

# Taxi Licensing Update for Licensing Committee – February 2024

## 1.0 Licensed Drivers

Driver and vehicle numbers have stabilised over the last 6 months, driver numbers rose 51 or 6% over the 12 months of 2023. February 2024 has seen significant levels of new driver applications and there are currently over 60 new applications being processed.

The team processed 21 new licence applications and 81 renewals during January 2024. It should be noted that an increasing number of licence applicants and holders would increase the Council’s income from taxi licensing.

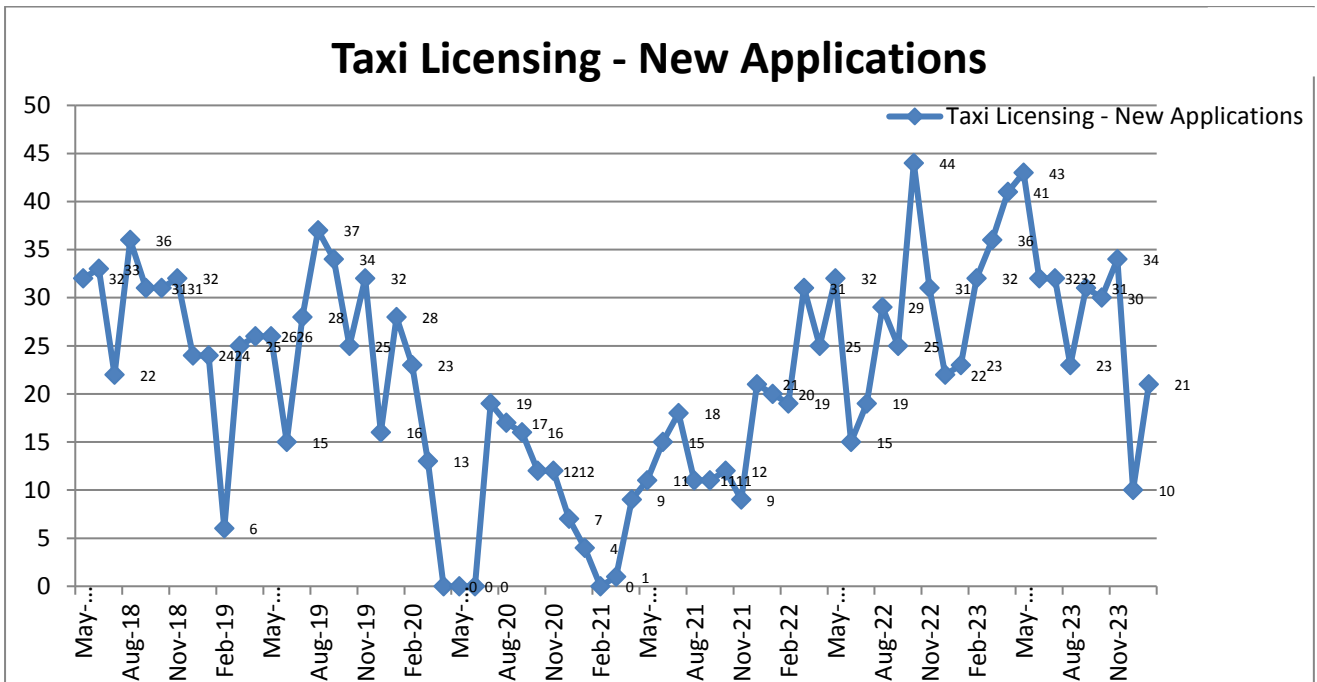
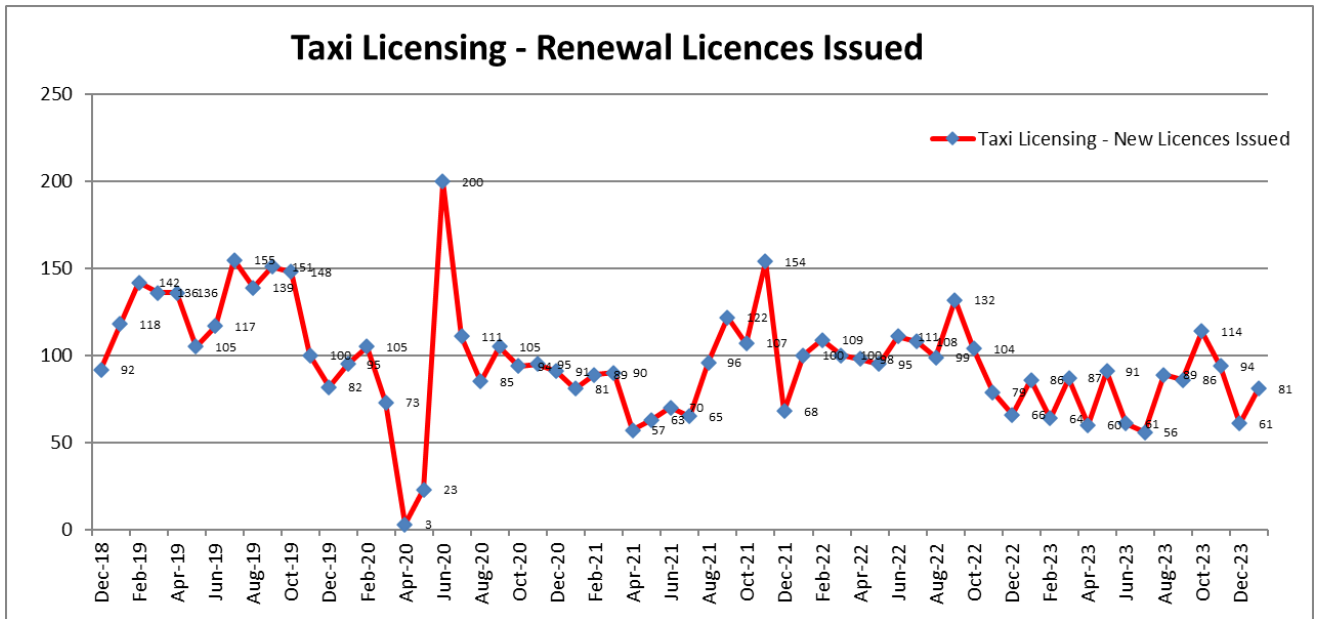


Figure 2 below shows the total number of licensed hackney carriage drivers in Wiltshire and their location.

The total number of licensed hackney carriage drivers at the end of January 2024 was 675, down 7 on the previous month, this is largely due to a number being suspended for not having valid DBS certificates in place. 131 were licensed in the North area, 76 in the East, 296 in the South and 172 in the West.

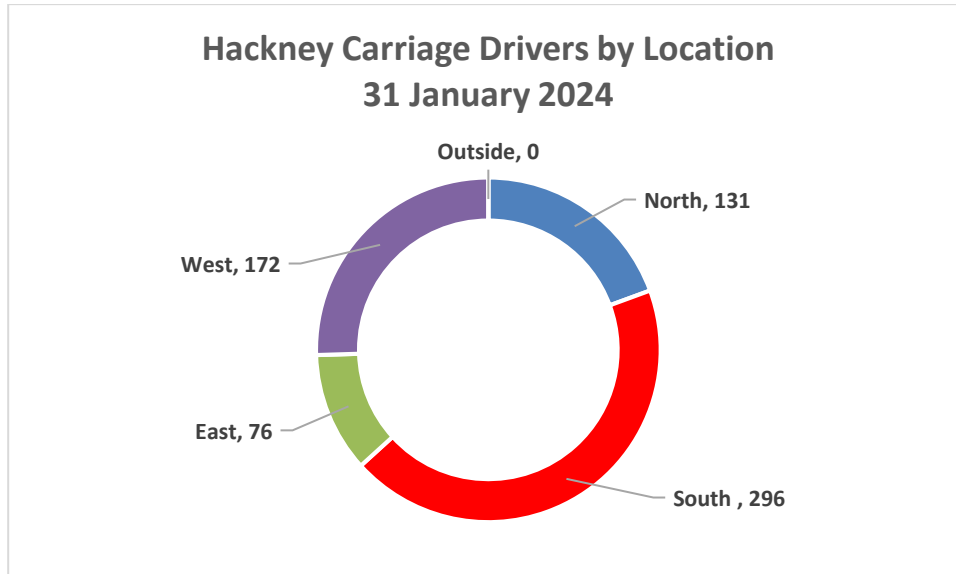
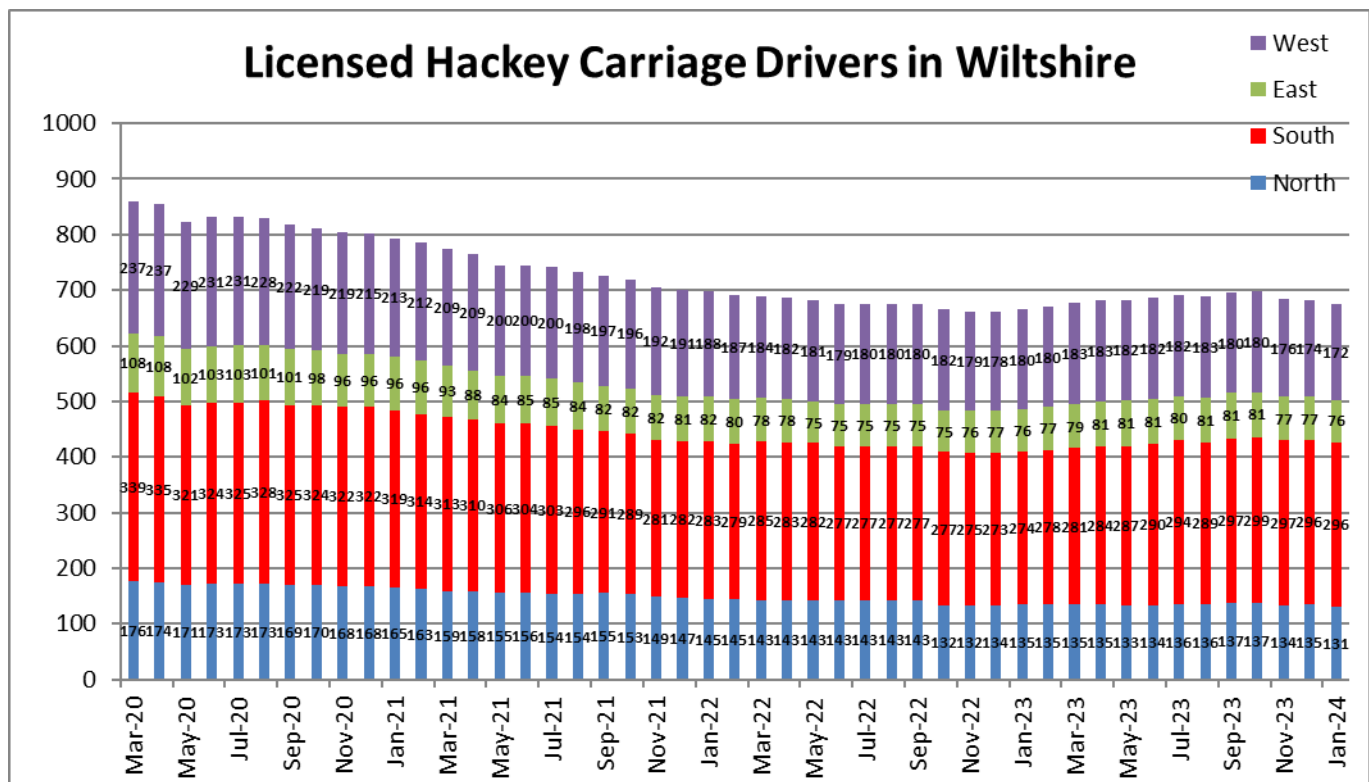


Fig.2

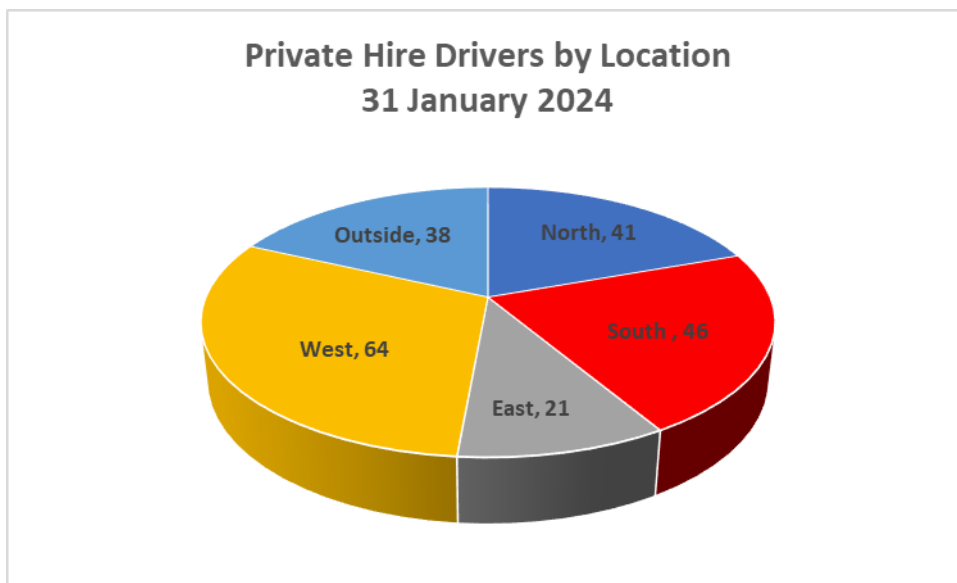
The graph below shows the monthly variation in hackney carriage driver numbers between March 2020, the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and 31 January 2024. During January 2024 numbers moved as follows, numbers in the South stayed the same, the North fell by 4, the East fell by 1 and the West fell by 2 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 89 in the West, 59 in the North, 42 in the East and 33 in the South. The West is clearly the worst affected area.

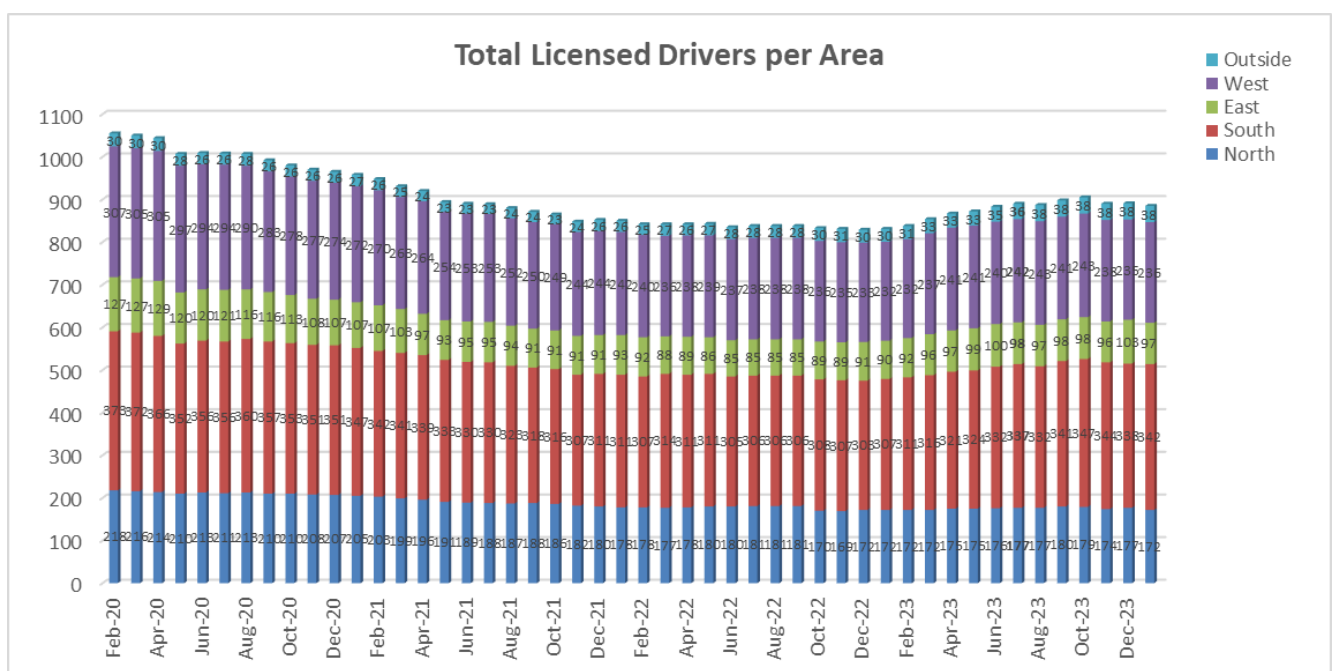


The team also license private hire only drivers, these totalled 210 as at the end of January 2024, showing an increase of 1 over the month, bringing the total number of drivers licensed to 885, a decrease of 6 on the previous month. It is clear there is a trend of drivers switching from hackney carriage 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. Recent best practice guidance published by Government in November 2023 allows us to question new applicants who live outside of Wiltshire where the majority of their work will be undertaken. The Council can now refuse to licence an individual who will be undertaking the majority of their work outside of Wiltshire. For information the area in which the private hire drivers are registered is as follows;



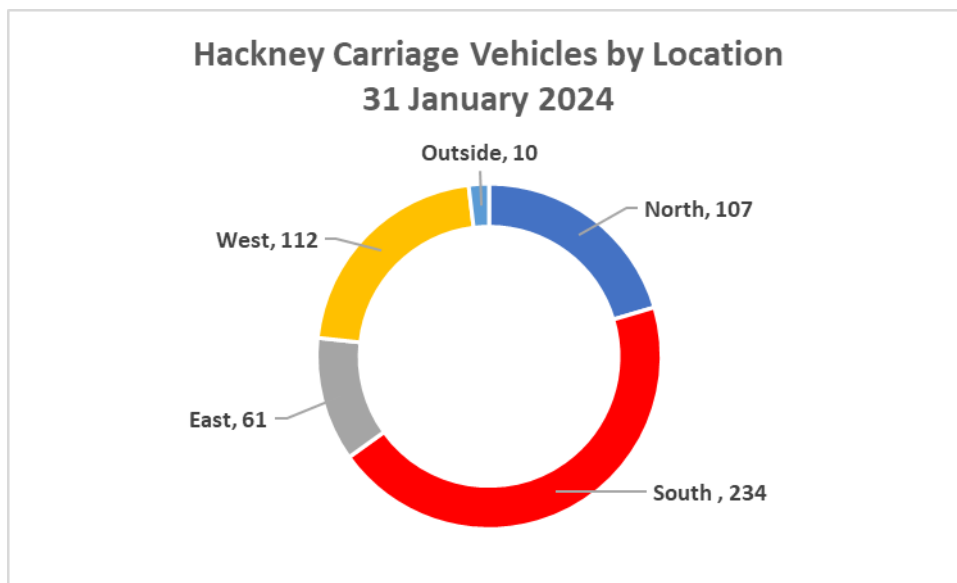
The graph below shows total driver numbers since February 2020, the month prior to the pandemic.



## 2.0 Licensed Vehicles

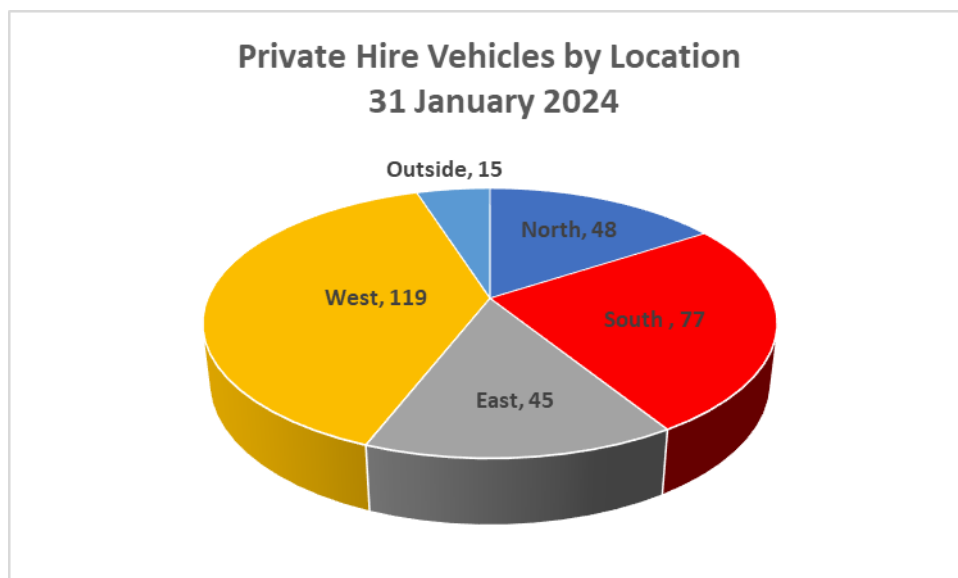
At the end of January 2024 the taxi licensing team licensed a total of 828 vehicles, vehicle numbers broke through 800 for the first time in 2 years in February 2023. Vehicle numbers were down 5 on the previous month. The team feel numbers have begun to increase over the last three months and are continuing 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, 524 hackney carriage vehicles and 304 private hire vehicles, hackney carriage numbers fell by 3 and private hire vehicle numbers decreased by 2 over the month when compared to the previous month. Of the 828 vehicles licensed 13.0% or 108 vehicles are wheelchair accessible. It should be noted that 27% 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 304 as at the end of January 2024.

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 January 2023 and January 2024, the number of licensed vehicles, hackney carriages and private hire vehicles increased by 35, or 4.4%.

## **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 6 months. 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 January 2024 for failing to declare a speeding conviction.

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 January 2024.

The team also completed a significant number of DBS checks during January 2024.

The team held the second of the newly established trader representative meetings on 18 September 2023 at Kennet House, Devizes. The trade raised concerns over window tints, a Licensing Committee report has been submitted to resolve this issue, the report was approved and the changes took place on 01 January 2024 and were well received by the industry.

The team continue to work on updated driver and vehicle guidelines in line with new government advice and best practice released in November 2023 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 and the team are reviewing the possibility of removing the current age criteria in relation to licensing vehicles and making the criteria emissions based.

The team will be introducing a single licensing zone for hackney carriages in Wiltshire with effect from 01 April 2024. Recently published guidance from Government supports the removal of smaller licensing zones and the creation of a single zone to cover an authority's area.

The new guidance places a lot of emphasis on accessibility to taxi ranks and taxi services and the team will undertake a rank review across our major towns to look at the level of accessibility, number of dropped kerbs, shelters to wait in etc.

The new guidance does stipulate that Local Authorities should not follow a 100% wheelchair accessible policy and recognises the need to have different types of transport to meet the needs of all service users and the industry.

A copy of the new guidance can be found at [Taxi and private hire vehicle licensing: best practice - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/taxi-and-private-hire-vehicle-licensing-best-practice)