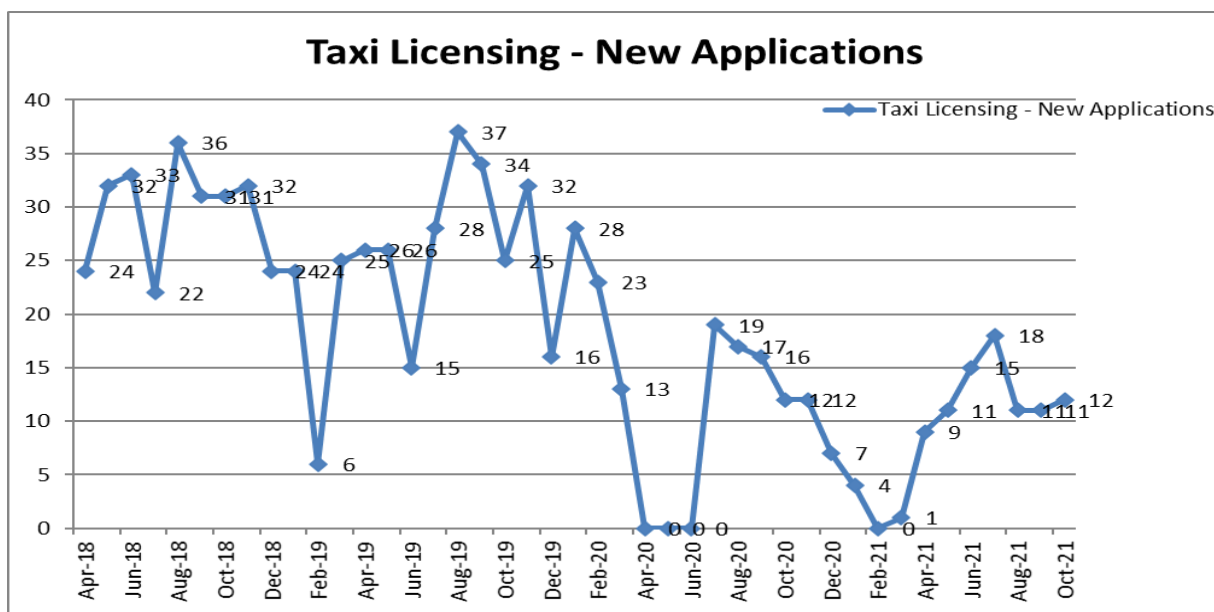
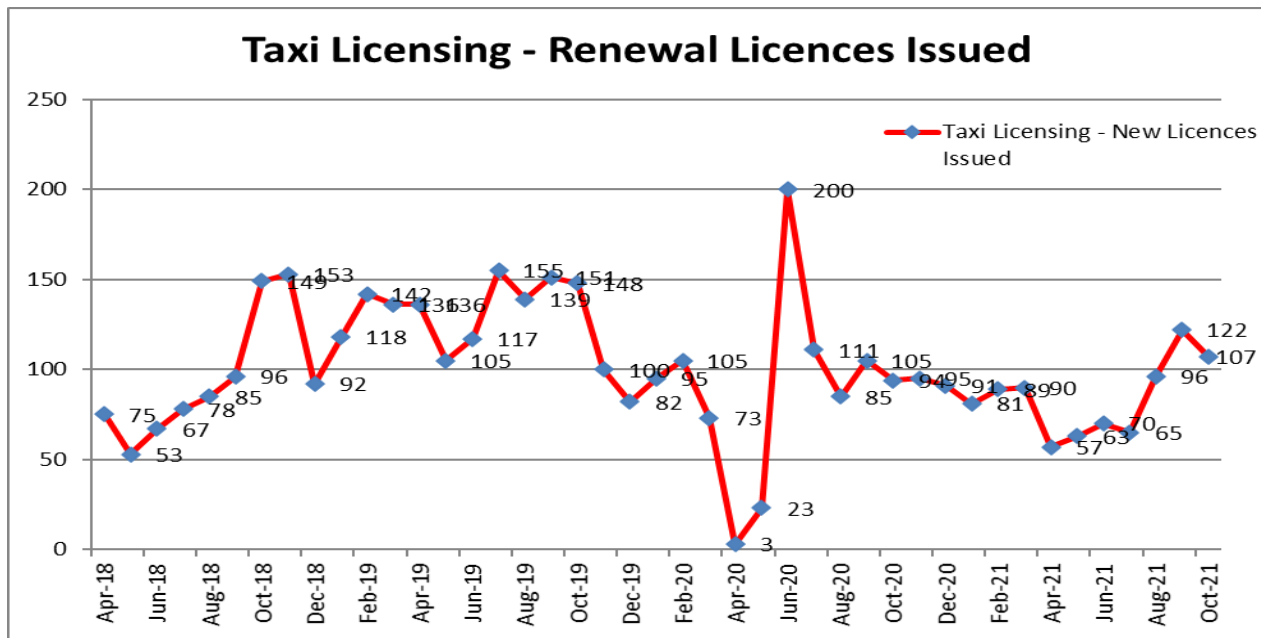


Licensing Committee Taxi Licensing Update – October 2021

1.0 Licensed Drivers

There continues to be pressure on both licensed driver and vehicle numbers with both showing month on month declines over the last 15 months, it is noted that the level of decline is slowing. Drivers are reporting higher levels of business now the economy is beginning to recover, however the number of drivers fell again by 6 in October 2021 making it 15 consecutive months of reducing driver numbers. The fall in drivers and vehicles is being seen at a national level as drivers move into the more stable delivery industry.

New driver and vehicle applications have fallen since the start of the pandemic, however the team are starting to see a recovery in numbers of new applicants. The team processed 12 new licence applications and 107 licence renewals during October 2021. It should be noted that the reducing number of licence applicants and holders will reduce the Council's income from taxi licensing in the short term, however the team do expect this to bounce back as part of the wider economic recovery. Taxi Licensing have introduced a new process for driver licence renewal since Covid-19 came to light which allows licences to be renewed remotely, negates the need for the driver to attend the office and allows them to provide documents electronically making the process far more efficient.



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. October's numbers were below those seen historically, however numbers have climbed steadily during 2021. The number of new applications is around half of the average historic number, it is hoped new applications will increase as business picks up and the economy recovers.

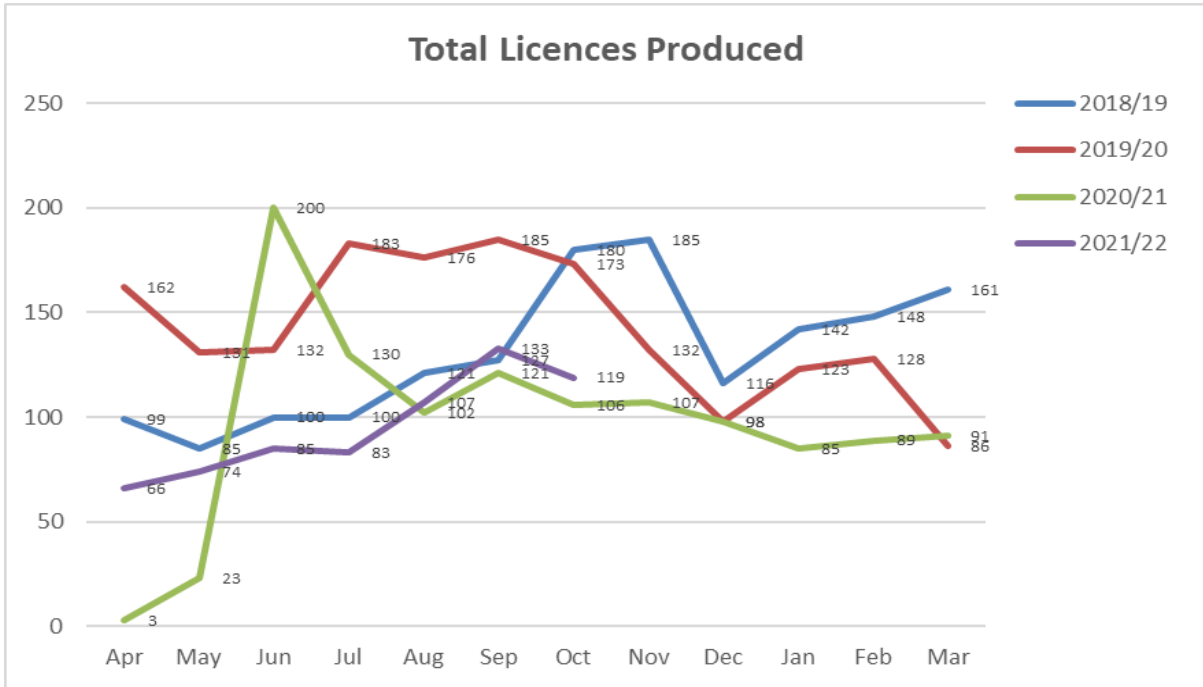


Figure 2 below shows the total number of licensed hackney carriage drivers in Wiltshire and their location.

The total number of licensed hackney carriage drivers at the end of October 2021 was 720, a decrease of 5 on the previous month. 153 were licensed in the North area, 82 in the East, 289 in the South and 196 in the West. Over the year April 2019 to March 2020 prior to Covid, the number of hackney carriage drivers fell 38, the number of private hire drivers rose by 12 over the same period, giving an overall fall in driver numbers of 26. Coronavirus and lockdown restrictions have seen a reduction in hackney carriage drivers of 140 over the period March 2020 to October 2021, representing a fall of 16%, this appears to be in line with the national average, however hackney carriage driver numbers have been falling for fifteen consecutive months.

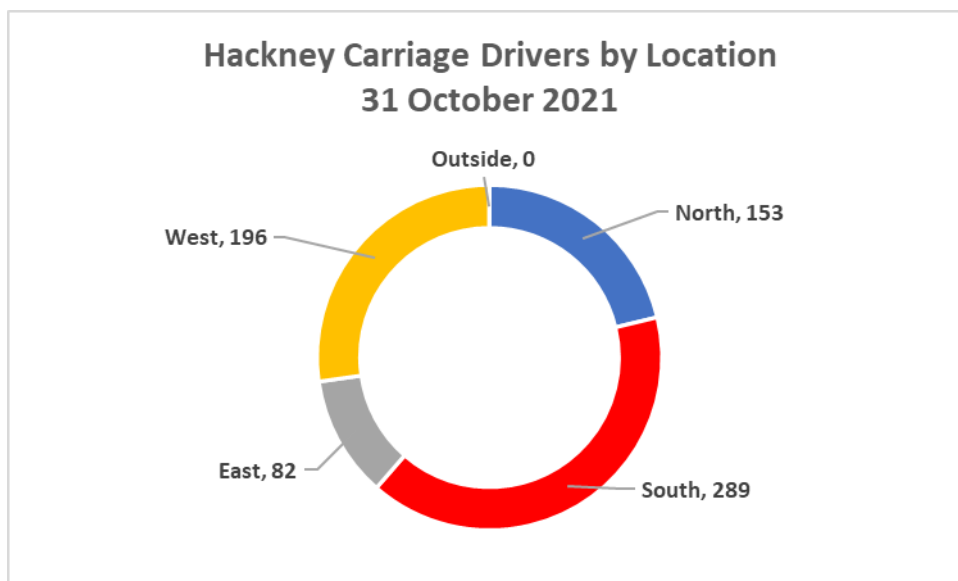
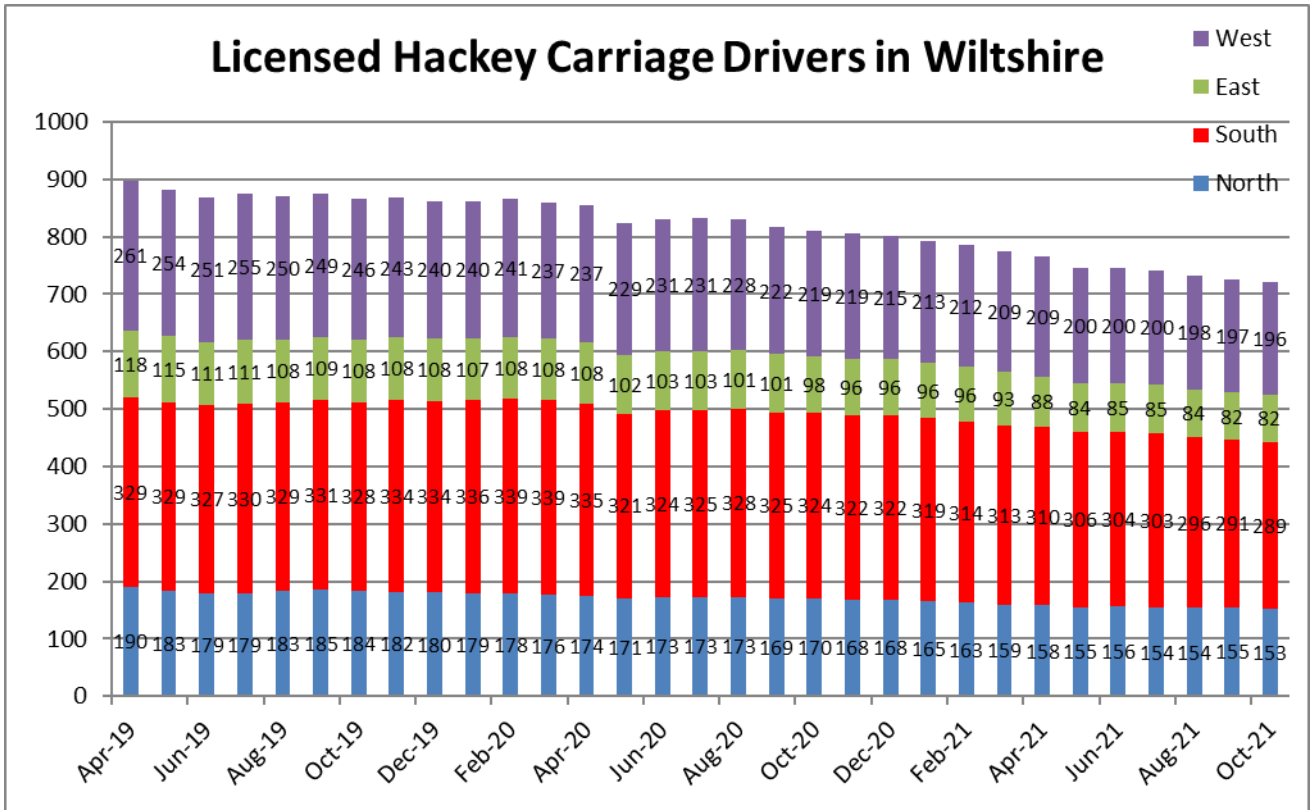


Fig.2

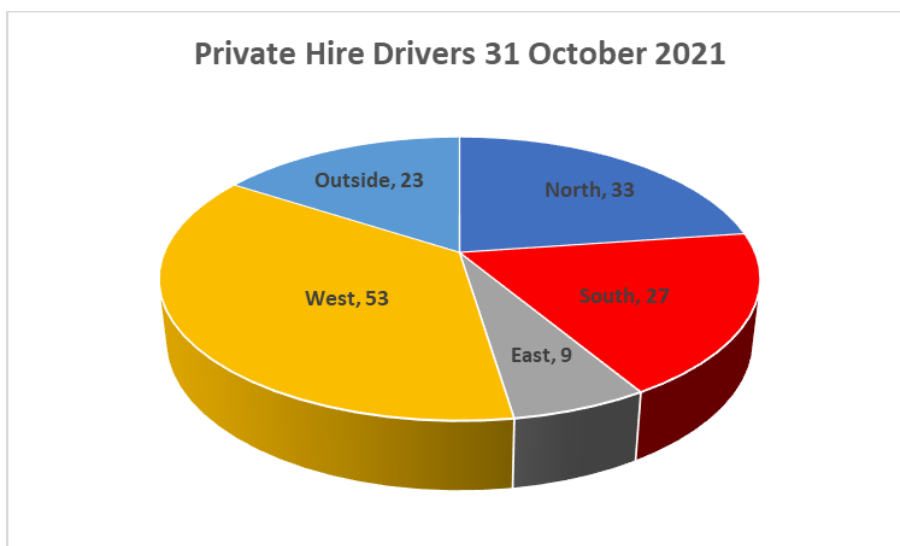
The graph below shows the monthly variation in hackney carriage driver numbers during 2019/20 and 2021/22. During October 2021 numbers fell by 5, numbers in the North fell by 2, the South fell by 2, the West by 1 and numbers in the East remained the same when compared to the previous month.

Since April 2019 Hackney Carriage driver numbers have fallen in all areas, down 65 in the West, 37 in the North, 36 in the East and 40 in the South. The West is clearly the worst affected area.

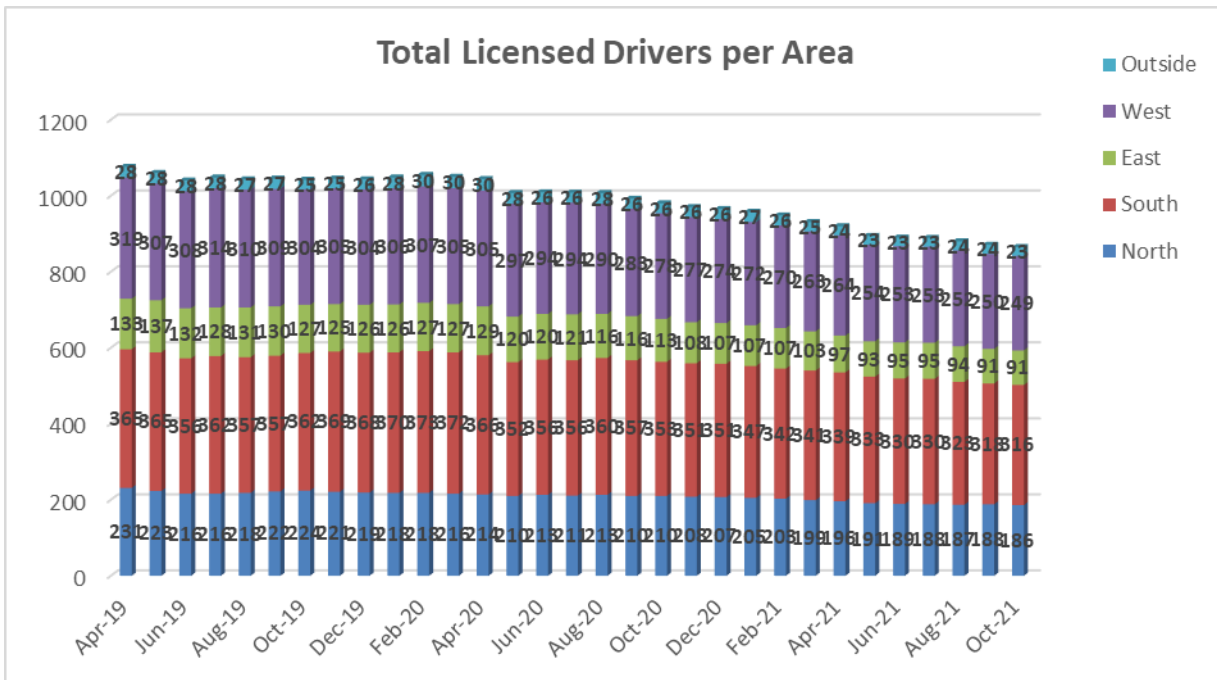


The team also license private hire only drivers, these totalled 145 as at the end of October 2021, a decrease of 1 over the month, bringing the total number of drivers licensed to 865, a reduction of 6 over the month.

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 and in similar numbers with the South area. For information the area in which the private hire drivers are registered is as follows;



The graph below shows total driver numbers since April 2019.



Since April 2019 the number of hackney carriage drivers has fallen by 178 and the number of private hire drivers has fallen by 33, an overall fall of 211 drivers or 20%. However 185, a large percentage of the reduction of 205 drivers has occurred since the first national lockdown in March 2020 as a result of Covid-19.

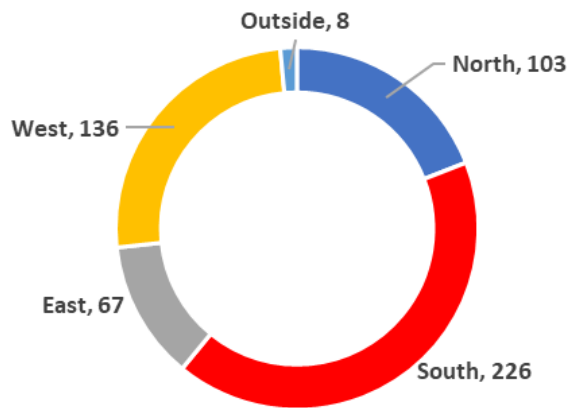
The newly formed Taxi Working group is investigating ideas for increased driver recruitment and Taxi Licensing and Passenger Transport Unit are working together to put forward a report containing ideas on how to increase numbers.

2.0 Licensed Vehicles

At the end of October 2021 the taxi licensing team licensed a total of 753 vehicles, down 4 on the previous month, this is the twelfth month in thirteen that vehicle numbers have fallen, however the level of fall is reducing. The impact of lockdown and the Covid restrictions has taken effect, vehicle numbers had dropped for 8 consecutive months prior to May 2021. Vehicles numbers stabilised during May 2021 but have fallen every month since, it was hoped numbers would stabilise after restrictions were lifted but this is taking longer than expected. The vehicle split is as follows, 540 hackney carriage vehicles and 213, private hire vehicles, a decrease of 4 hackney carriage vehicles, the private hire vehicle numbers remained the same over the month when compared to the previous month. Of the 753 vehicles licensed 13.5% or 102 vehicles are wheelchair accessible. It should be noted that 30% of licensed private hire vehicles are wheelchair accessible compared to 7% 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.

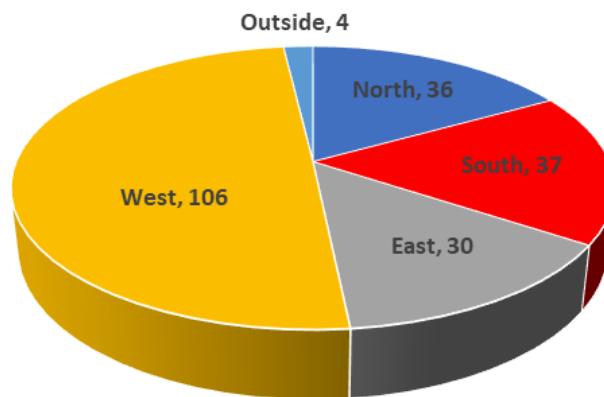
Hackney Carriage Vehicles by Location 31 October 2021



The team also license private hire only vehicles, as advised above these totalled 213 as at the end of October 2021.

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 October 2021



Between April 2019 and October 2021 the number of licensed vehicles, hackney carriages and private hire vehicles decreased by 179, the number has reduced by 178 or 19% 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, this has seen more enforcement and more penalty points and formal notices issued. 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 15 times during October 2021, to 15 drivers.

The drivers were issued points for the following reasons;

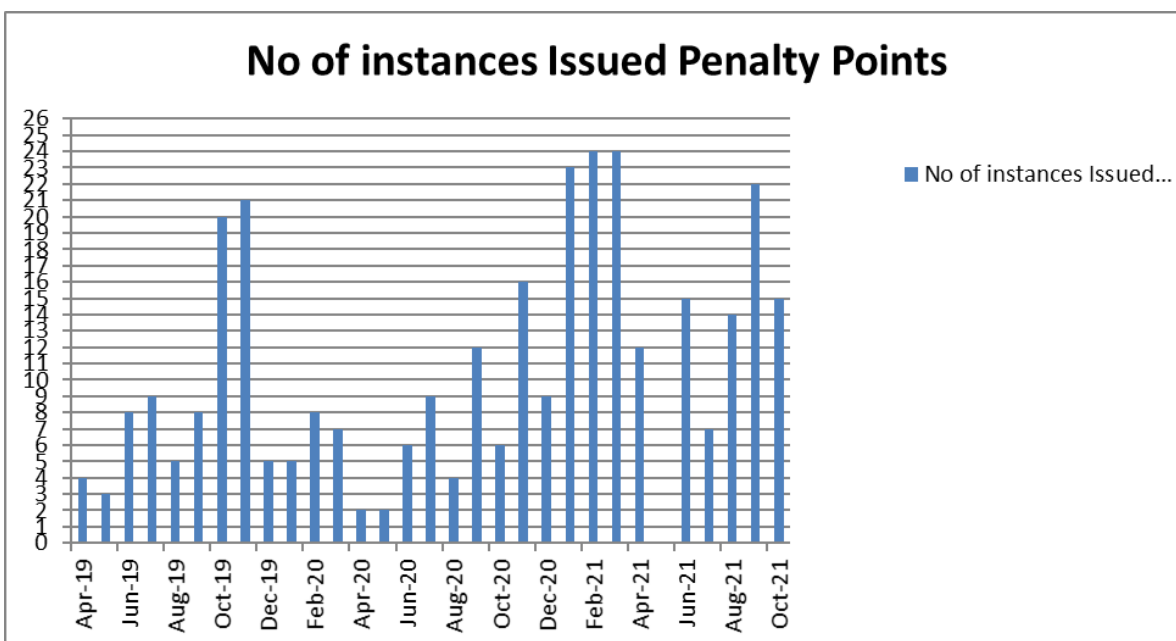
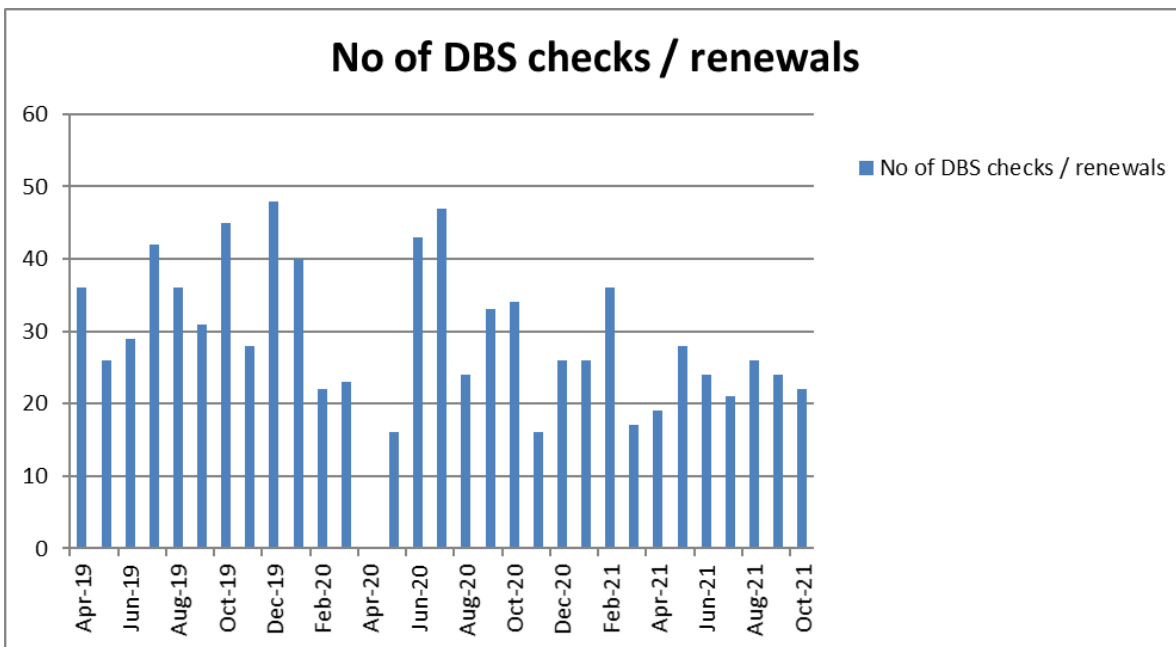
- 10 – Failure to display their badge
- 2 – Failure to notify a motoring conviction
- 1 – Dangerous driving
- 1 – Smoking/vaping in a licensed vehicle
- 1 – Failure to notify change of address

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.

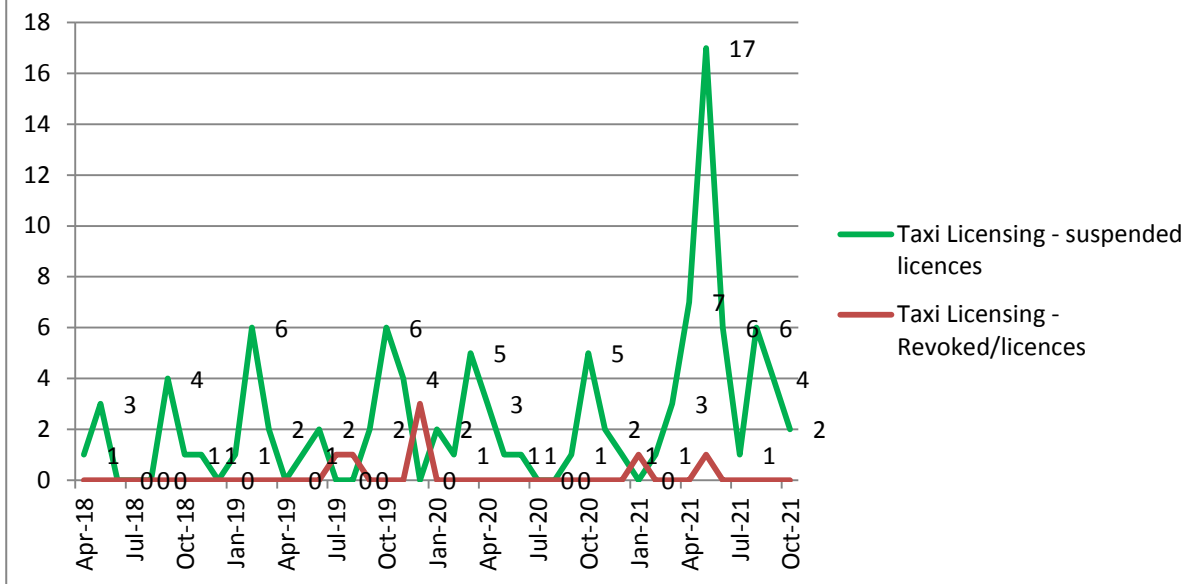
The graph below shows a trend of increased enforcement as the team effectively manage our driver database.

The Team suspended two drivers and revoked none during October 2021.

The team also completed 22 DBS checks during October 2021.



Suspended & Revoked Licences



On 27 January 2020 the team received permission from the Council's Licensing Committee to undertake a public consultation on a new schedule of fares and tariffs for Hackney Carriages. The previous schedule had not changed since 2015 and the proposal follows work with the industry representatives and the late night economy in Wiltshire. The consultation ran until 20 February 2020 and a final proposal was arrived at following consultation. Due to Covid-19 implementation was delayed until the 2021/22 financial year. The changes are being advertised in the local press between 11 and 26 November 2021 to allow the industry and public to raise objections. In the event of no objections the implementation of the new tariff will take place 04 January 2022.

The team continue to work on updated driver and vehicle guidelines in line with central government guidance 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 proposed 2020 Environment bill which will place requirements on Local Authorities to manage air quality. This may impact taxis and our guidelines around vehicle age and emissions.

The team continue to review Government guidance issued in July 2020 on industry standards and will amend current processed and guidelines or seek Licensing Committee approval to do so during 2022.

The current Coronavirus pandemic has hit the taxi industry very hard, threatening the very existence of a number of operators and drivers. This has been evidenced in month on month reductions in driver and vehicle numbers, however our falls of 16% for drivers and 19% for vehicles are in line with other local authorities, some of which have reported falls in excess of 20%. A recent report by the private hire trade association indicated that nationally 50% of private hire drivers had left the trade due to Covid-19.

Tom Ince Principal Compliance Officer
22 November 2021