

Licensing Committee Tax Licensing Update – November 2022

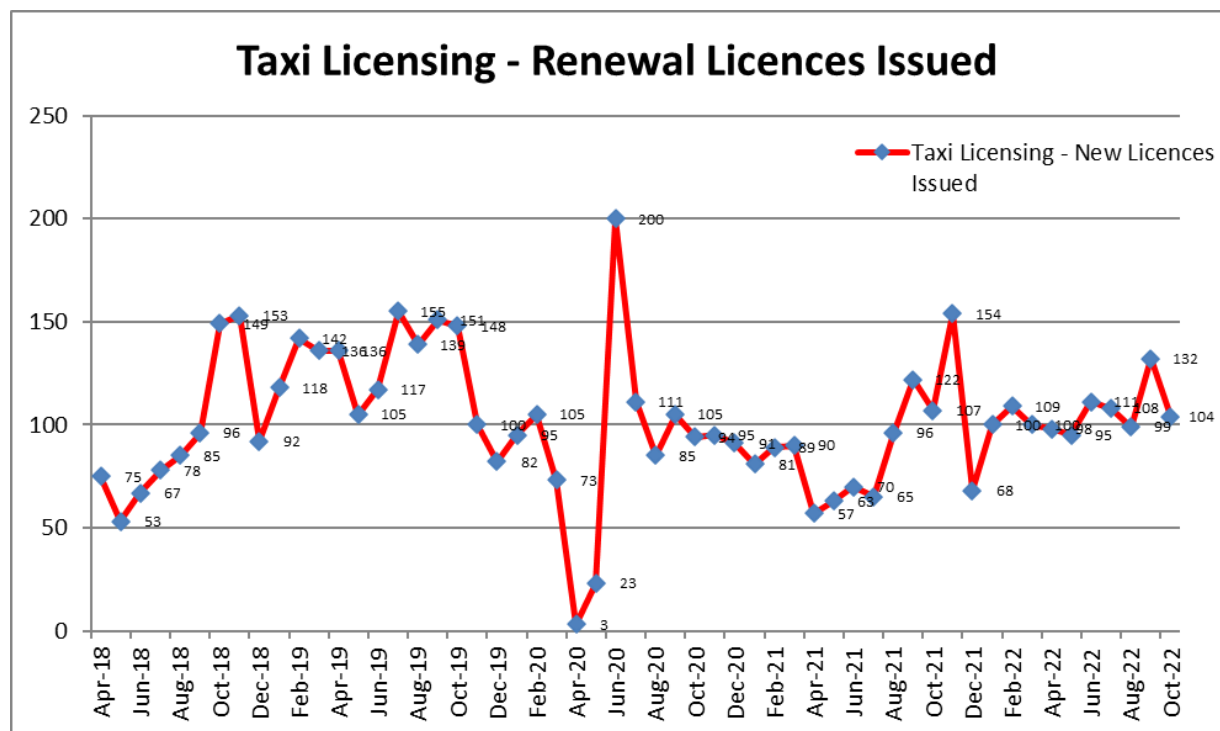
1.0 Licensed Drivers

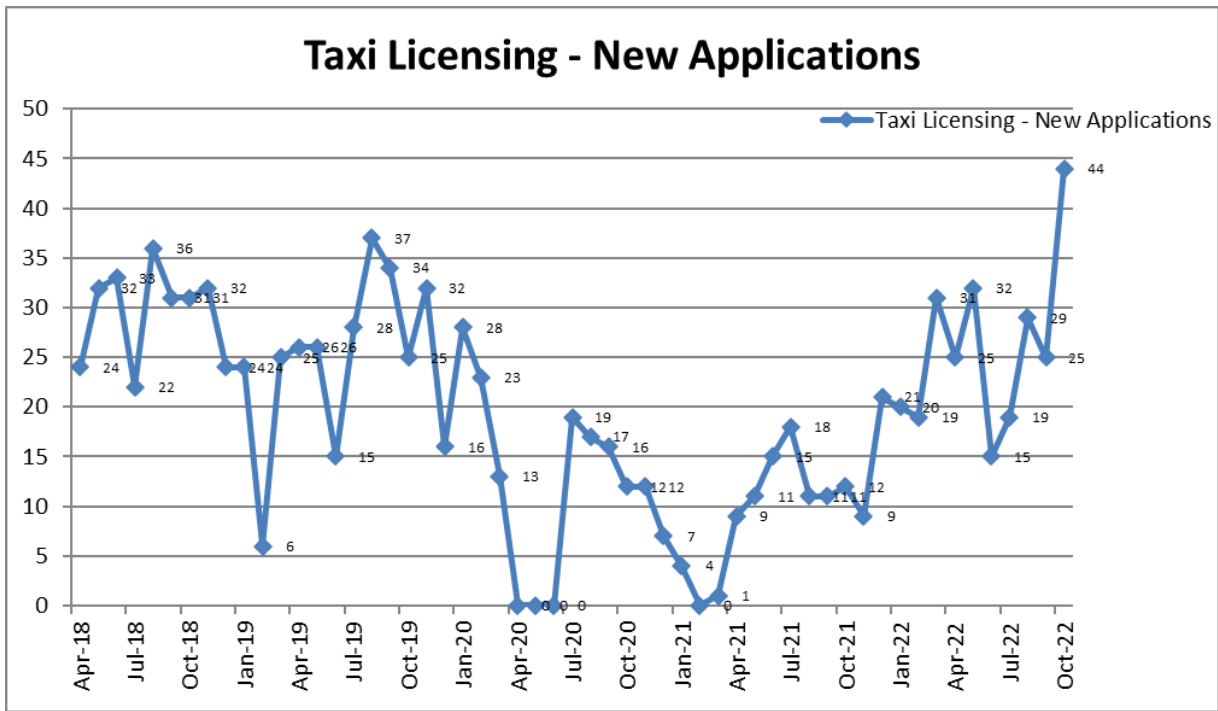
Driver and vehicle numbers have stabilised over 2022 following both showing month on month declines between 2020 and 2021. Drivers are reporting higher levels of business now the economy is beginning to recover; however the Council has received a number of complaints over the last two months from individuals struggling to book a taxi, especially at school run time.

To counter this the Taxi Licensing and Passenger Transport Team have launched a driver recruitment campaign with the support of the Council's Communications Team which has resulted in a higher level of new driver applications.

The fall in drivers and vehicles is being seen at a national level as drivers move into the more stable delivery industry and other jobs where they can earn a similar wage without working unsociable hours

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 44 new licence applications and 104 renewals during October 2022. It should be noted that a reducing number of licence applicants and holders would reduce the Council's income from taxi licensing. The current economic position within the UK may result in a recovery in the taxi industry taking longer than expected, if indeed it ever returns to pre-pandemic levels.





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 as it is more cost effective. 2019 saw a large number of drivers renew and is behind the increased numbers for 2019/20. 2020 numbers were below those seen historically, however numbers have climbed steadily during 2021 and 2022/23 levels are expected to be high. The number of new applications has risen over the last 3 months to a level seen prior to the pandemic. Whilst new applications are up overall driver levels remain flat as older drivers continue to leave the industry.

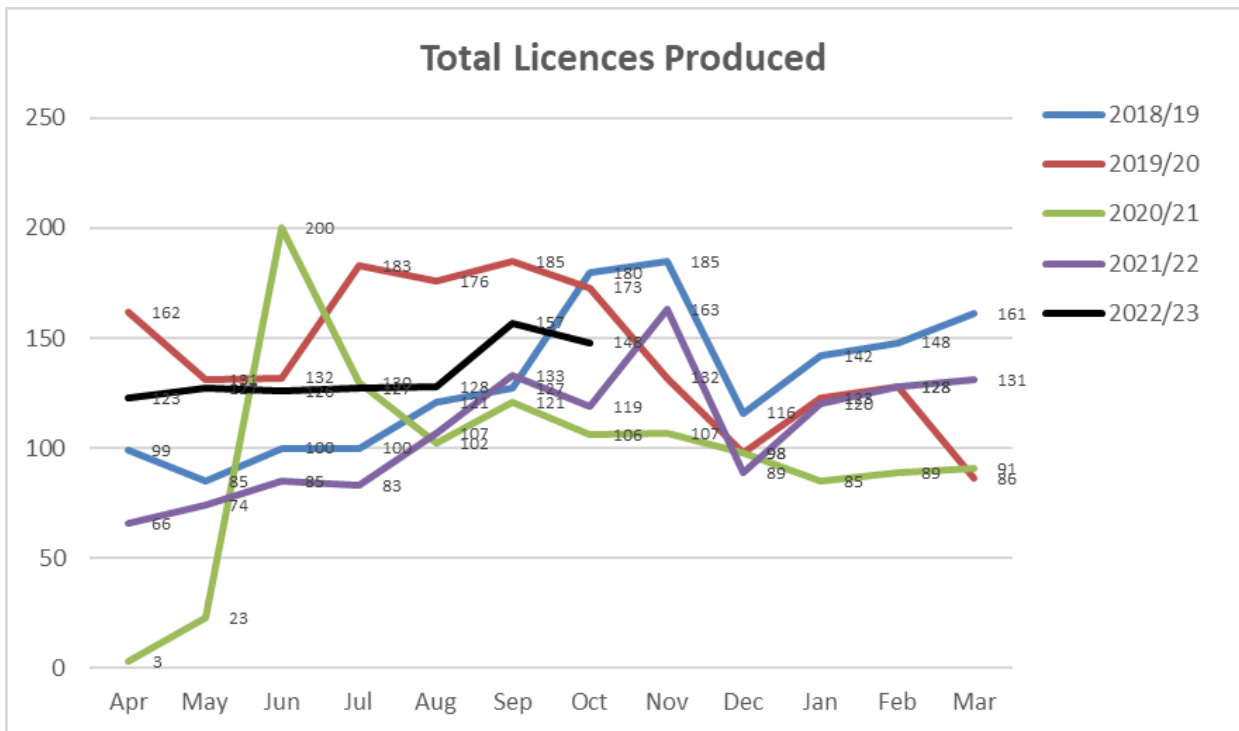


Figure 2 below shows the total number of licensed hackney carriage drivers in Wiltshire and their location.

The total number of licensed hackney carriage drivers at the end of October 2022 was 666, a decrease of 9 on the previous month. 132 were licensed in the North area, 75 in the East, 277 in the South and 182 in the West. Over the year April 2019 to April 2020 the number of hackney carriage drivers fell 44, for the same period in 2020 to 2021 driver numbers fell 89 demonstrating the effect of the pandemic. Between April 2021 and April 2022 numbers fell 79 as the effects of the pandemic and the economic situation still weighed on the industry. The number of private hire drivers rose by 12 over the same period, April 19 to April 20 giving an overall fall in driver numbers of 32 for 2019-20. For the period April 2020 to 2021 private hire driver numbers fell by 35 giving an overall for of 124 between April 2020 and April 21, between April 2021 and 2022 private hire drivers rose by 1, giving an overall fall between April 21 and April 22 of 78. This is far better than the 124 fall during the same period the previous year but the fall in drivers continues to put pressure on Passenger Transport Unit. Coronavirus and lockdown restrictions have seen a reduction in hackney carriage drivers of 195 over the period March 2020 to October 2022, representing a fall of 23%, this appears to be in line with the national average. It is noted that driver numbers have stabilised over the last 3 months.

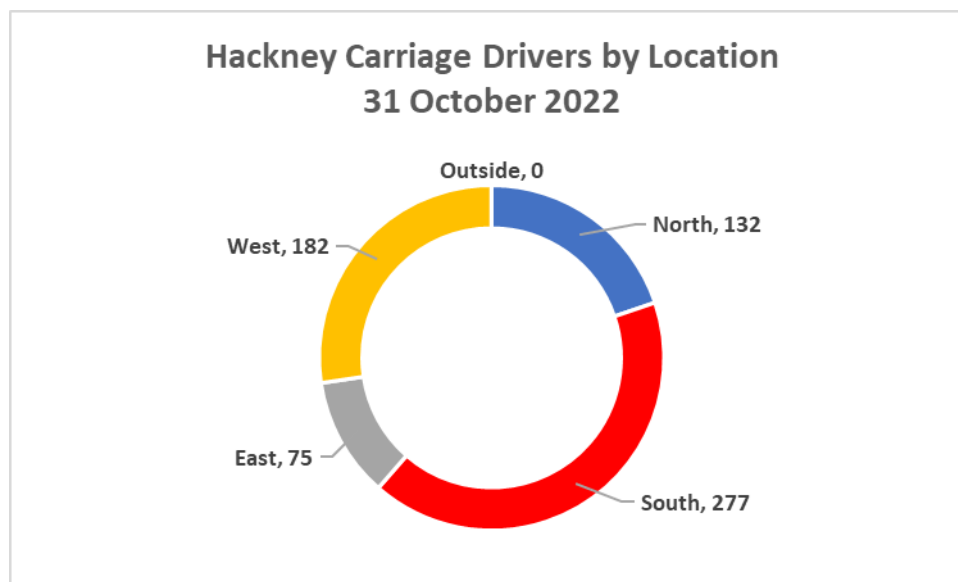
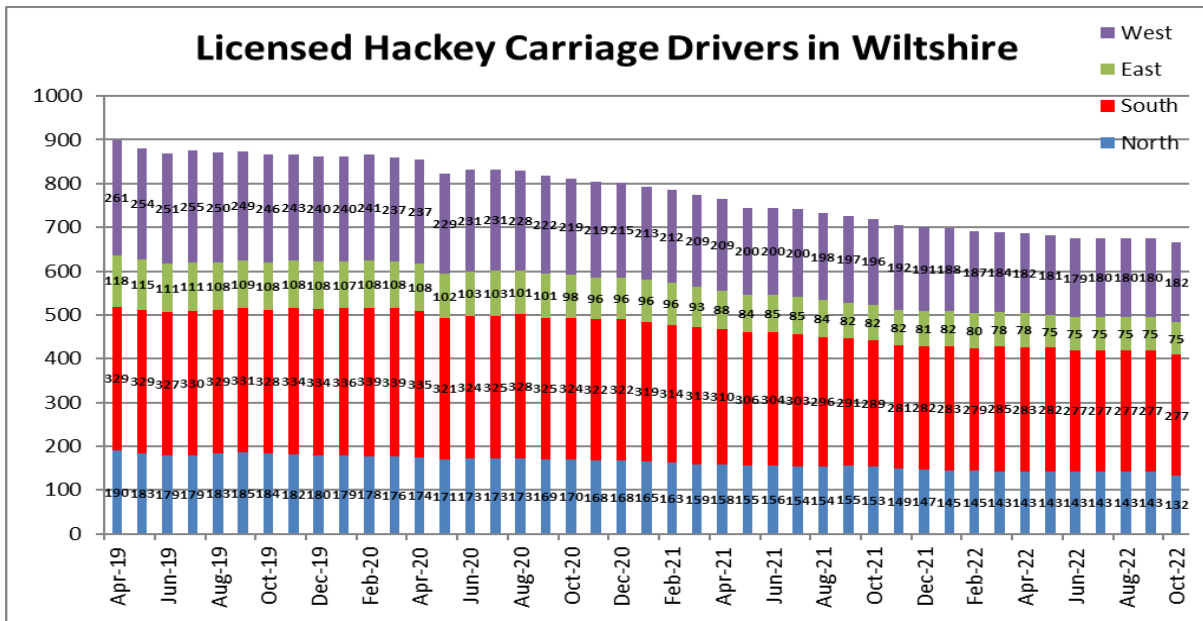


Fig.2

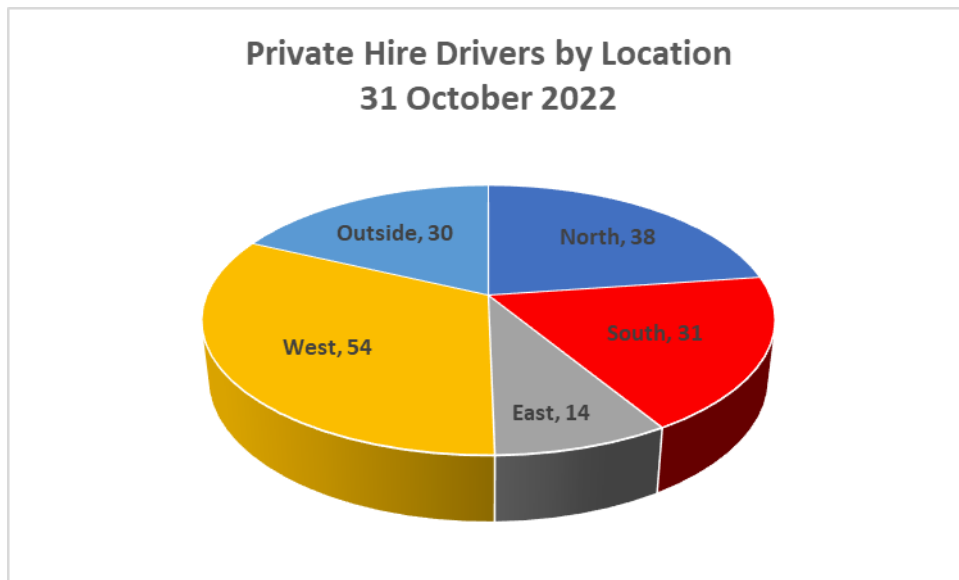
The graph below shows the monthly variation in hackney carriage driver numbers during 2019/20 and 2021/22. During October 2022 numbers fell by 9, numbers in the North fell by 11, the South and East stayed the same whilst the West rose by 2 when compared to the previous month.

Since April 2019 Hackney Carriage driver numbers have fallen in all areas, down 79 in the West, 58 in the North, 43 in the East and 52 in the South. The West is clearly the worst affected area.

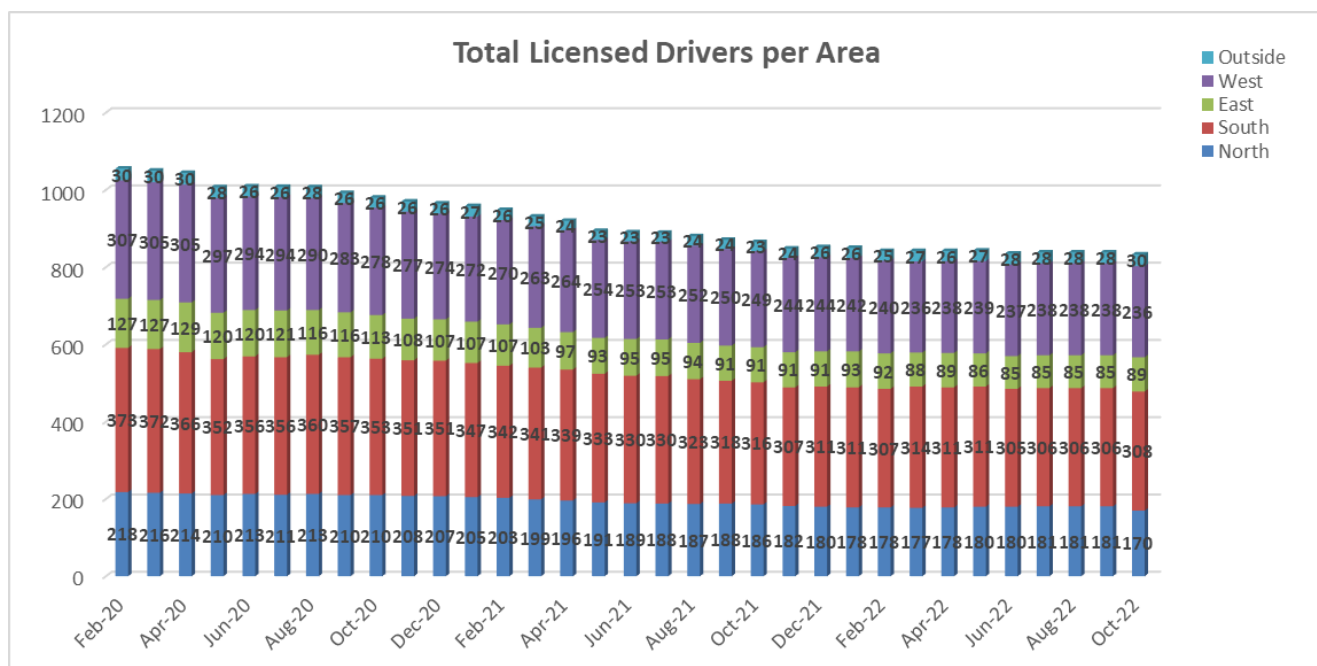


The team also license private hire only drivers, these totalled 167 as at the end of October 2022, an increase of 4 over the month, bringing the total number of drivers licensed to 833, an decrease of 5 on the previous month. It should be noted that as of 22 November 22 driver numbers had risen by 4 to 837. 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.

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.



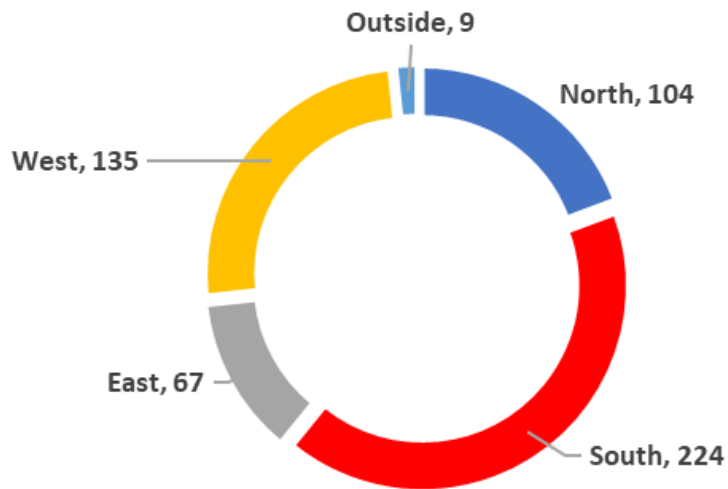
Since April 2019 the number of hackney carriage drivers has fallen by 232 and the number of private hire drivers has fallen by 11, an overall fall of 243 drivers or 23%. However 217, a large percentage of the reduction of 243 drivers has occurred since the first national lockdown in March 2020 as a result of Covid-19.

2.0 Licensed Vehicles

At the end of October 2022 the taxi licensing team licensed a total of 772 vehicles, an increase of 9 over the previous month. As of 22 November 2022 vehicle numbers had risen to 791, up 19 since the end of October. 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. The vehicle split is as follows, 539 hackney carriage vehicles and 233 private hire vehicles, hackney carriage numbers rose by 3 and private hire vehicle numbers rose by 6 over the month when compared to the previous month. Of the 772 vehicles licensed 13.7% or 106 vehicles are wheelchair accessible. It should be noted that 32% of licensed private hire vehicles are wheelchair accessible compared to 6% 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.

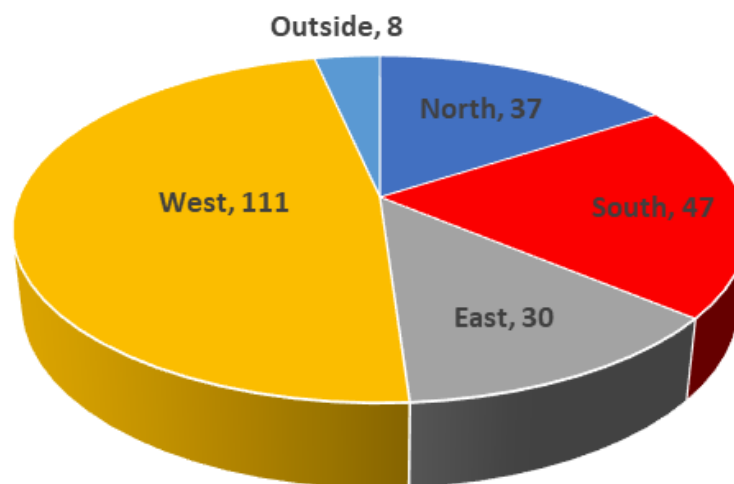
Hackney Carriage Vehicles by Location 31 October 2022



The team also license private hire only vehicles, as advised above these totalled 233 as at the end of October 2022.

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 2022



Between April 2019 and October 2022 the number of licensed vehicles, hackney carriages and private hire vehicles decreased by 159, the number has reduced by 158 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 October 2022 has seen the level of enforcement reduce over the last 6 months. On 30 June 2022 night time enforcement on the ranks was undertaken with Wiltshire Police who communicated with drivers to spread information on their campaign to reduce violence against women and encouraging drivers to report concerning behaviour. 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.

No penalty points were issued during October 2022. The numbers have fallen recently as one team member is off on long term sick and enforcement officers have had to step in 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 graph below shows a trend of enforcement as the team effectively manage our driver database.

The team revoked one driver during October 2022.

The team also completed 32 DBS checks during October 2022. An issue had been identified with the latest Government advice on DBS checks and the team worked with the Council's DBS team on a solution during June 2022 which was achieved.

Following presentation of a report to Licensing Committee recommending an increase to tariff 1 in light of the record fuel prices that are currently being seen, a 10% increase to the tariff 1 mileage rate will be implemented on 1 December 2022.

The team presented the report after undertaking a fare benchmarking exercise with our neighbouring local authorities as a number of drivers and operators had requested fare increases in lieu of the escalating fuel prices.

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.

As you will be aware Licensing Committee approved the creation of a single Licensing Zone for hackney carriages in Wiltshire. The team are currently working on process changes to move to a single zone with implementation planned for 1 April 2023.

The current Covid-19 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.

However given the current economic situation within the UK the team believe that driver and vehicle numbers are unlikely to return to those seen prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This is concerning as Passenger Transport Unit have advised they are struggling to fulfil all of their SEND school contracts due to a lack of drivers and vehicles. It is hoped that the driver recruitment campaign will assist PTU and the results of this are starting to feed through, however PTU face increased demands for their services at a time when driver and vehicle numbers are shrinking nationally.