not necessary as significant progress has been made rectifying matters brought to the attention of management through the audit. This has, however,



resulted in delays in finalising and issuing the audit report as officer resource has been targeted at rectifying the matters raised.

To address wider issues faced by the service, not just for the taxi licensing regime a Rapid Improvement Plan (RIP) was instigated to assist in identifying and developing solutions to the deficiencies experienced by the current information system serving the service. There was a clear need to stabilise the current technology to ensure the service could operate whilst delivering changes and a transformation to improve customer experiences and create efficiencies within the team.

The team have been significantly involved, resource wise, in the review of the service and the rapid improvement plan. This has been needed to ensure that business analyst colleagues have a full understanding of how the work is undertaken and team members views in respect of future improvements.

The table below provides an overview since June 2023 of the licensing teams involvement to date and work undertaken alongside the business analyst team for service change, whilst operating BAU. The work undertaken so far as part of the RIP project has gone some way to improve performance within the team.

21/06/23.	Licencing Rapid Improvement Project plan has been agreed with Service
21/06/23.	Project scope developed and agreed
30/06/23.	Data collection completed
30/06/23.	Performance baseline and Process maps data captured
30/06/23.	Current state report first draft completed and shared with the team
30/06/23.	Next steps and immediate deliverables agreed to stabilise current technology
30/06/23.	Reviewed telephone numbers and email addresses online
30/06/23.	Website review Workshop meetings set up
10/07/23.	DBS checks completed
10/07/23.	Calls transferred to Netcall solution to understand number of calls coming into the service
10/07/23.	BA team met with service and provided narrative around some of the sections of the report
10/07/23.	Assigned BA resources to re-design New Driver process
13.07.23.	Confirmed scope of deliverables with audit
13/07/23.	Testing team carried out testing on the Vehicle application and booking process and fed back findings to Project Group
13/07/23.	Taxi Driver application Form requirements gathered from Service
20/07/23.	Meet with Audit to discuss scope and deliverables for Audit committee update
31/07/23.	Review of CDC Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy carried out, recommendations made relating to the insurance requirement and wording change around section 5.4 on criminal record

31/07/23.	Comparison of the licensing policy against the DFT standards carried out. Recommendations offered in relation to a robust recording system for complaints
31/07/23.	Training providers identified for the safeguarding and knowledge tests
31.07/23.	CDC benchmarked against neighbouring authorities in terms of training options
31/07/23.	Report produced for the movement to Eventbrite to book knowledge and safeguarding training
31/07/23.	Market examined for Licensing software providers. Feedback from other Councils utilising different providers gathered to gauge suitability
31/07/23.	Policy changes consideration on CDC requirement to check valid insurance throughout life of the Licence.
31/07/23.	CCTV report redrafted
31/07/23.	Emissions report redrafted
31/07/23.	Complaints procedure developed to be utilised between the licensing team and departments within CDC
31/07/23.	Plying for hire procedure drafted and agreed for implementation
31/07/23.	Review and amendments made to the Off-sales premises inspection record
31/07/23.	Reviewed 'Revocation Notice' approach and considered advice on this from the Consultant
31/07/23.	Considered and implemented advice from the Consultant in respect of the suspensions and return of Council equipment
31/07/23.	Consultant provided advice on the content of the application forms to reduce the documents size
31/07/23.	Reviewed Project Documents to reflect wider customers benefiting from improvements
02/08/23.	Incorporated outcomes of the Audit Report into the current state findings
02.08.23.	Development Team refined Taxi Driver Licence Application
11.08.23.	Assessment of fees and charges for Taxi Licensing and a benchmark of CDCs fees and charges against the neighbouring authorities' fees and fleet completed by consultant
11.08.23.	Future State design workshops booked
16.08.23	Development Team refined Taxi Vehicle Application form and provided options to Service
18.09.23.	Future State design workshops completed
19.08.23.	Interim redesigned online Taxi Driver application form go live on internet pages
30.09.23.	Future state recommendations shared and discussed
30.09.23	Licensing online forms for development identified and agreed
31.10.23.	Future State recommendations discussed and agreed
23/11/23.	Go live with revised Webpages
23.11.23.	CDC Web homepage amended to improve visibility of Licensing Service
05.12.23	Plan/evaluate option for a telephone study
06/12/23.	Gather requirements for General enquiry form across all of Licensing

The initial audit identified 12 actions as part of the Hackney Carriage/Private Hire licensing improvement plan. Other factors, alongside the work detailed in the table above which are worth noting in respect of the service not having scope to have fully concluded all the audit actions include

- The required work of some of the audit actions are interdependent with the new information management system that the service procures.
- An increase in new driver applications has been received since April 2023, it is unknown as to the actual reason but believed to be associated with the cost-of-living crisis and people finding additional work for income.
- Under resourced team to meet the current demands of the service. Full financial review on the true costs to the service has been undertaken which has identified that the costs are not a true reflection of the actual costs of the service to meet the demands. This work also identified that to provide the required level of service 2 additional members of staff are required to ensure an effective service.

Work still proposed to be undertaken include

- Develop and go live with Vehicle Process
- Carry out user acceptance testing with the trade on new products.
- Develop and go Live with driver process
- Complete call study and forecast require resources for telephone line opening
- Secure resources for telephone line opening and open telephone lines
- Reduce/ close the email channel
- Design and deliver chat bot/AI telephony opportunities

To date there are 5 audit actions that are continued to be worked on to fully comply with the recommendations of the audit. Please see the following update;

Documented procedures

With regard to the update on documented procedures, the full service is undergoing a transformation on the information management system that it uses therefore it had been agreed that due to the system deficiencies this particular audit action would be deferred to late 2024. As a result, this audit requirement has not been fully actioned. The original intention was to purchase a new system from the cloud frameworks, however from research with various Local Authorities it was identified that such procurement would not provide the service with the best options for recourse in the event of issues experienced. Therefore, the service has undertaken a full procurement exercise for the tender of a new information management system which closed on the 12.01.24 and is now subject to the evaluation/moderation process of the business and ICT. Upon successful procurement, the proposal is for the introduction and implementation of a new

system from April 2024 which will run alongside the existing system, to allow for a phased approach of the system across all Regulation and Enforcement services.

Due to the existing information management system no longer being an available product from April 2024, the service is currently undertaking an exercise to upgrade the version of the Assure system serving the licensing team as well as merging the combined system of M3/Assure product to other service areas.

The team have been significantly involved with business analyst colleagues and have been involved in creating a mapping process of the work/task areas associated with HC/PH licensing. This mapping process has enabled the team to focus on areas where improvements were required to enable a better level of service. Such work has assisted in the webpage upgrade and development of new online forms (of 48 forms serving the team – to date 23 have been completed with a go live of 2) for assisting in providing a new image and an improved customer journey.

A complaints procedure has been developed in relation to complaints being referred from Education and/ or vulnerable adults departments. This has been shared and agreed between departments to ensure that there is a robust process of sharing vital information in relation to a concern/complaint.

Reporting of management information from Assure

This audit action is reliant upon the change to the information management system, however in such absence the team have continued to work with the existing system for modifying reporting mechanisms associated with HC/PH licensing tasks to ensure that there is confidence in the reporting results. To date the team have reviewed, and either reconfigured or rebuilt the following areas of work to ensure that there is confidence with the reporting module.

- All current drivers and email address report
- Licensed vehicle date of registration and fuel type (emissions) report
- All current vehicle licence holder and email address report
- Licensing workload percentage bar report
- Licensing workload pie chart report
- Private Hire Operators and email addresses report

To date the modified reports have demonstrated confidence in the reported results as duplicate recorded have now been weeded from the system.

Prior to the implementation of the procured information management system, the services current system will be upgraded to the latest version by March 2024. We have been informed that the current reporting format will be installed on the test server for us to query the data, therefore it is not envisaged that the reporting modules we have created will be impacted. A period of testing is intended to be

undertaken prior to going live to ensure that the reporting modules will continue run in the format designed.

Spot checks/Inspections

Since April 2023 the team have undertaken 7 joint evening operations with SYP in terms of ad hoc checks of HC/PH vehicles, as a result of this work the team have checked 151 vehicles. Issues identified were mostly to do with Door stickers missing HC/PH plates not displayed correctly & not wearing drivers badge while working, these have all been addressed with the HC/PH drivers to ensure compliance of the licensing requirements. Inspections of Operators have been undertaken across the borough, this work was prioritised and actioned in terms of addressing the larger organisations' potential for more risk due to volume of drivers. The team have checked the larger operators/city centre located businesses; no significant concerns were highlighted. The renewal of this task for the larger/city centre operators is set for the first quarter of the next financial year. For borough wide/smaller/individual operators the team have sent questionnaires prior to Christmas to those operators, with a requirement to respond by 14.01.24 to assist the team in determining a risk-rating based inspection programme for the next 12 months where those identified as 'high risk' will be prioritised for an in-depth inspection over those who are rated as a 'low risk' operator. To date 30 responses have been received and no issues identified. The intention is for this audit action to be completed no later than July 2024.

Regrettably, the team have experienced a delay in completing this audit action due to various work strands which were classified as higher priority needing action, which resulted in officers moving away from business-as-usual work. The other aspects of work undertaken included the assurance that all HC/PH drivers licensed by the Licensing Authority are on the DBS update service and provided consent. This resulted in resources being spent in ensuring that the trade was compliant with the licensing requirement as well as suspending a number of HC/PH drivers for none compliance of the DBS requirement. As a result of this work Doncaster's Licensing Authority operates at a higher standard than neighbouring authorities who's approach has been to introduce the requirement at the point of driver's licence renewal, which could take up to 3 years to be compliant with the Department for Transport.

The team have also introduced and implemented an external system set up for the booking of knowledge and safeguarding training events to avoid the experiences of duplicated bookings, funding taken but no dates available and double booking of training dates/times. Since the introduction of the rapid improvement plan (RIP), all members of the licensing team have been heavily involved with the various business analyst workshops/scoping and testing reviews with the shared view of improving the customer experience and developing a streamlined service for the processing and assessment of required data.

Consulting on the Mandatory Introduction of CCTV

Following the outcome of the Audit, the Council employed an independent licensing consultant to act as critical friend and undertake a wider health check on the Council's licensing service. The consultant assisted with many aspects of licensing

business, including undertaking a review of the report which considered the mandatory introduction of CCTV in all licensed vehicles, initially considered by the licensing committee in June 2022. It was determined that due to the long-term impact of Covid on the trade, which brought about a sustained downturn in the night-time economy, compounded by the current cost-of-living crisis (which has delivered a further blow to the taxi licensing industry), the context to this original ambition had clearly changed. Consequently, following discussions with the Chair of the Licensing Committee and senior political leadership it has been agreed that at present, consultation on the introduction of CCTV will be deferred until such a time that the ongoing effect of the cost-of-living crisis on the trade and consumers alike reduces. The authority will of course continue to review its commitment to implement consultation on these matters.

This decision has been publicised on the City of Doncaster Councils website to the trade via a status update on the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy.

Renewal Reports

As a result of the work undertaken by the independent consultant, it was recommended that some parts of the renewals policy should be considered and changed to allow for the policy to continue to ensure people's safety but also to streamline the service to allow more proactive checks to be carried out by the team and ensure licence holders comply with legislation, the policy and licensing conditions.

Proposed policy changes included current practice around the multiple checks of insurance documents and medical certificates. The recommendations made in relation to vehicle insurance identified this as a policy requirement that places unnecessary additional requirements on an already stretched licensing team. The current regime is that the licensing team run a report to identify those drivers whose cover has lapsed during the licence period, contact those owners and those who fail to provide evidence of continuous insurance cover have their vehicle licence suspended. It is proposed, therefore, to amend the policy to require Doncaster Licensing Team to check the vehicle is correctly insured upon grant / renewal of the vehicle licence but then, in line with other Local Authorities, incorporate any further checks as part of private hire operator checks. This will see compliance officers making enquiries as to what checks are carried out by the operator to ensure that the vehicles operated by them are licensed, insured, have a valid mot, an in date council inspection and are road worthy. The law states that drivers of all vehicles, including Taxis, must hold valid insurance. It should be noted that these checks will continue to form part of coordinated roadside operations with South Yorkshire Police

In the interim and until the proposed policy changes can be agreed, in order to meet the requirement of the audit report, the team have rebuilt and tested a reporting tool in the system to extract data relating to insurance documents. To date reports to identify drivers whose insurance cover has lapsed during the licence period has been collated, reminder letters have been created and sent to drivers.

The proposed policy changes for interim insurance checks and a change to policy in relation to medical certification, will be contained in a report to be brought to committee in due course.

Also, in addition to these proposed policy changes, in November 2023 the DFT published the document 'Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Best Practice Guidance for Licensing Authorities'. This new guidance proposes a number of changes in relation to best practice and a report outlining all of the recommendations and implications for the service, will also be brought forward to committee, once the implications for the service and current policy are determined.

The Council's licensing unit is a small, but incredibly busy and high-profile area of council business, which has made significant achievements managing the volume of work associated with the function. This has been down to the continued hard work and commitment of all team members who have positively embraced the challenges and areas for improvement highlighted by the Audit report. It is worth noting that complaints relating to the service have fallen by over 50% from 53 received in 2022 to just 22 in the year to date.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

6. There are no specific options to consider within this report. The report aims to provide a detailed update to members on positive progress to date.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED OPTION

7. Not applicable.

8. Legal Implications [MC Churchman 24.1.24]

The Council has a number of statutory duties regarding various licensing functions. In the context of this report, those functions arise from the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 and the Town Police Clauses Act 1847. Statutory guidance and Audit recommendations will assist the Council in carrying out its functions.

9. Financial Implications [Officer Initials: _RT_ | Date: _23/01/24_____]

There are no direct financial implications attached to the update given in this report. The service is in the middle of undergoing a procurement exercise to secure a new management information system to service all departments of Regulation and Enforcement which will be implemented by March 2026, this is being done via a capital scheme costing £250k.

In addition to this Regulation and Enforcement are also updating the existing NEC system costing £52,725 which will again benefit the taxi licensing function and help achieve the audit objectives.

10. Human Resources Implications There are no direct HR Implications in relation to this report. **[Officer Initials: AA | Date: 23/01/2024]**

11. Technology Implications [Officer Initials: PW | Date: 23/01/24]

Digital & ICT are working closely with the Licensing service and the Business Analysis Team in Customer Services to develop and deliver the technology needed to support the identified improvements. Work is in progress to build a new solution for the Taxi Vehicle License process that will include multi-forms to allow customers to only complete the required parts at the correct point in the process, instead of one large form with multiple calls, stopping points and vulnerabilities previously leading to timeouts. This solution will also include a new look and feel “portal” style front end, allowing customers to part save their applications and show their progress in the process and a booking component that will have team admin access and an audit trail. This technology will also be used for the Driver Licence process, along with the development of an additional 40 online request forms. This whole solution is in progress with staggered go live dates and a projected completion date of 31st March 2024.

Work is also underway to upgrade and complete the migration of M3 Public Protection to Assure and to support with the evaluation of a replacement information management system.

RISKS AND ASSUMPTIONS

12. There are no risks and assumptions associated with this report as no decisions are being recommended or taken.

CONSULTATION

13. No specific consultation has been undertaken in respect of this report.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

14. Not Applicable

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

15. HC/PH – Hackney Carriage/Private Hire

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