

Taxi Licensing Update – Licensing Committee – July 2023

1.0 Licensed Drivers

Driver and vehicle numbers stabilised over 2022/23 following both showing month on month declines between 2020 and 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Numbers have risen during 2023/24, from a low of 829 in December 2022 to the current level of 890. 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, driver numbers have risen by 61 over the last 7 months.

The team processed 107 new licence applications in the last 3 months. It should be noted that a reducing number of licence applicants and holders would 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.

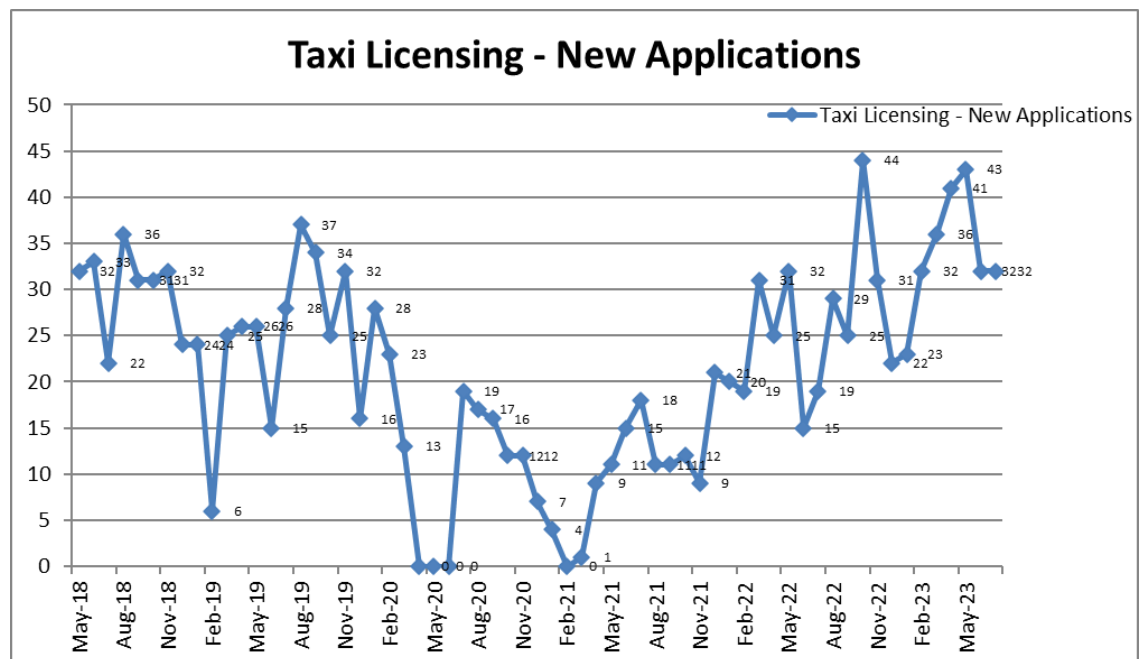
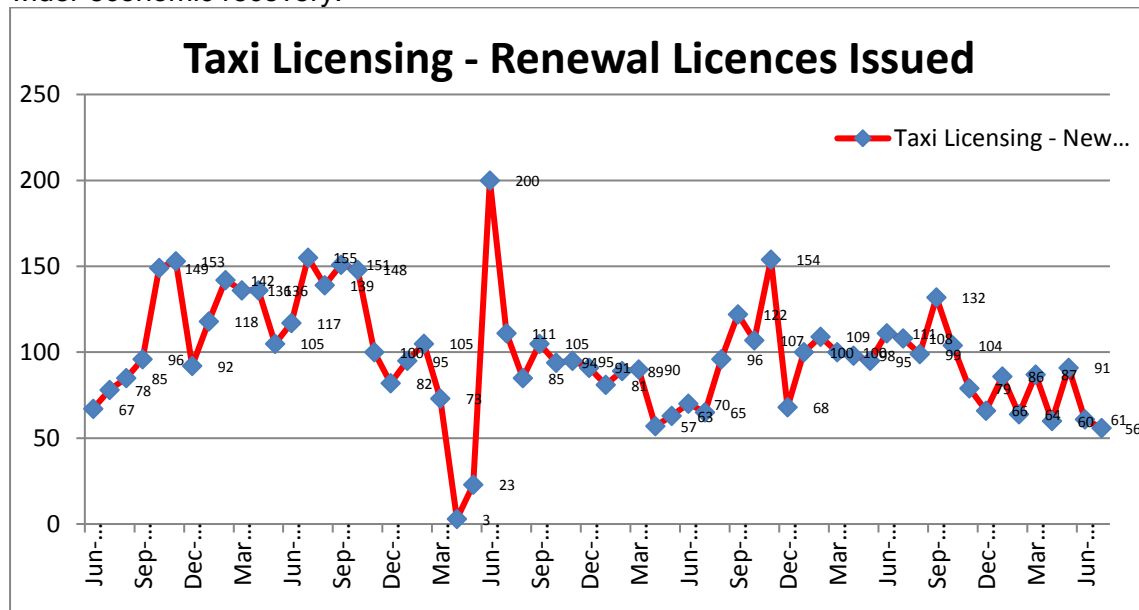


Figure 2 below shows the total number of licensed hackney carriage drivers in Wiltshire and their location.

The total number of licensed hackney carriage drivers at the end of July was 692, up 5 on the previous month. 136 were licensed in the North area, 80 in the East, 294 in the South and 182 in the West. The fall in drivers continues to put pressure on PTU and whilst numbers are beginning to rise they are not rising faster enough to meet the increased SEND Passenger Transport are experiencing. It is noted that driver numbers have risen every month over the last 8 months.

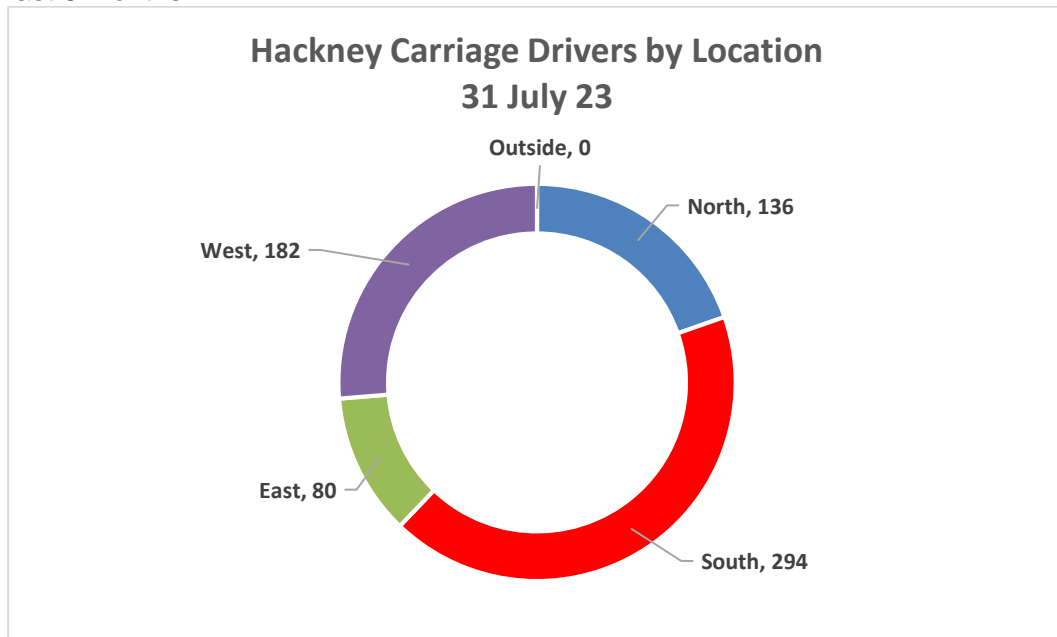
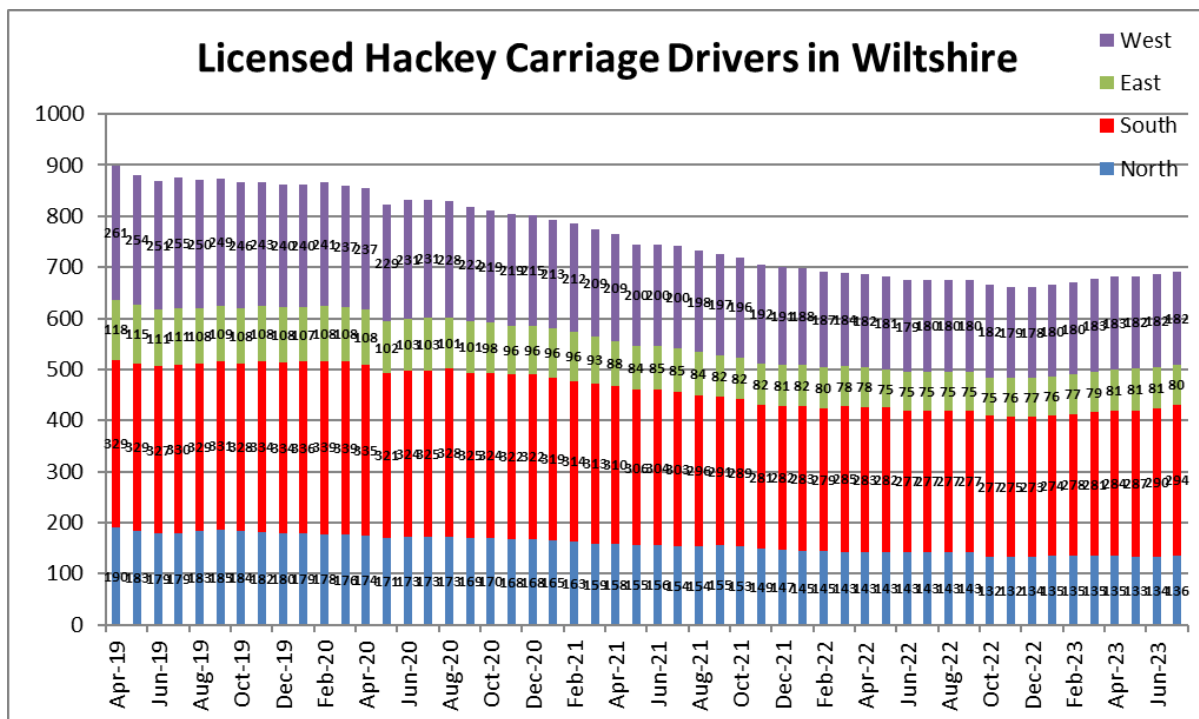


Fig.2

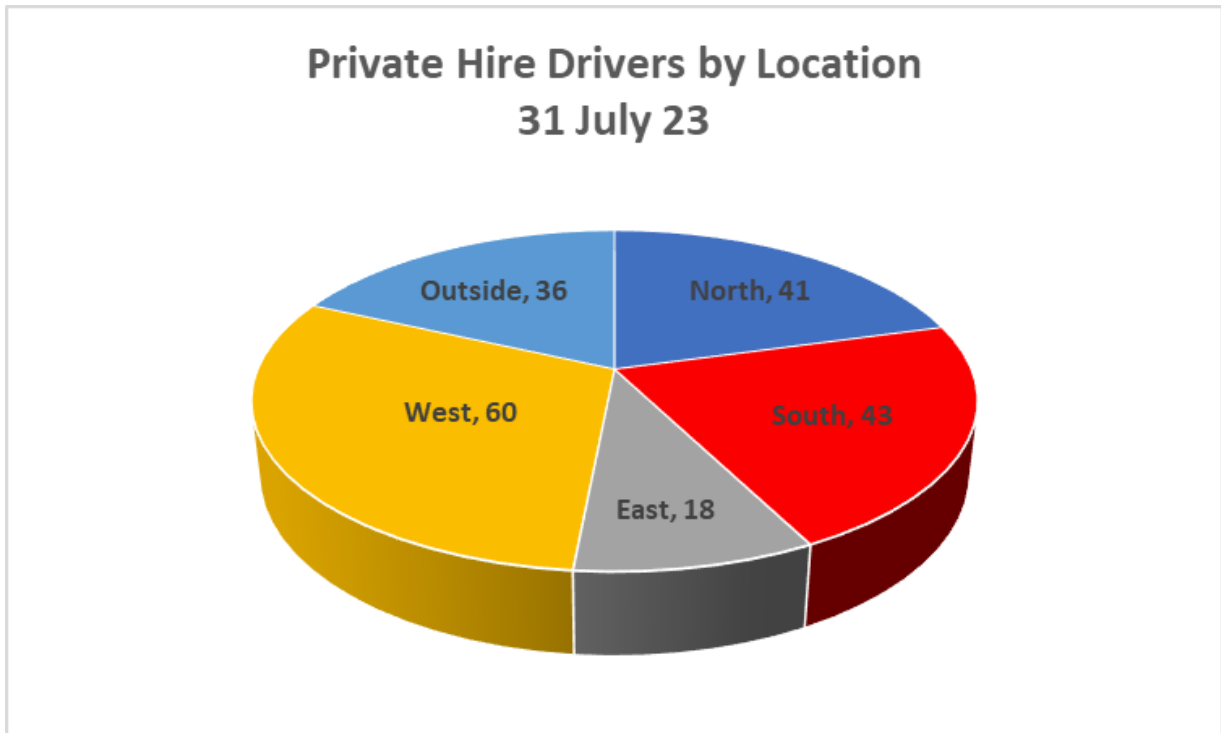
The graph below shows the monthly variation in hackney carriage driver numbers between April 2019 and now. During July 2023 numbers increased by 5, numbers in the North rose by 2, the West remained the same and the South rose by 4 but the East fell by 1 when compared to the previous month.

Since April 2019 Hackney Carriage driver numbers have fallen in all areas, down 79 in the West, 54 in the North, 38 in the East and 35 in the South. The West is clearly the worst affected area.

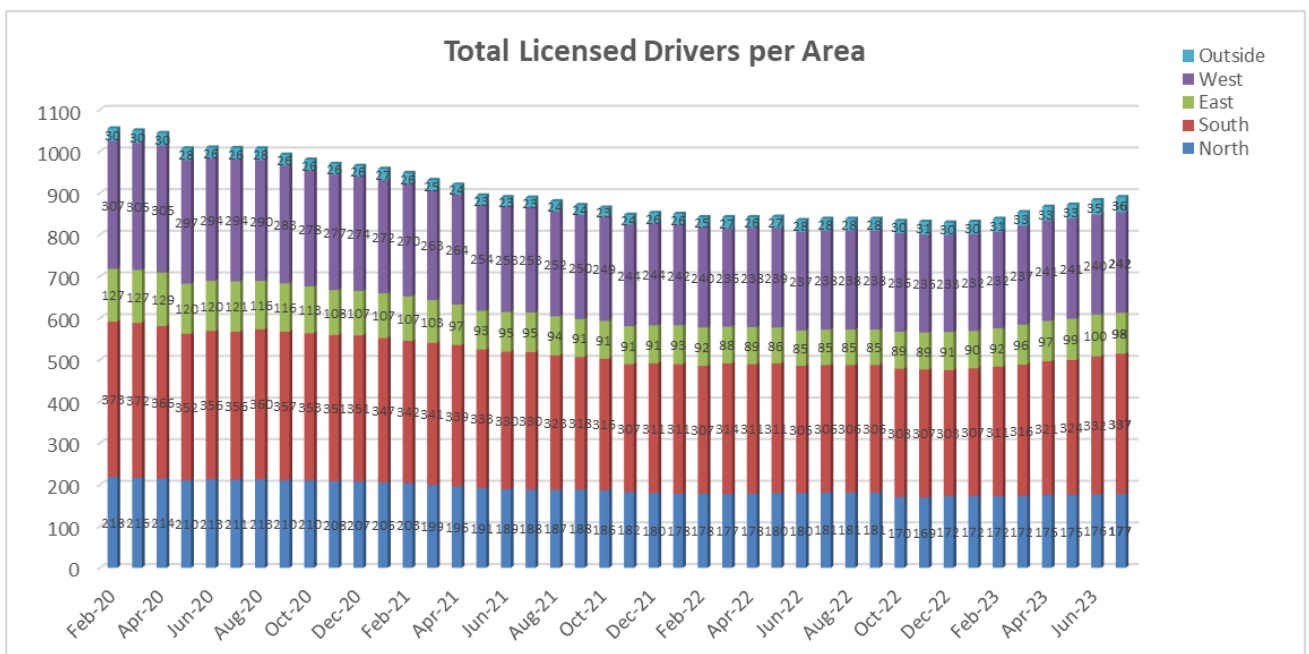


The team also license private hire only drivers, these totalled 198 as at the end of July 2023, an increase of 2 over the month, bringing the total number of drivers licensed to 890, an increase of 7 on the previous month. It is clear there is a trend of drivers switching from hackney carriage to private hire, this reflects the lower footfall in our town centres and the reducing amount of business available from the town centre ranks.

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.



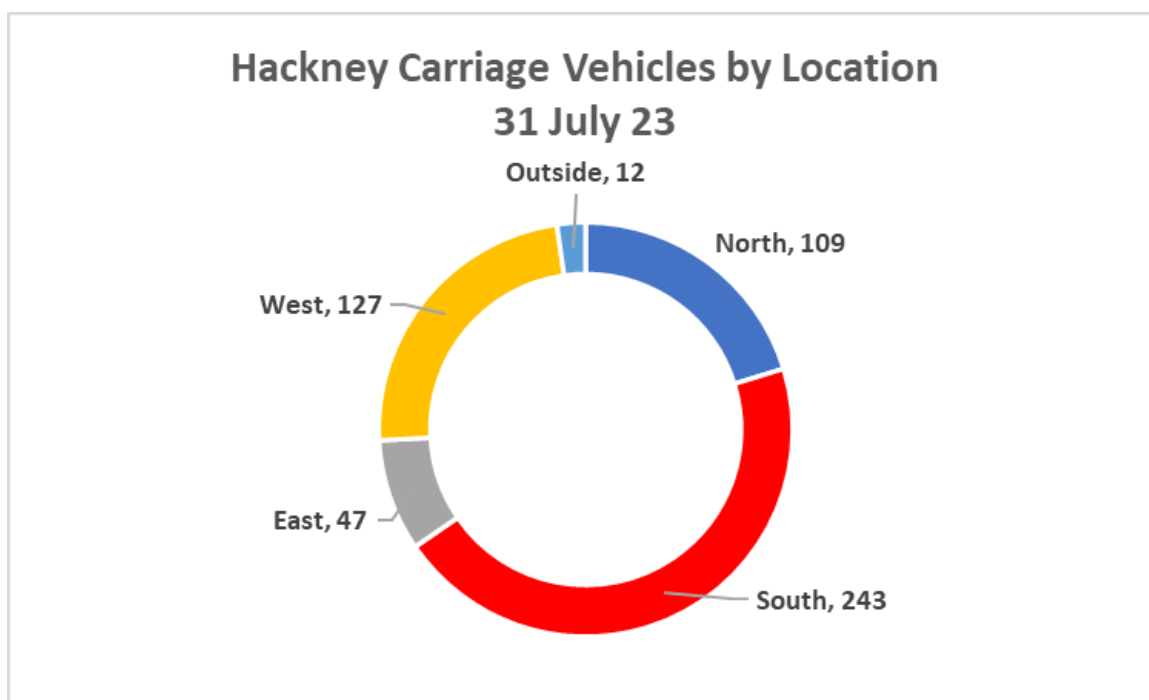
Since April 2019 the number of hackney carriage drivers has fallen by 197 and the number of private hire drivers has risen by 20, an overall fall of 177 drivers or 16%. However 160, a large percentage of the reduction of 177 drivers has occurred since the first national lockdown in March 2020 as a result of Covid-19.

2.0 Licensed Vehicles

At the end of July 2023 the taxi licensing team licensed a total of 825 vehicles, vehicle numbers broke through 800 for the first time in 2 years in February 2023. Vehicle numbers were down 6 on the previous month. Vehicle numbers have stabilised post pandemic and are up 80 from the lowest point of 745 vehicles in January 2023. However, we are still well down on the 1050 vehicles licenced at the time of the first lockdown. Given the changes in shopping habits and our behaviour the team believe it is unlikely that vehicle or driver numbers will return to the levels seen prior to Covid-19.

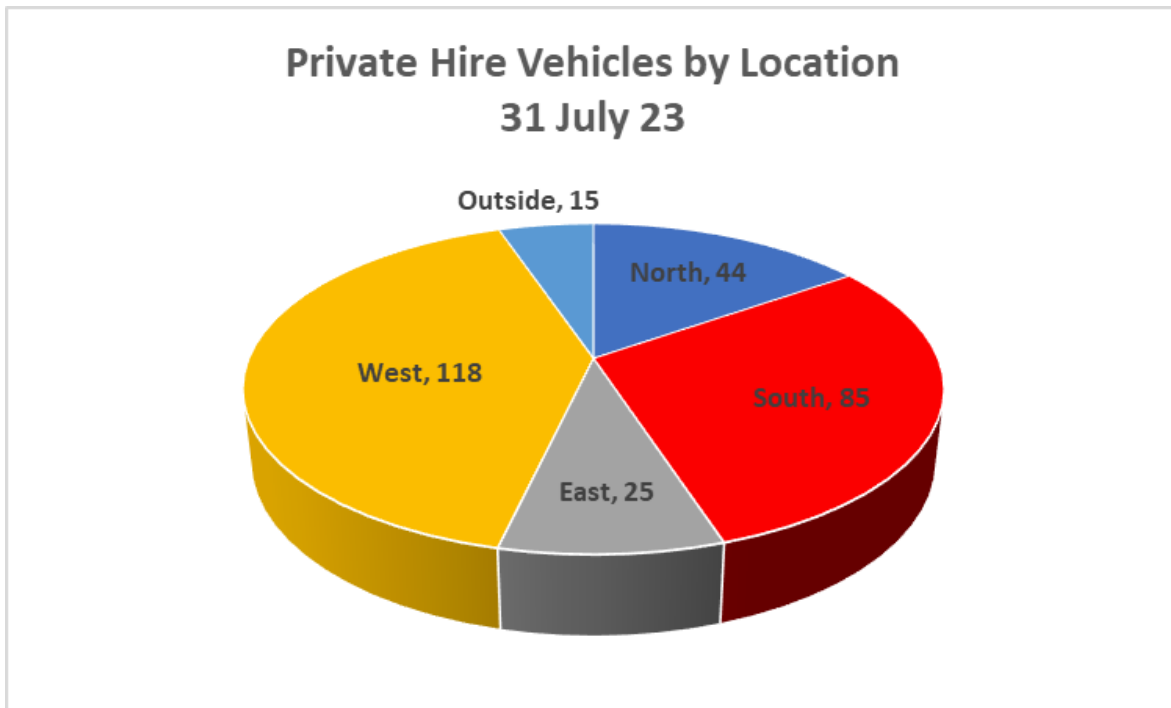
The vehicle split is as follows, 538 hackney carriage vehicles and 287 private hire vehicles, hackney carriage numbers fell by 4 and private hire vehicle numbers fell 2 over the month when compared to the previous month. Of the 825 vehicles licensed 13.7% or 113 vehicles are wheelchair accessible. It should be noted that 29% 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.



The team also license private hire only vehicles, as advised above these totalled 287 as at the end of July 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;



Between April 2019 and July 2023, the number of licensed vehicles, hackney carriages and private hire vehicles decreased by 243, the number has reduced by 217 or 23% 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 continues to impact the time officers have to leave the office and patrol the taxi ranks and towns.

The team issued penalty points to on 24 occasions during March 2021, the highest monthly total ever recorded.

Penalty points were issued to 4 drivers during July 2023, 1 for failing to notify a speeding conviction, 1 for not wearing a badge and 2 for failing to notify the team of a 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 Team did not revoke any drivers but suspended four drivers during July 2023.

The team held the first of the newly established trader representative meetings on 5 June 2023 at Kennet House in Devizes. The trade representatives raised concerns over window tints, PTU contracts being cancelled at short notice, Council support with electric or wheelchair vehicles and a number of other issues which are being reviewed. 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 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 the work on introducing a single licensing zone for hackney carriages in Wiltshire. Advice has been received from the Council’s Legal Team that the Council does not

need to adopt any new legislation to facilitate the change and the team can implement a single zone. It is planned to implement this later in 2023, possibly from 1 January 2024. Current workloads and the implementation of a new system do not provide the team with sufficient resource to implement a single zone at this time.

The team are also looking into the Council's policies around window tints for hackney carriages following challenge from the industry. During April 2023 a benchmarking exercise was undertaken against other local authorities in the area. The results indicated we should amend our policy and a report has been drafted for Licensing Committee to consider this at their December 2023 Committee meeting.

The Coronavirus pandemic has 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
4 September 2023