

Taxi Licensing Update for Licensing Committee – May 2024

1.0 Licensed Drivers

Driver and vehicle numbers have increased over the last 12 months and the team are dealing with significant numbers of new driver applications, driver numbers rose by 81 or 11% over the 12 months of 2023. In the first four months of 2024 numbers only rose by 3.

The team processed 34 new licence applications and 69 renewals during April 2024. It should be noted that an increasing number of licence applicants and holders would increase the Council’s income from taxi licensing.

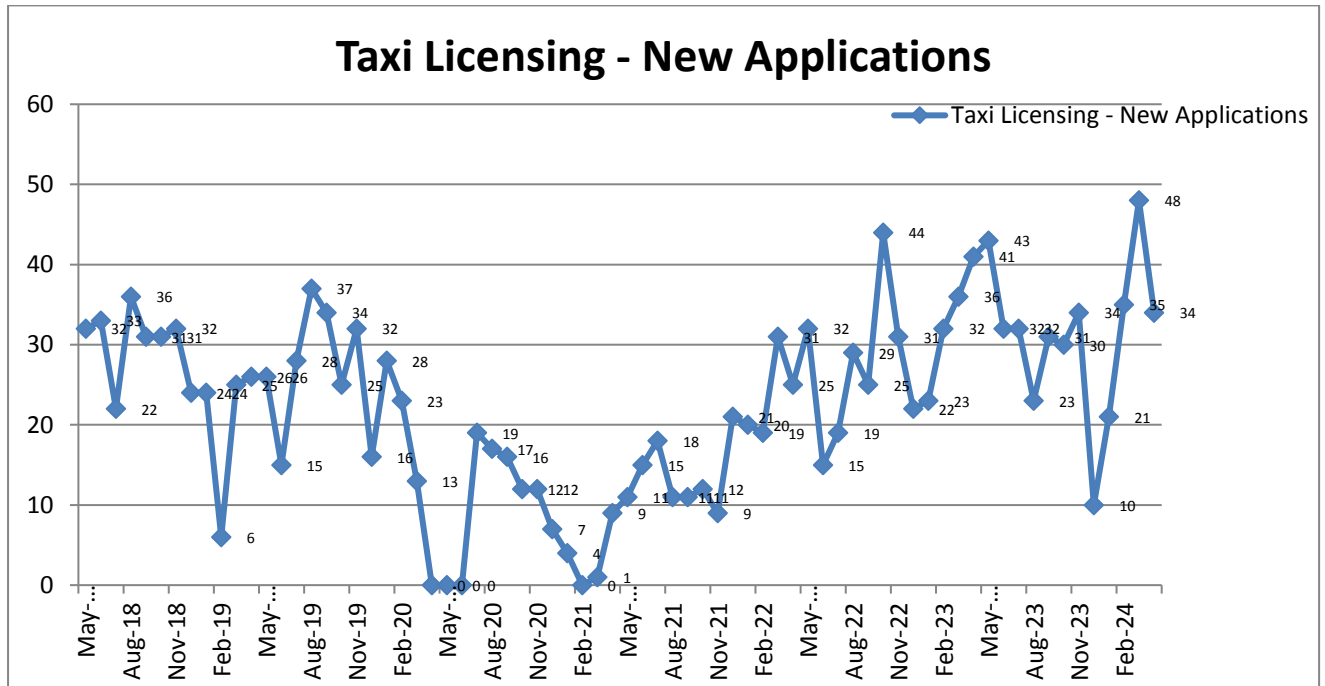
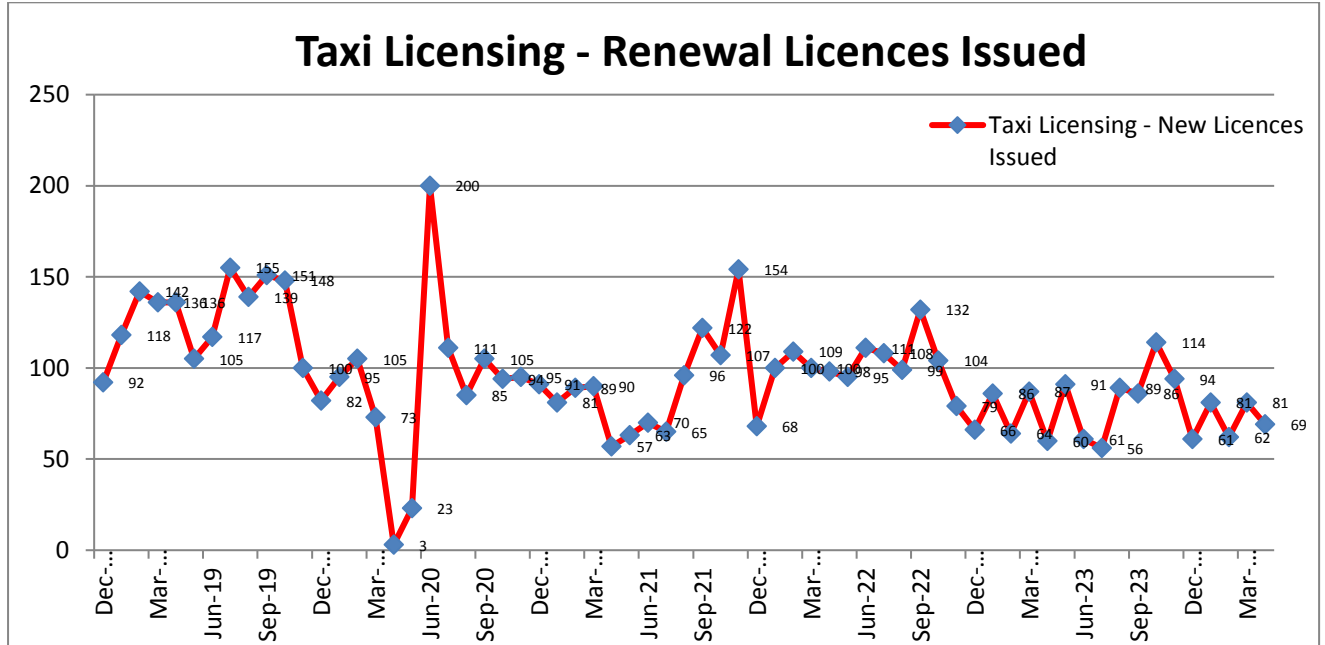


Figure 2 below shows the total number of licensed hackney carriage drivers in Wiltshire and their location.

The total number of licensed hackney carriage drivers at the end of April 2024 was 684, up 3 on the previous month but only 1 on this time last year. 136 were licensed in the North area, 79 in the East, 299 in the South and 170 in the West. The level of drivers continues to put pressure on PTU and whilst numbers are rising, they are not rising faster enough to meet the increased SEND demand Passenger Transport are experiencing.

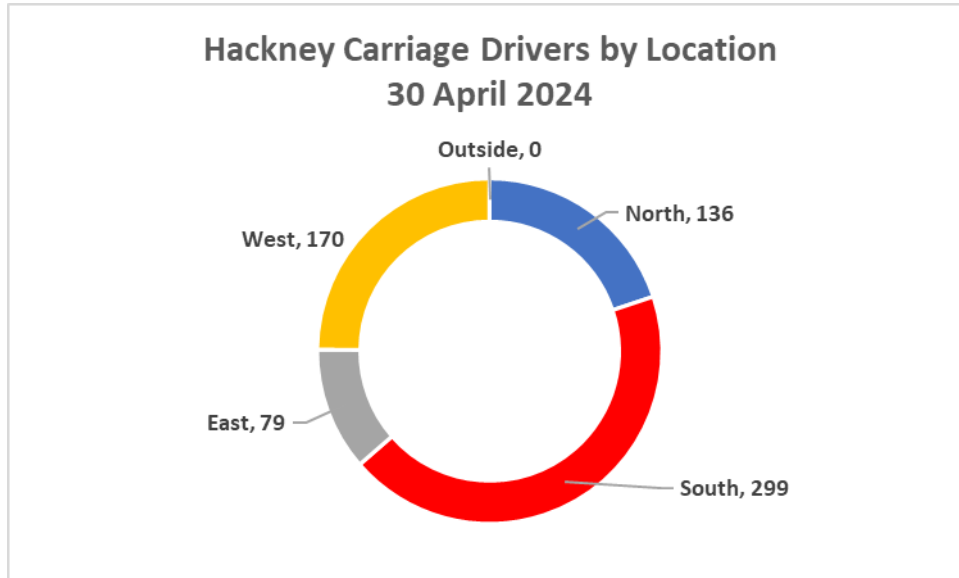
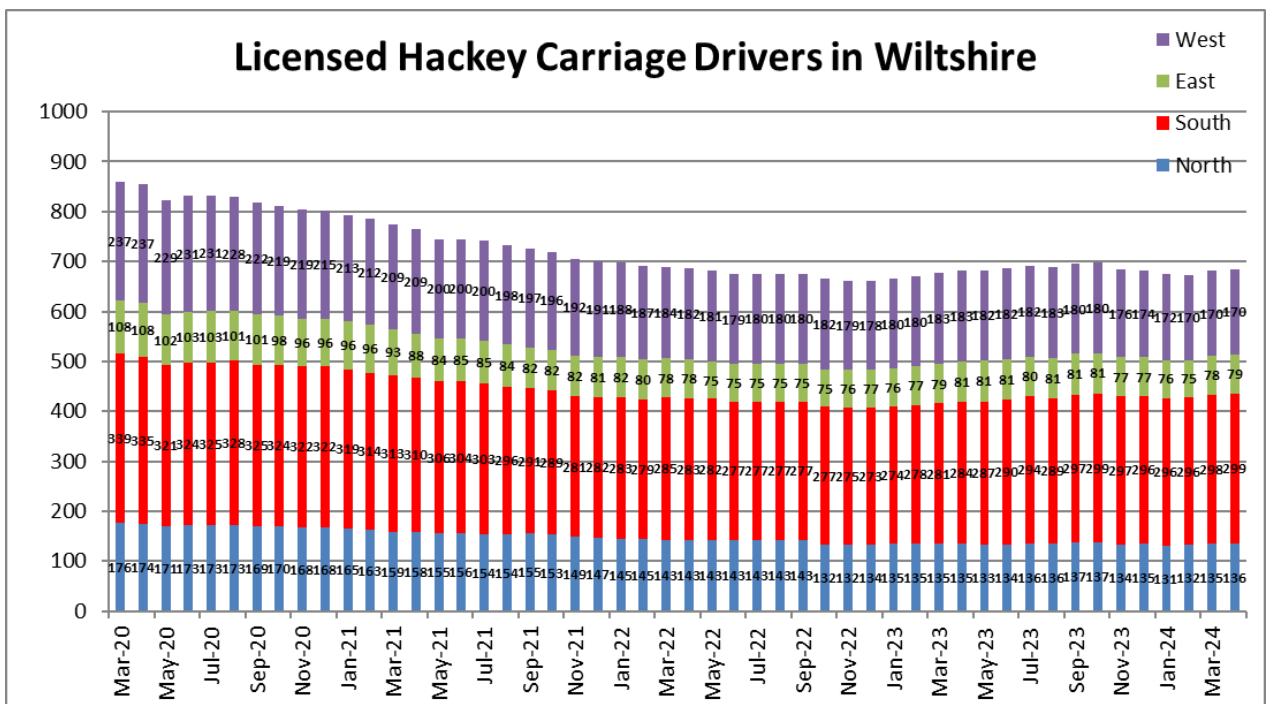


Fig.2

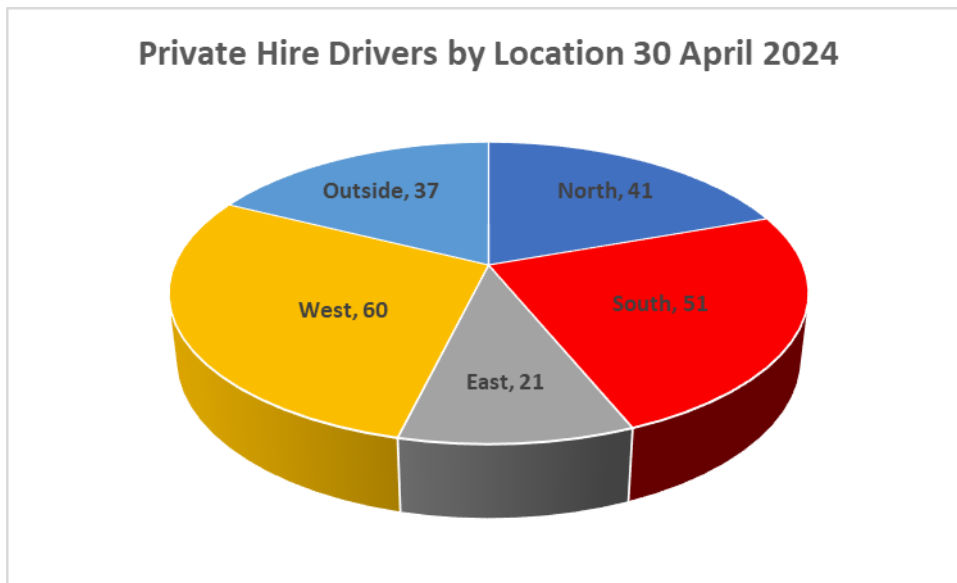
The graph below shows the monthly variation in hackney carriage driver numbers between March 2020, the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and now. During April 2024 numbers moved as follows, numbers in the South rose by 1, the North rose by 1, the East rose by 1 and the West stayed the same when compared to the previous month.

Since April 2020, the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, Hackney Carriage driver numbers have fallen in all areas, down 91 in the West, 54 in the North, 39 in the East and 31 in the South. The West is clearly the worst affected area.

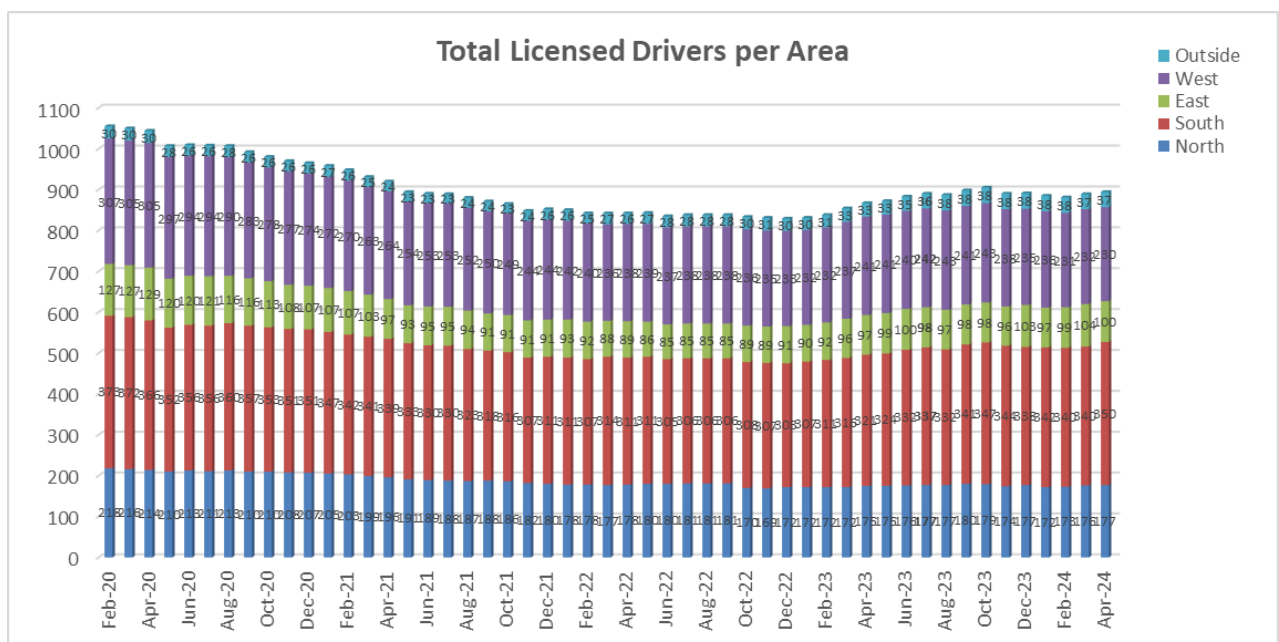


The team also license private hire only drivers, these totalled 210 as at the end of April 2024, up 2 on last month and 26 on this time last year, bringing the total number of drivers licensed to 894, an increase of 5 on the previous month.

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. Recent best practice has provided the authority with the power to ask applicants from outside the area where they intend to undertake the majority of their work, if they will not be working in Wiltshire, we now have the power to refuse the application. 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.

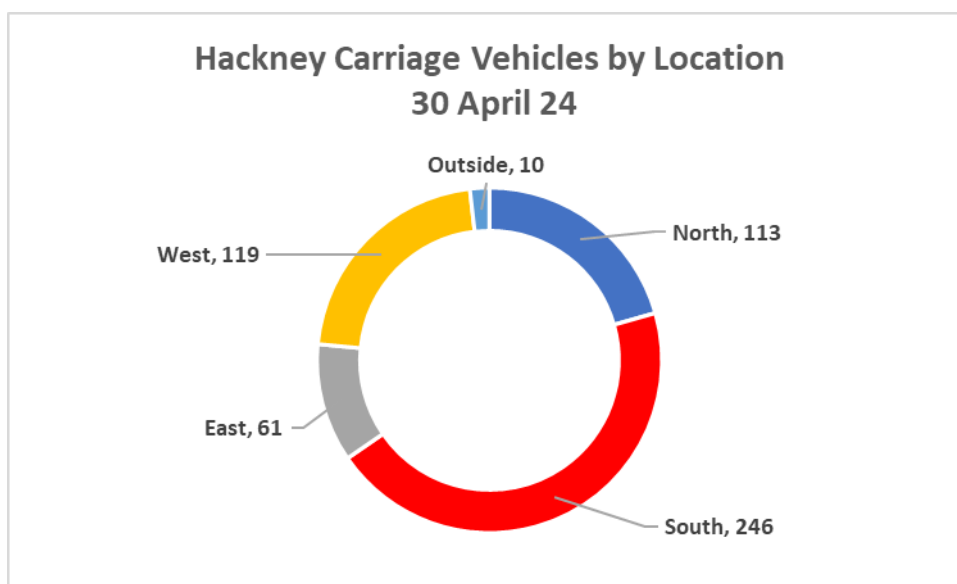


Since April 2019 the number of hackney carriage drivers has fallen by 194 and the number of private hire drivers has risen by 32 an overall fall of 162 drivers or 15%.

2.0 Licensed Vehicles

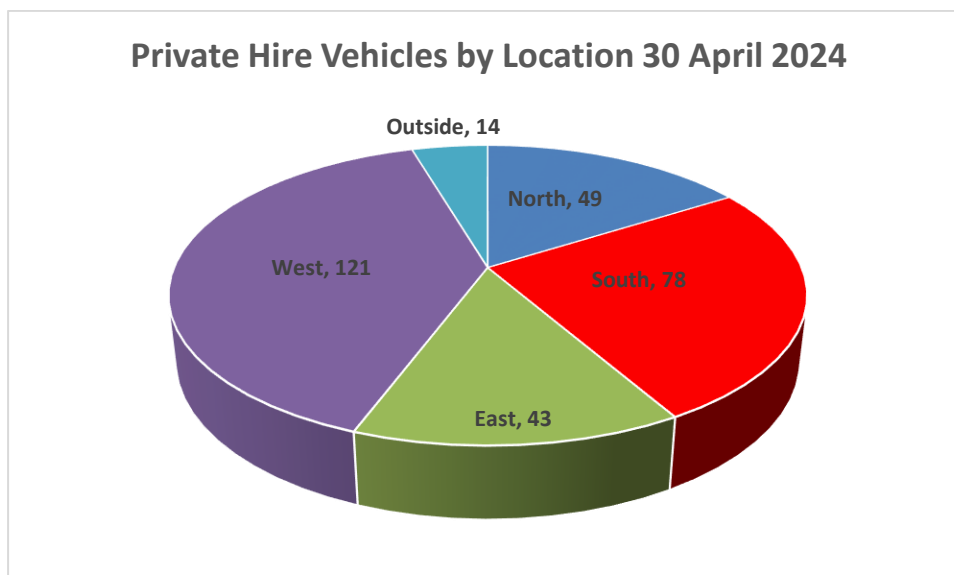
At the end of April 2024, the taxi licensing team licensed a total of 854 vehicles, vehicle numbers broke through 800 for the first time in 2 years in February 2023. Vehicle numbers were up 5 on the previous month. The team feel numbers have began to increase over the last three months and are continuing to rise, however we are still well down on the 1050 vehicles licenced at the time of the first lockdown, given the fall in footfall in our town centres the team feel it is unlikley vehicle numbers will return to pre-pandemic levels. The vehicle split is as follows, 549 hackney carriage vehicles and 305 private hire vehicles, hackney carriage numbers rose by 4 and private hire vehicle numbers rose by 1 over the month when compared to the previous month. Hackney carriage vehicle numbers are beginning to rise following the change to the window tint requirements on 1 January 2024. Of the 854 vehicles licensed 13.2% or 113 vehicles are wheelchair accessible. It should be noted that 28% 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 305 as at the end of April 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 April 2019 and April 2024, the number of licensed vehicles, hackney carriages and private hire vehicles decreased by 208, the number has reduced by 184 or 20% 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, a new team member is due to start on 1 May 2024 which will improve our visibility on the ranks and in towns. The team issued penalty points to on 24 occasions during March 2021, the highest monthly total ever recorded.

Penalty points were issued to 6 drivers during April 2022, 3 for speeding and 3 for failing to be with their vehicle.

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 or suspend any drivers during April 2024.

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

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 to removing the current age criteria in relation to licensing vehicles and making the criteria emissions based.

The team introduced a single licensing zone for hackney carriages in Wiltshire with effect from 1 April 2024.

Tom Ince
Principal Compliance Officer