

Licensing Committee Tax Licensing Update – October 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. 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 and vehicle applications, driver numbers have risen by 80 or 11% over the last 11 months.

The team processed 30 new licence applications and 114 renewals during October 2023.

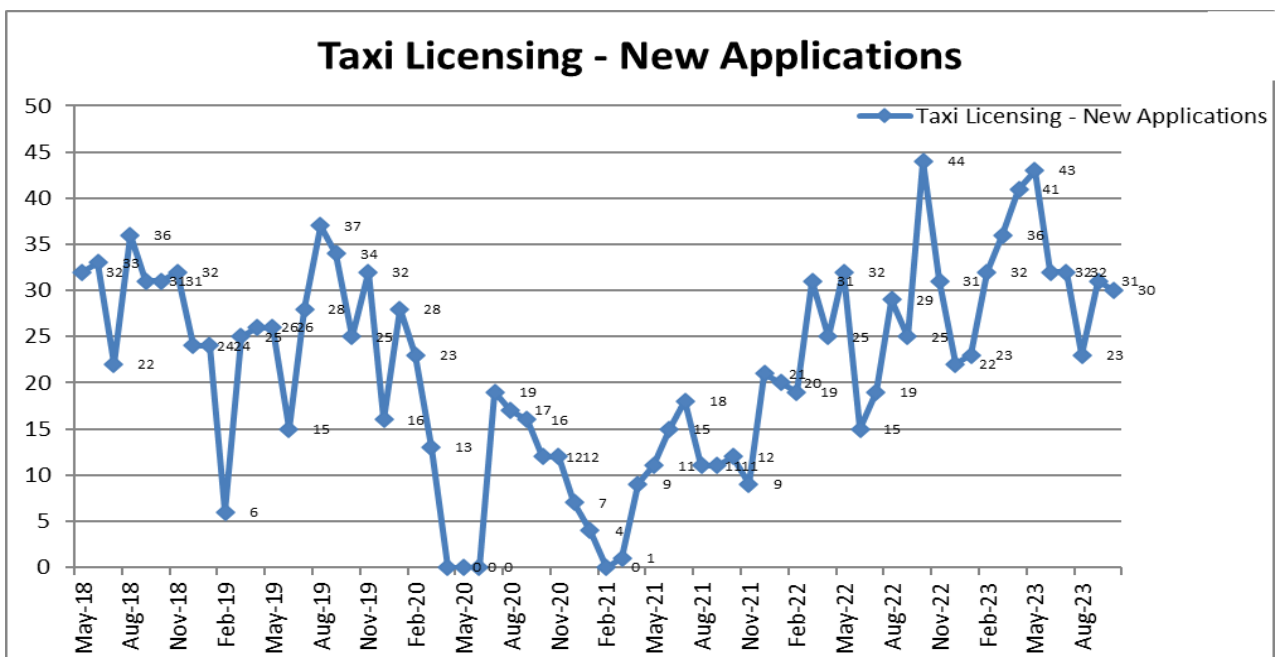
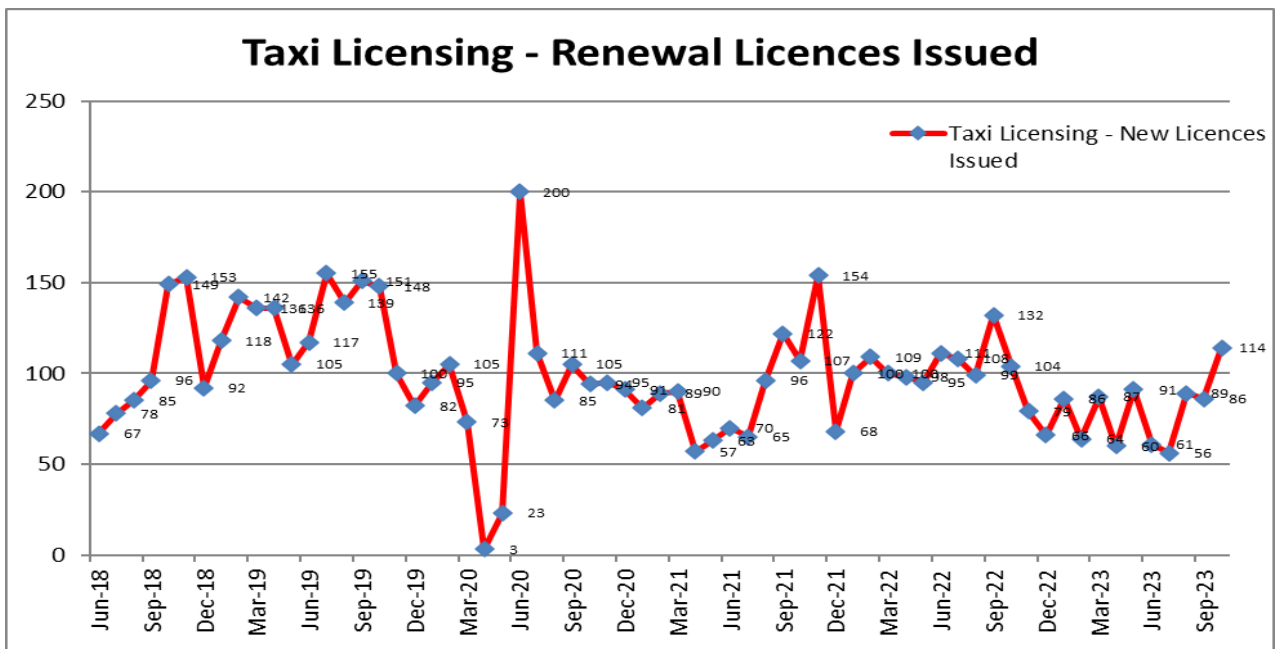


Figure 2 below shows the total number of licensed hackney carriage drivers in Wiltshire and their location.

The total number of licensed hackney carriage drivers at the end of October was 697, up 2 on the previous month. 137 were licensed in the North area, 81 in the East, 299 in the South and 180 in the West. The fall in drivers continues to put pressure on PTU and whilst numbers are rising, they are not rising fast enough to meet the increased SEND demand Passenger Transport are experiencing.

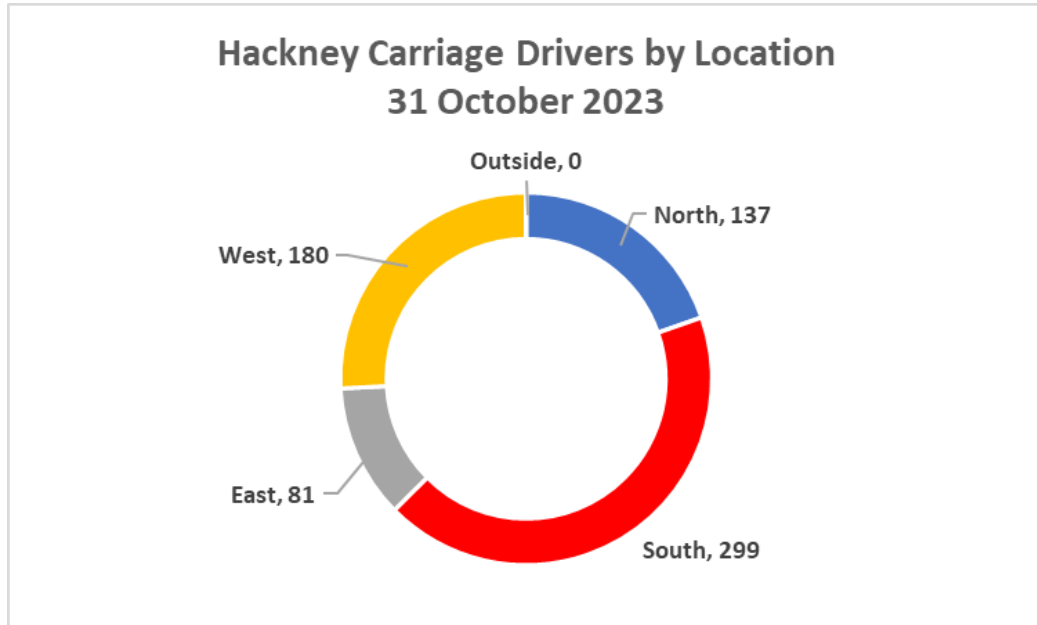
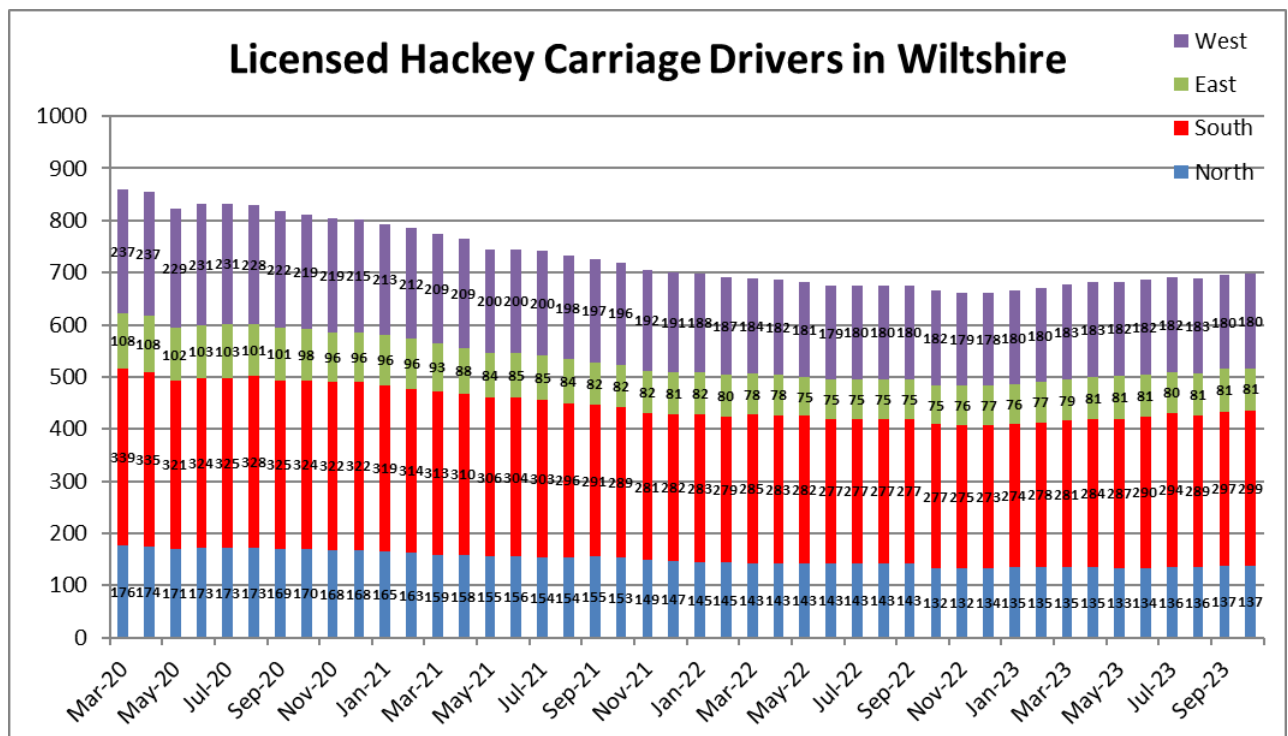


Fig.2

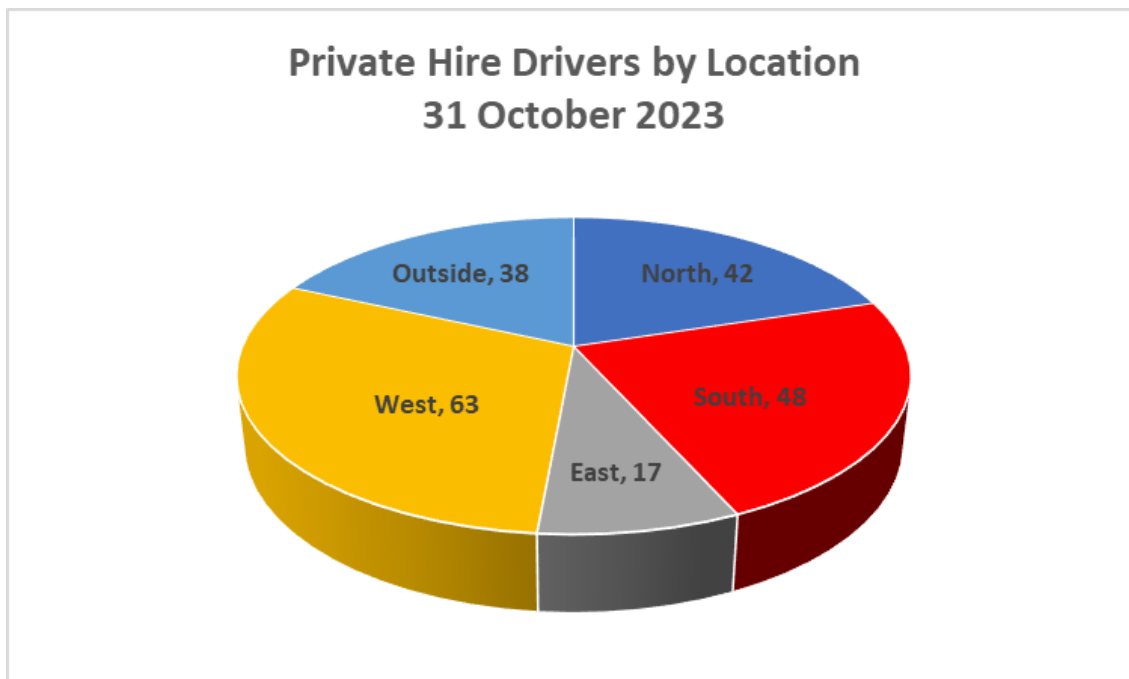
The graph below shows the monthly variation in hackney carriage driver numbers between March 2020, the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and now. During October 2023 numbers rose by 2, numbers in the South rose by 2, all other areas remained the same when compared to the previous month.

Since April 2020, the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, Hackney Carriage driver numbers have fallen in all areas, down 81 in the West, 53 in the North, 37 in the East and 30 in the South. The West is clearly the worst affected area.

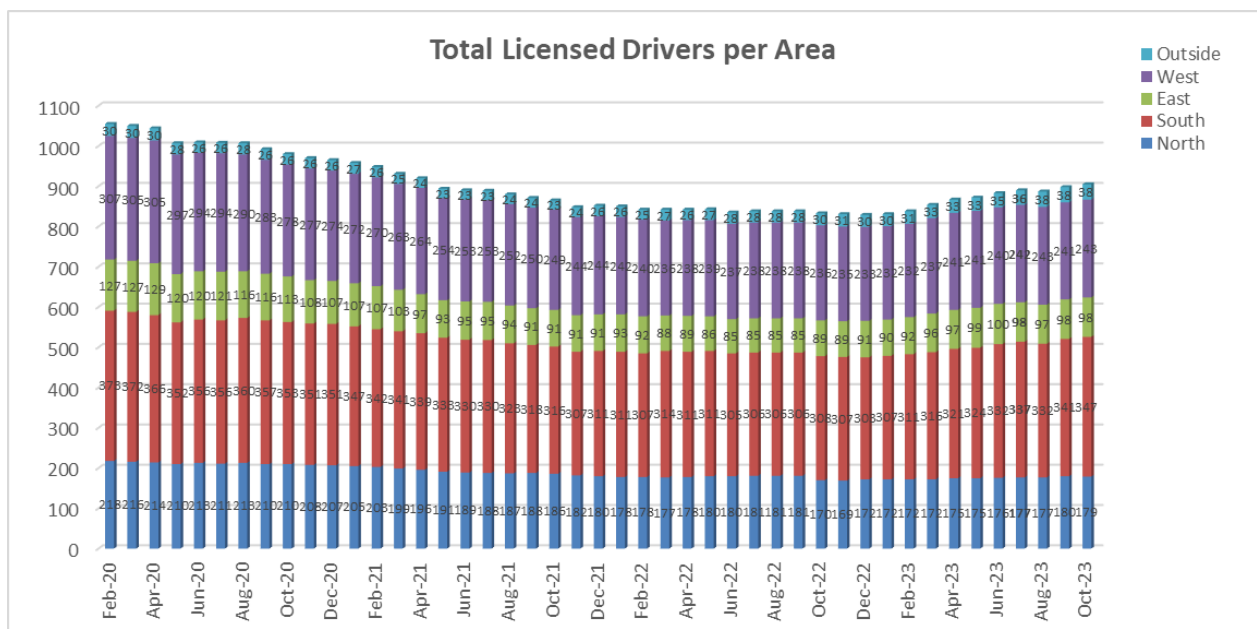


The team also license private hire only drivers, these totalled 208 as at the end of October 2023, showing an increase of 5 over the month. This brings the total number of drivers licensed to 905, an increase of 7 on the previous month and the highest total since April 2021. It is clear there is a trend 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. The team are witnessing a trend of drivers from outside the area applying for licences in Wiltshire. A number of applications for Swindon based drivers have been received and we believe this is due to the fact that Swindon Borough Council are not currently licensing any new drivers. 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.

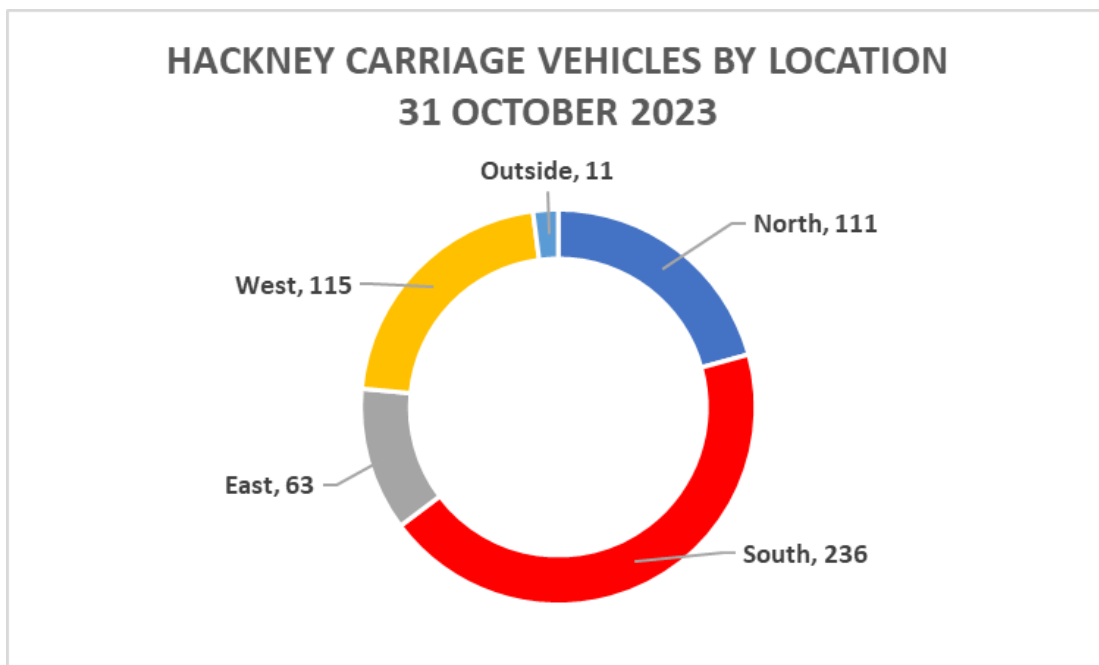


Since April 2019 the number of hackney carriage drivers has fallen by 182 and the number of private hire drivers has risen by 30, an overall fall of 152 drivers or 14%.

2.0 Licensed Vehicles

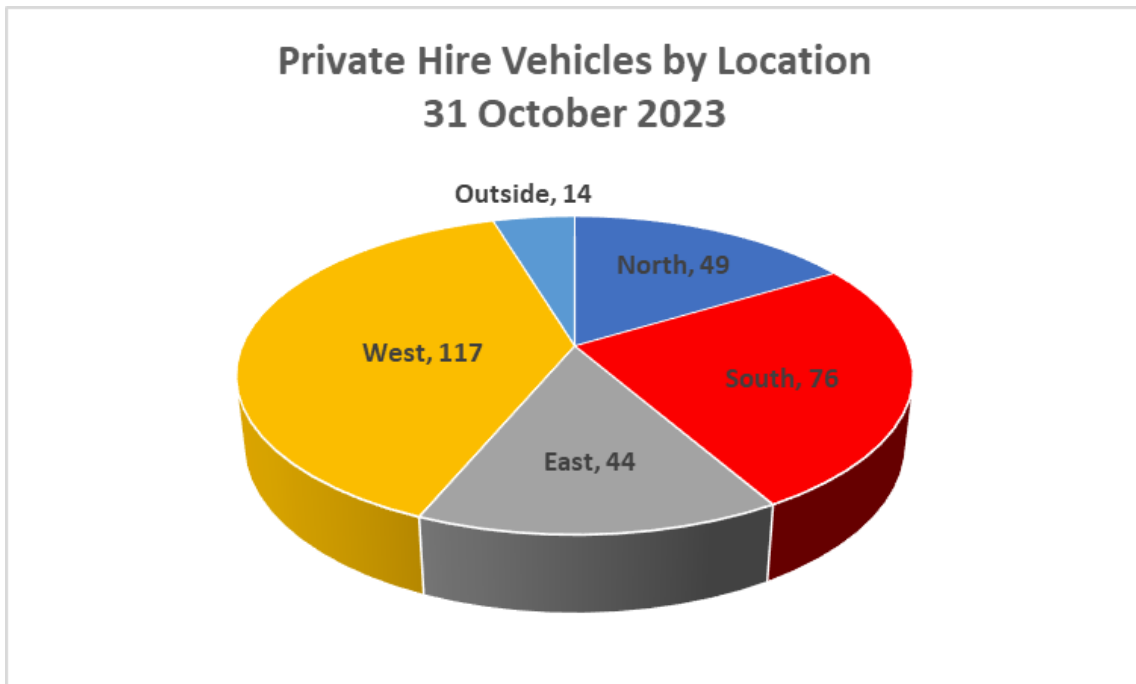
At the end of October 2023 the taxi licensing team licensed a total of 836 vehicles, vehicle numbers broke through 800 for the first time in 2 years in February 2023. Vehicle numbers were down 4 on the previous month. Numbers have begun to increase over the last three months and are continuing to rise, however we are still well down on the 1050 vehicles licenced at the time of the first lockdown. The vehicle split is as follows, 536 hackney carriage vehicles and 300 private hire vehicles, hackney carriage numbers fell by 7 and private hire vehicle numbers rose by 3 over the month when compared to the previous month. Of the 836 vehicles licensed 13.8% or 115 vehicles are wheelchair accessible. It should be noted that 28% 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 300 as at the end of October 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:



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 has seen the level of enforcement reduce over the last 3 months although this situation is slowly changing and officers are able to spend more time on the ranks enforcing. The team issued penalty points on 24 occasions during March 2021, the highest monthly total ever recorded.

Penalty points were issued to 3 drivers during October 2023.

1 driver was issued points for dangerous driving, 1 for parking on and blocking a zebra crossing and one for failing to notify the Council of a change in 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 3 drivers during October 2023.

The team held the second of the newly established trader representative meetings on 18 September 23 at Kennet House Devizes. The trade raised concerns over window tints, and a Licensing Committee report has been submitted to resolve this issue. 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. To move to a single 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. 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, possibility from 01 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.

Tom Inc, Principal Compliance Officer
8 November 2023