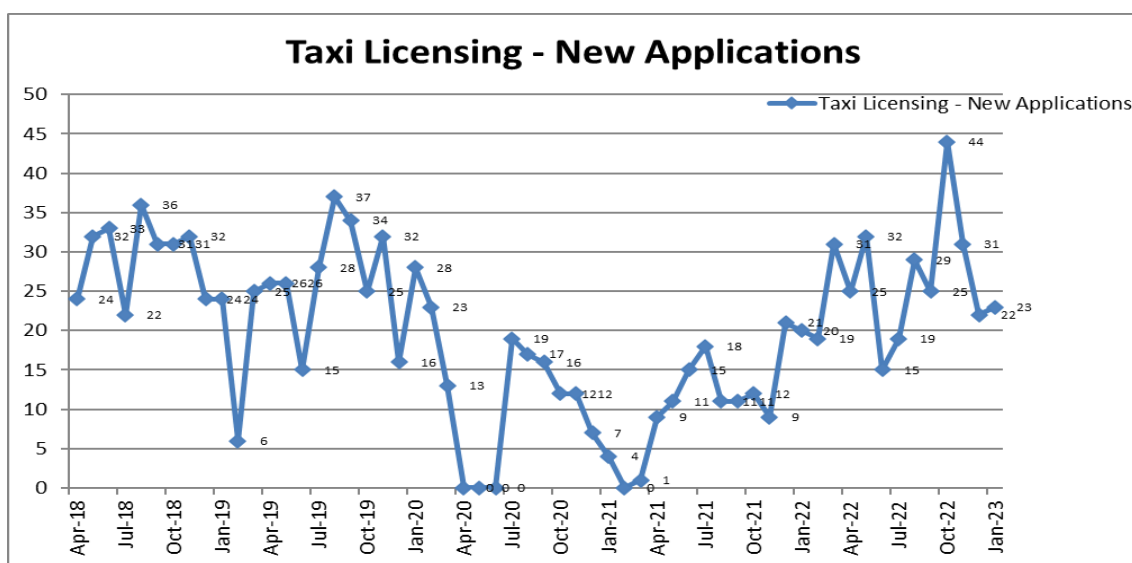
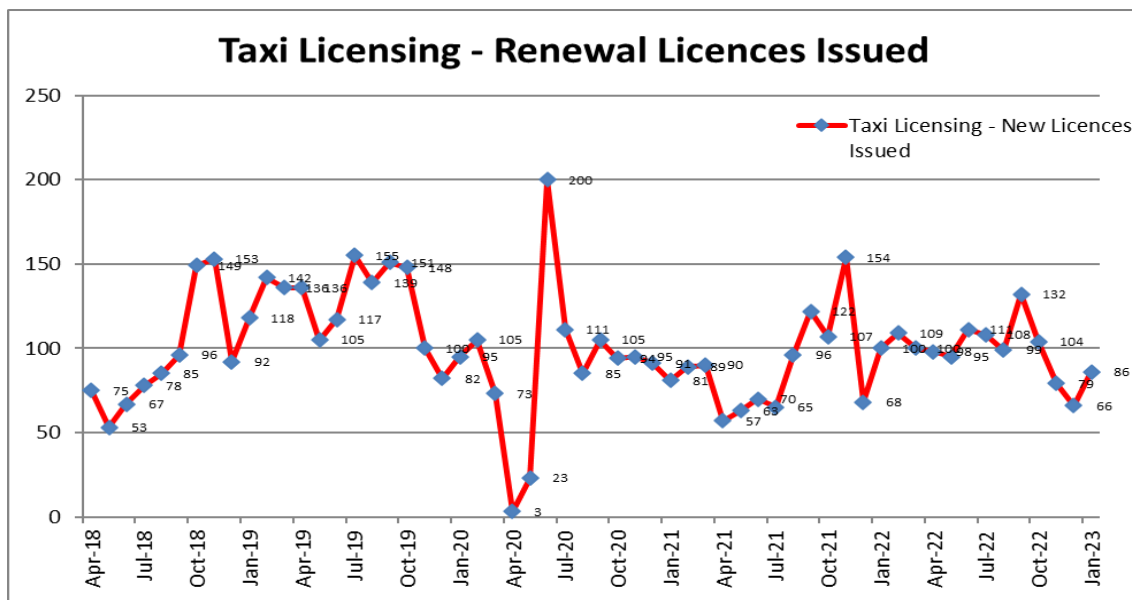


Taxi Licensing Update for Licensing Committee – January 2023

1.0 Licensed Drivers

Driver and vehicle numbers have stabilised over 2022/23 following both showing month on month declines between 2020 and 2021. Drivers are reporting higher levels of business now the economy is beginning to recover. The fall in drivers and vehicles has been seen at a national level as drivers moved into the more stable delivery industry and other jobs where they can earn a similar wage without working unsociable hours. The Taxi Licensing Team, in conjunction with Passenger Transport Unit commenced a driver recruitment campaign in the second half of 2022 and this is now paying dividends with significant numbers of new driver applications. The team have approximately 30 applications in progress.

New driver and vehicle applications had fallen since the start of the pandemic however the team are starting to see a recovery in numbers of new applicants and levels are back to those seen pre pandemic. The team processed 23 new licence applications and 86 renewals during January 2023. The team have experienced a significant period of staff sickness along with an officer leaving the team, this has resulted in some delays in processing new applications.



The chart below shows the total number of licences produced each month. Driver licences are issued for one or three years, most drivers opt for a three year licence. 2019 saw a large number of drivers renew and is behind the increased numbers for 2019. The number of new applications has risen over the last year to a level seen prior to the pandemic, it is hoped new applications will continue to increase as business picks up and the economy recovers. Whilst new applications are up overall driver levels remain flat as older drivers leave the industry. Driver numbers fell below 1000 in August 2020 and are a long way from reaching this level again. Demand will dictate if driver numbers return to pre pandemic levels

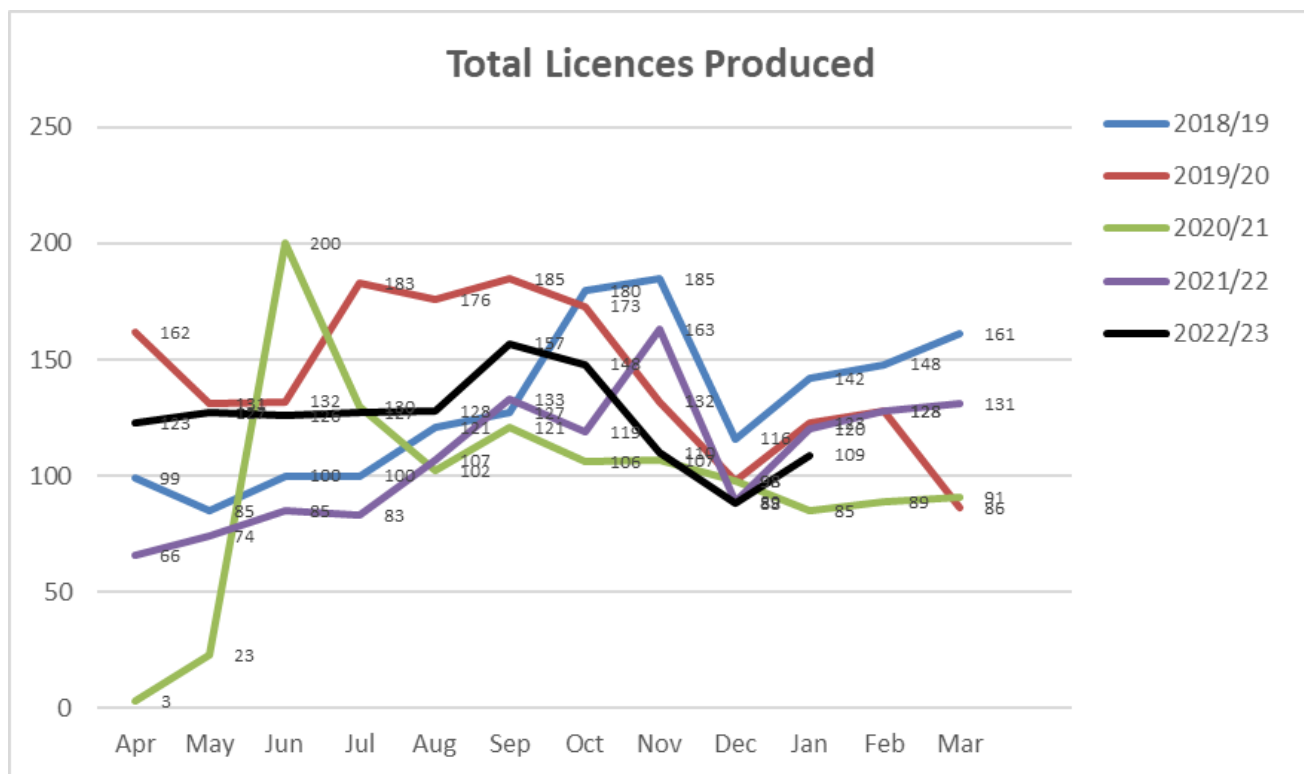


Figure 2 below shows the total number of licensed hackney carriage drivers in Wiltshire and their location.

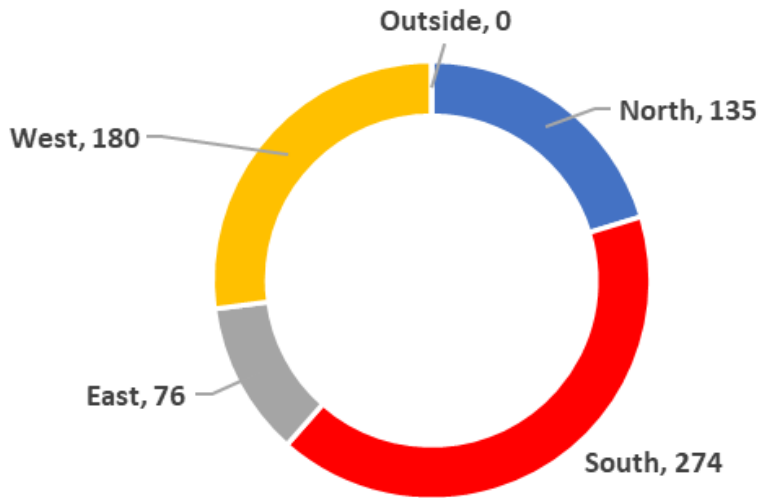
The total number of licensed hackney carriage drivers at the end of January was 665, up 3 on the previous month, prior to the pandemic we licensed 860 hackney carriage drivers

As of the end of January 2023, 135 were licensed in the North area, 76 in the East, 274 in the South and 180 in the West. The reduction in hackney carriage drivers over an annual period is shown below:

- April 2019 to April 2020 - decrease of 44
- April 2020 to April 2021 - decrease of 89
- April 2021 to April 2022 - decrease of 79
- April 2022 to date - decrease of 21

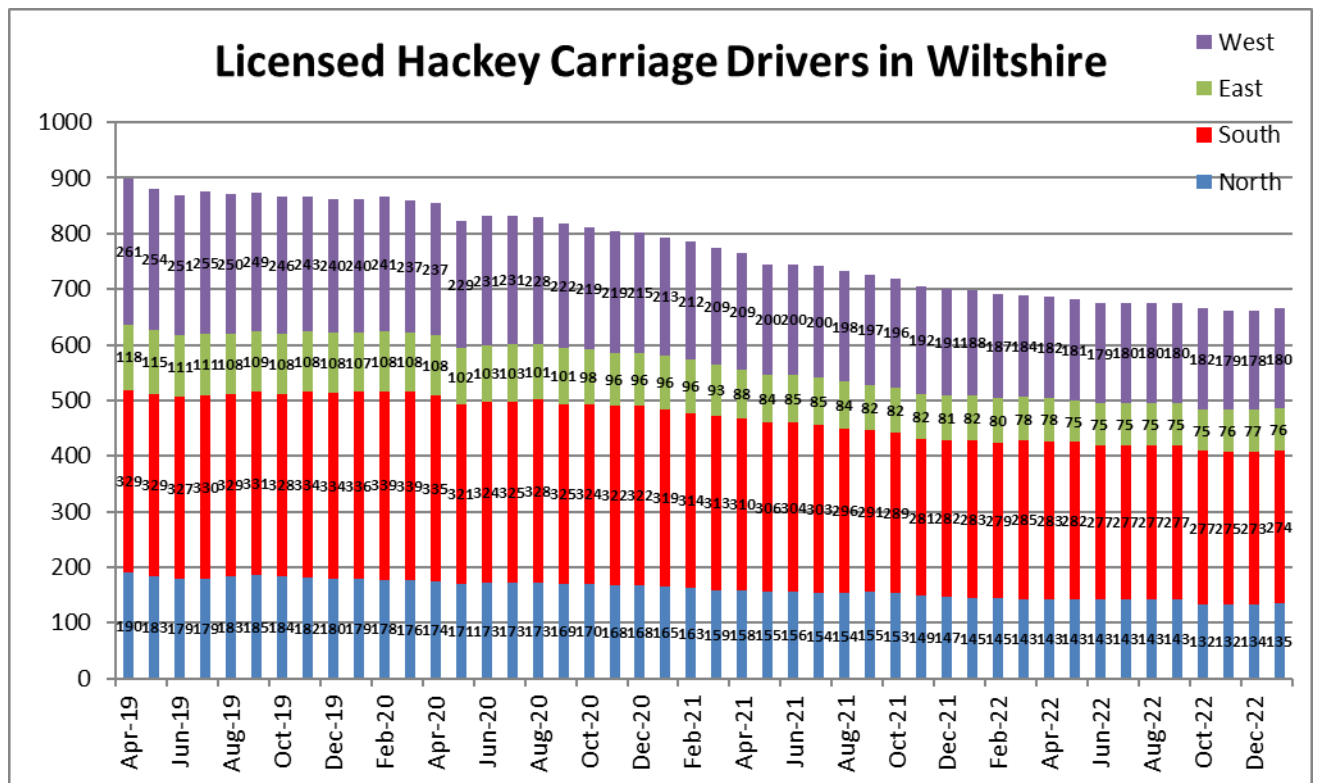
The numbers demonstrate the effect of the pandemic but also highlight numbers had been falling before Covid hit. The numbers also show that the decrease in the last year has been the smallest for 4 years, it is hoped this is a beginning of a recovery for the industry. Coronavirus and lockdown restrictions have seen a reduction in hackney carriage drivers of 197 over the period March 2020 to January 2023, representing a fall of 21%, this appears to be in line with the national average. Driver numbers have stabilised over the last 3 months.

Hackney Carriage Drivers by Location 31 January 2023



The graph below shows the monthly variation in hackney carriage driver numbers during 2019/20, 2021/22 and 2022/23. During January 2023 numbers rose 3, numbers in the North rose by 1, the South rose by 1, the West rose by 2 whilst the East fell by 1 when compared to the previous month.

Since April 2019 Hackney Carriage driver numbers have fallen in all areas, down 81 in the West, 55 in the North, 42 in the East and 55 in the South. The West is clearly the worst affected area.

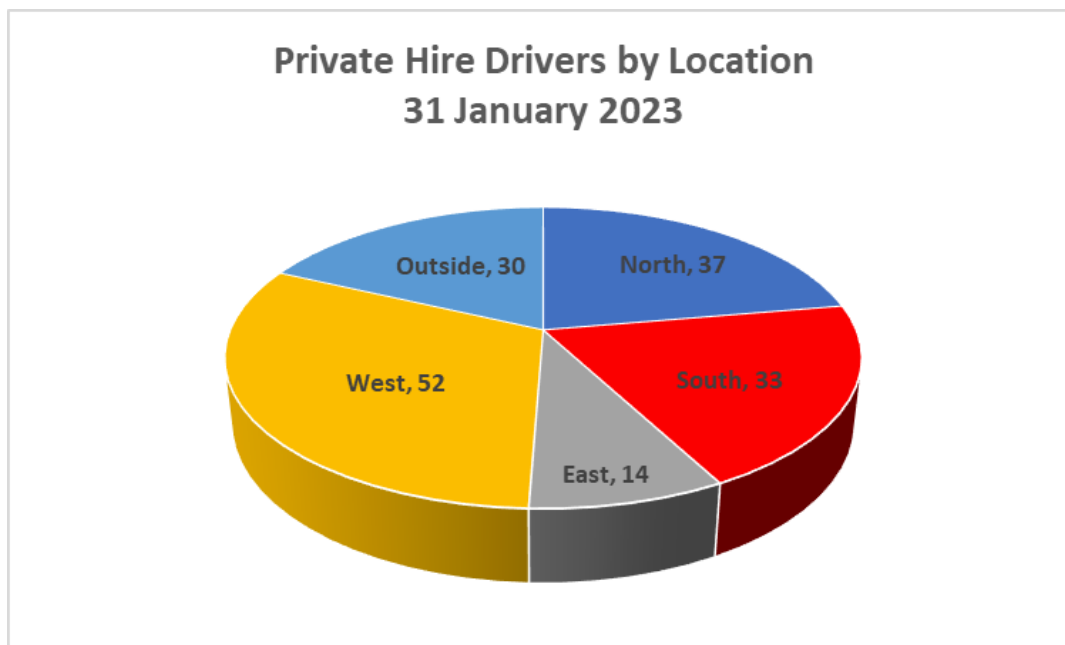


The team also license private hire only drivers, these totalled 166 as at the end of January 2023, a decrease of 1 over the month, bringing the total number of drivers licensed to 831, an increase of 2 on the previous month. It is clear there is a trend of drivers switching from hackney carriage to private hire, this reflects the lower footfall in our town centres and the reducing amount of business available from the town centre ranks.

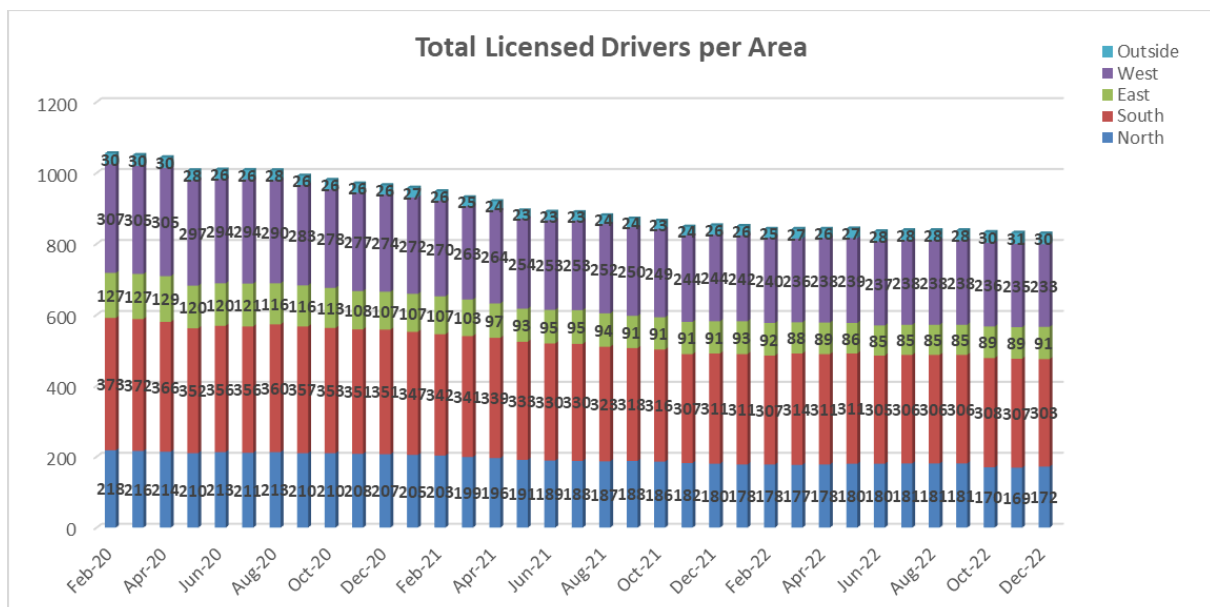
The yearly movement in private hire driver numbers is as follows:

- April 2019 to April 2020 - increase of 12
- April 2020 to April 2021 - decrease of 35
- April 2021 to April 2022 - increase of 1
- April 2022 to date - increase of 10

Private Hire drivers are not restricted by zone and can take bookings for anywhere in the Country. It is interesting to note that we have more private hire drivers living outside of the county than in the east of the county. For information the area in which the private hire drivers are registered is as follows;



The graph below shows total driver numbers since February 2020, the month prior to the pandemic.

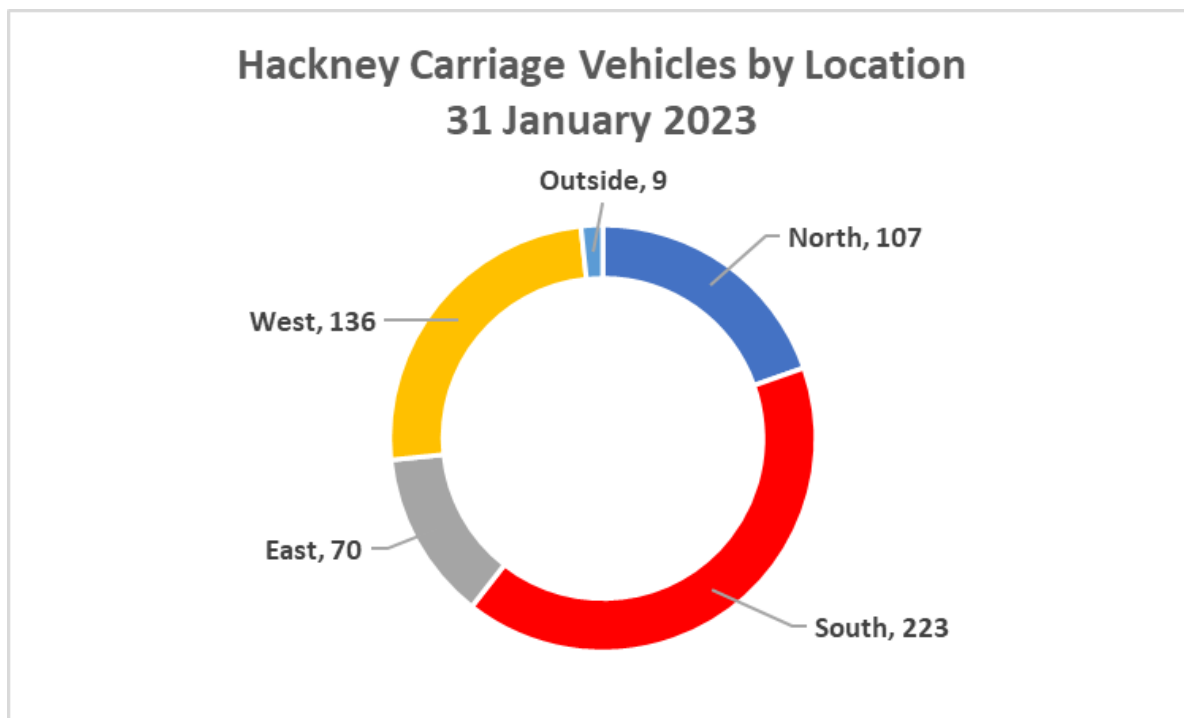


Since April 2019 the number of hackney carriage drivers has fallen by 233 and the number of private hire drivers has fallen by 12, an overall fall of 245 drivers or 21%. However 219, a large percentage of the reduction of 245 drivers has occurred since the first national lockdown in March 2020 as a result of Covid-19.

2.0 Licensed Vehicles

At the end of January 2023 the taxi licensing team licensed a total of 793 vehicles, the same as the previous month. The impact of lockdown and the Covid restrictions had taken effect and vehicle numbers had dropped for 8 consecutive months prior to May 2021, it was hoped numbers would stabilise after restrictions were lifted but this is taking longer than expected although the team feel numbers have stabilised over the last three months and are beginning to rise, however we are still well down on the 1050 vehicles licenced at the time of the first lockdown. The vehicle split is as follows, 545 hackney carriage vehicles and 248 private hire vehicles, hackney carriage numbers fell by 2 and private hire vehicle numbers rose by 2 over the month when compared to the previous month. Of the 793 vehicles licensed 13.2% or 105 vehicles are wheelchair accessible. It should be noted that 31% of licensed private hire vehicles are wheelchair accessible compared to 5% of hackney carriage vehicles, this reflects the type of work each type of vehicle undertakes.

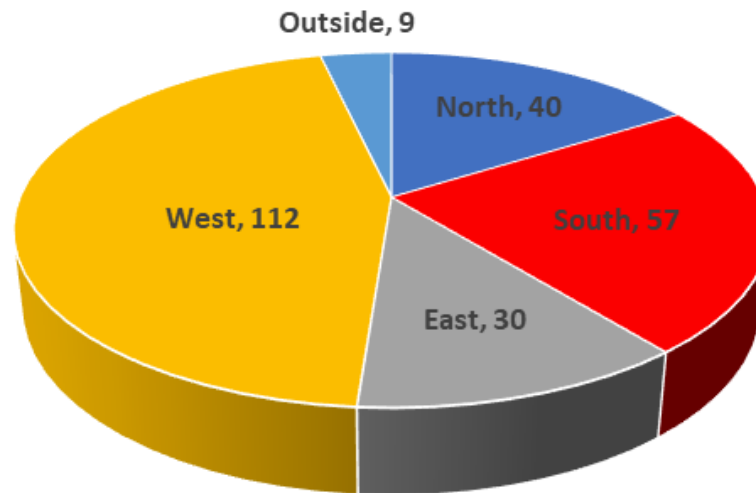
The chart below shows the location split of all hackney carriage vehicles.



The team also license private hire only vehicles, as advised above these totalled 248 as at the end of January 2023.

Private Hire drivers are not restricted by zone and can take bookings for anywhere in the Country if they wish. For information the area in which the private hire vehicles are registered is as follows;

Private Hire Vehicles by Location 31 January 2023



Between April 2019 and January 2023 the number of licensed vehicles, hackney carriages and private hire vehicles decreased by 143, the number has reduced by 142 or 17% since the first Coronavirus lockdown was announced in March 2020, this is in line with national trends.

3.0 Enforcement actions

The team continue to proactively enforce the Council's policies in relation to taxi licensing, ensuring we have a visible presence on the rank, however staff sickness during the period March to December 2022 has seen the level of enforcement reduce over the last 6 months. The team issued penalty points to on 24 occasions during March 2021, the highest monthly total ever recorded. The enforcement officers also undertook drive by inspections and rank visits within our towns to identify potential issues.

Penalty points were issued to 2 drivers during January 2023, one for abusive behaviour towards another taxi driver and one for failing to notify the Council of a change of address. The numbers have fallen recently as one team member is off on long term sick and enforcement officers have had to step in to cover admin tasks and licence production, reducing the level of enforcement.

The Council operates an internal penalty points scheme under which a driver will be suspended if they reach 12 points in a rolling 12 month period.

The Team did not revoke any drivers in January 2023 but suspended four drivers during the month.

The team also completed 15 DBS checks during January 2023.

The team continue to work on updated driver and vehicle guidelines in line with government advice which will further enhance standards within Wiltshire for the benefit of service users and the industry in general. The team are considering the impact of the 2020 Environment bill which placed requirements on Local Authorities to manage air quality. This may impact taxis and our guidelines around vehicle age and emissions.

The team continue the work on introducing a single licensing zone for hackney carriages in Wiltshire. To move to a single licensing zone the Council has to adopt Paragraph 25 – Schedule 14 of the Local Government Act 1972, a report is being written for full Council to facilitate this.

The team are also investigating the possibility of a school only taxi licence, we are currently communicating with other local authorities that have trialled the idea and will discuss with Passenger Transport Unit if the idea is feasible in due course.

The Coronavirus pandemic hit the taxi industry very hard and all local authorities have seen reducing driver numbers. The team believe numbers are stabilising and are working with our colleagues in Passenger Transport Unit on initiatives to encourage recruitment of new drivers in Wiltshire.

Tom Ince
Principal Compliance Officer
15 February 2023