

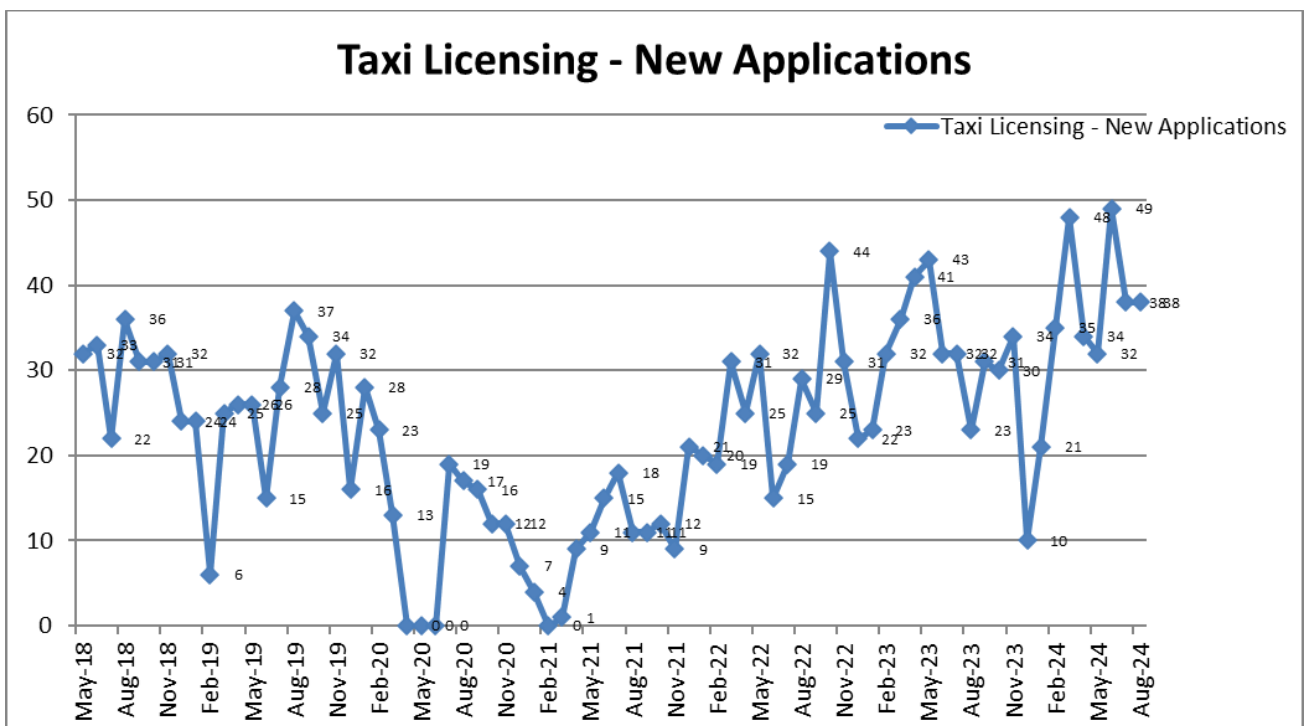
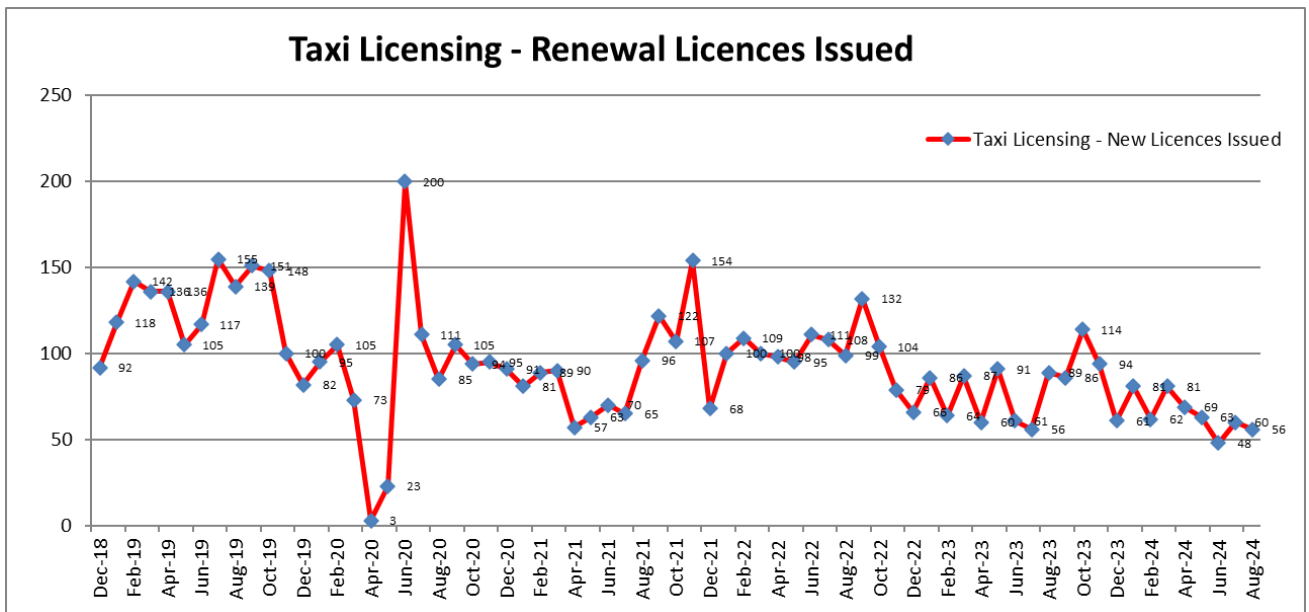
Licensing Committee - Taxi Licensing Update – September 2024

1.0 Licensed Drivers

Driver numbers have stabilised 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.

Since the start of the 2024/25 year in April driver numbers have risen by 8 or 1%, driver numbers broke through 900 this month, for the second time since April 2021.

The team processed 38 new licence applications and 56 renewals during August 2024. It should be noted that an increasing number of licence applicants and holders would increase the Council's income from taxi licensing but also place additional pressure on the small taxi licensing team.



The total number of licensed hackney carriage drivers at the end of August 2024 was 679, down 2 on the previous month. 135 were licensed in the North area, 78 in the East, 297 in the South and 169 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.

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

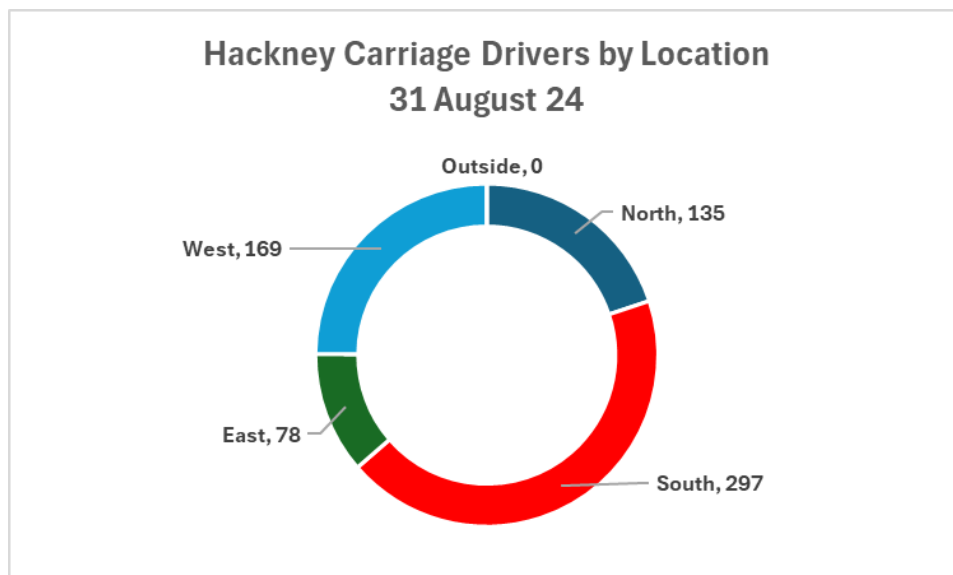


Fig.2

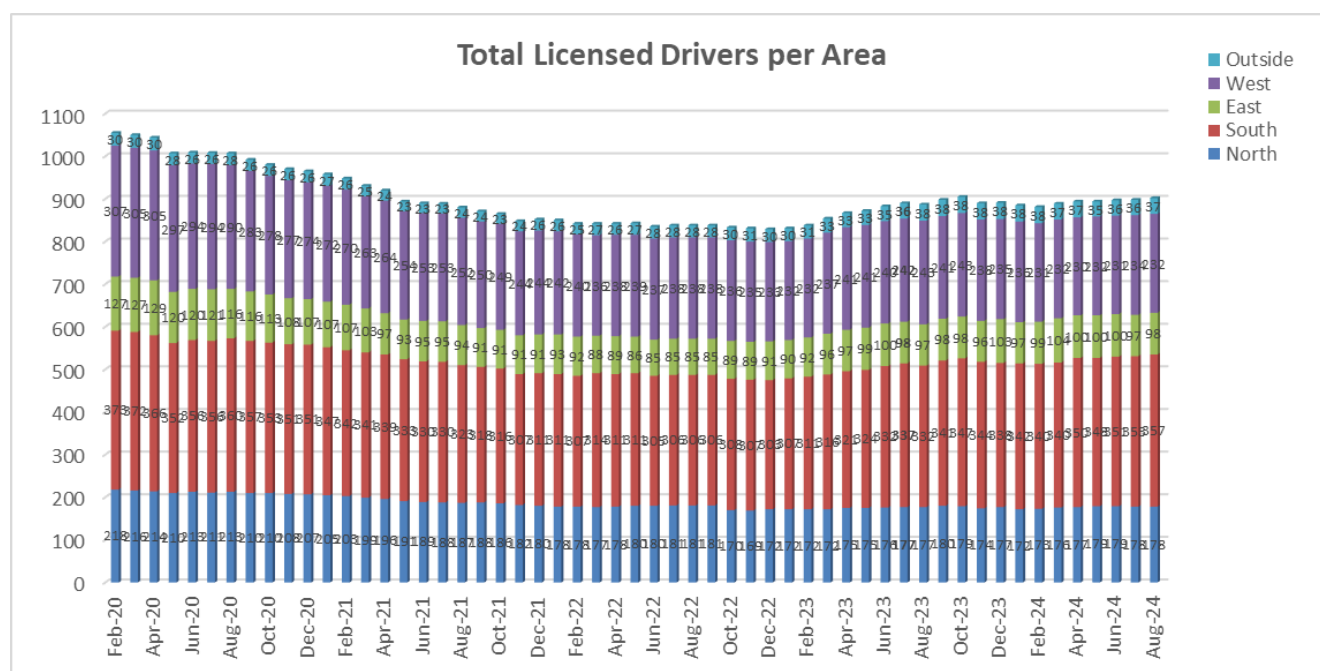
Since April 2020, the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, Hackney Carriage driver numbers have fallen in all areas, down 92 in the West, 55 in the North, 40 in the East and 33 in the South. The West is clearly the worst affected area.

The team also license private hire only drivers, these totalled 223 as at the end of August 2024, up 6 on last month, bringing the total number of drivers licensed to 902, up 4 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 start of the pandemic, the number of hackney carriage drivers has fallen by 199 and the number of private hire drivers has risen by 45 an overall fall of 154 drivers or 15%.

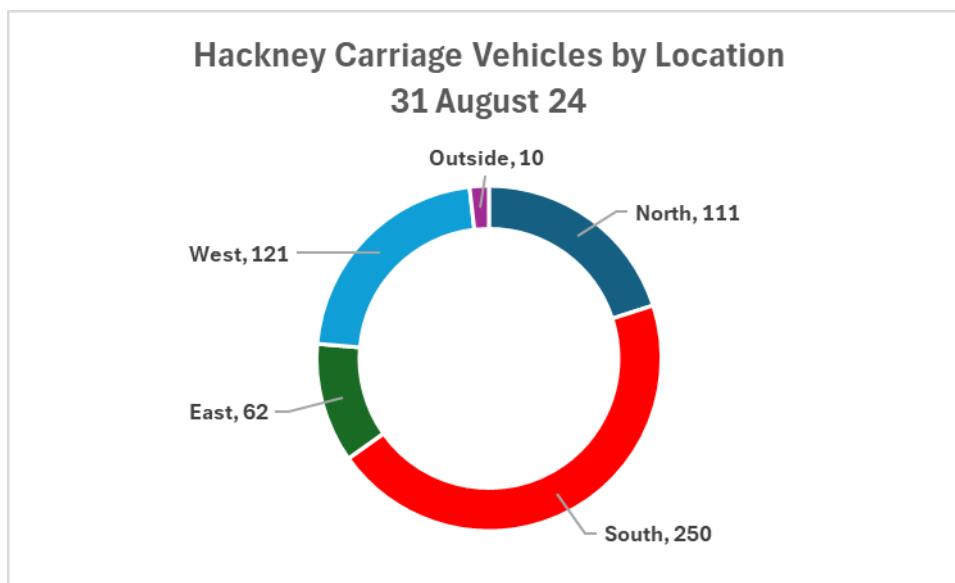
2.0 Licensed Vehicles

At the end of August 2024 the taxi licensing team licensed a total of 860 vehicles, vehicle numbers broke through 800 for the first time in 2 years in February 2023. Vehicle numbers were up 2 on the previous month. Vehicle numbers have begun to increase over the last six months and the trend is rising. We are up 115 vehicles or 15% from the lowest point in January 2022, however we are still well down on the 1050 vehicles licenced at the time of the first Covid lockdown. The team believe it is unlikely we will ever reach this level again due to the changing footfall within our town centres and the overall reduction in demand for taxis from the street.

The vehicle split is as follows, 554 hackney carriage vehicles and 306 private hire vehicles, hackney carriage numbers remained the same and private hire vehicle numbers rose by 2 over the month. Hackney carriage vehicle numbers are beginning to rise following the change to the window tint requirements on 1 January 2024.

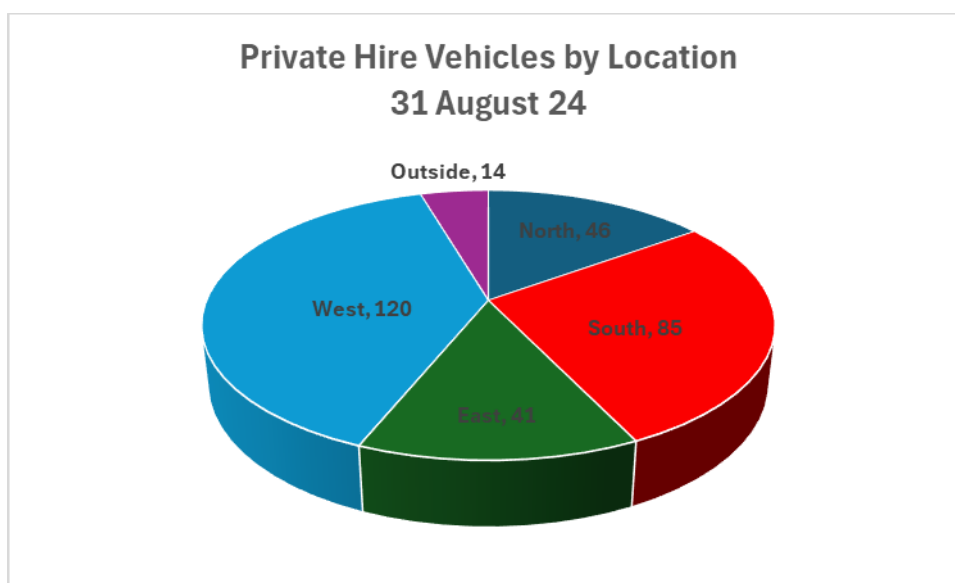
Of the 860 vehicles licensed 13.4% or 115 vehicles are wheelchair accessible. It should be noted that 29% of licensed private hire vehicles are wheelchair accessible compared to 5% of hackney carriage vehicles, this reflects the type of work each type of vehicle undertakes.

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 306 as at the end of August 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 August 2024, the number of licensed vehicles, hackney carriages and private hire vehicles decreased by 206, the number has reduced by 200 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 started on 1 May 2024 which has improved our visibility on the ranks and in towns. The team issued penalty points on 24 occasions during March 2021, the highest monthly total ever recorded.

Penalty points were issued to 10 drivers during August 2024, 3 for not wearing their badge, 3 for failing to notify the team of a conviction, 2 for speeding, 1 for smoking in their vehicle and 1 for parking in a disabled bay.

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 August 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 of removing the current age criteria in relation to licensing vehicles and making the criteria emissions based. The team also need to undertake two large projects and report back, firstly a taxi rank review to evaluate how accessible our ranks are to all members of the public and secondly also look at how we transition our current fleet of vehicles across to hybrid or fully electric vehicles.

The team are also currently dealing with the implementation of a new taxi licensing system, Arcus. Arcus went live on 17 June 2024 but at present the Arcus system is not able to perform a number of the licensing processes, so the team are having to duplicate work within our old M3 system and Arcus. The team are working with IT and Arcus to fix all system issues so a fully working Arcus system can be used to process Taxi Licensing work moving forward.

Tom Ince
Principal Compliance Office
2 September 2024