

Report to: ADULTS SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date: 4th JULY 2006

Report of: TAXI SCRUTINY PANEL

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Report No:

TITLE OF REPORT:

Taxi Scrutiny Panel - Findings

NON-CONFIDENTIAL

**This report does not contain information which warrants its consideration
in the absence of the Press or Members of the public**

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Members are asked to approve:

- (i) the recommendations made to the Executive Member for Environmental Services and the Licensing and Environmental Regulations Committee as laid out in the report (Section 8 of report);**
- (ii) That the Executive Member for Environmental Services and the Licensing and Environmental Regulations Committee be asked to prepare a report, setting out their response to the recommendations contained in this report. That these responses be presented back to the Adults Services Scrutiny Committee within three months.**

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 At the Adults Services Scrutiny Committee meeting on the 13th December 2005 it was decided to establish a Scrutiny Panel to examine all aspects of Taxi Vehicle Testing.
- 1.2 The panel was subsequently appointed, being politically balanced and the permanent membership was:
 1. Councillor Hussain (Chair)
 2. Councillor A Connell
 3. Councillor Hamilton
 4. Councillor Ibrahim
 5. Councillor Mrs Rothwell
 6. Councillor Shaw

(note: for the final meeting of the Panel held on 6th June Councillors Burrows, Price and Rock had replaced Councillors Hamilton, Ibrahim and Mrs Rothwell as members of the Panel)

- 1.3 The Panel was supported through its investigations by the following officers:

Paul Bridge – Assistant Director, Environmental Services
 Andrew Fisher – Group Manager, Licensing
 Roy Fox – Special Projects Manager, Environmental Services
 Stephen Maslivec – Head of Environmental Protection
 Robert Landon – Head of Democratic Services
 James Dearling – Senior Democratic Services Officer

2. Reasons for Review

- 2.1 The Panel was established following the Committee's consideration of proposals to improve availability of taxi vehicle tests and to increase testing fees. At that time objections had been received from the taxi trade. The trade had been asked to submit costed proposals for alternative taxi testing arrangements, including the use of private sector garages.

3. Process and Evidence

- 3.1 The Panel met on six occasions in addition to undertaking two site visits to the testing bay at Wellington Yard.
- 3.2 During its early meetings the Panel refined its terms of reference to focus on:
 - The charges/costs of taxi testing;
 - The standards applied in testing; and

- The opening hours/waiting times at the testing station

- 3.3 During the course of its deliberations the Panel, in addition to extensive oral evidence from officers, also considered reports and undertook site visits and witness sessions. As a starting point for the review the Panel considered a detailed report from the Director of Adults Services which set out the background to the arrangements for the testing of taxis and private hire vehicles. The Panel also considered extensive comparative information about arrangements in AGMA and other North West local authorities.
- 3.4 In addition to receiving evidence from Council Officers the Panel held a number of witness sessions with the following representatives of the taxi trade, independent garages and the testing bay at Wellington Yard:-

Mr Sajid Bax	Bolton Private Hire Association
Mr Mark Fuller	RRG Bolton
Mr Sajid Khan	Bolton Private Hire Association
Mr Charles Oakes	Bolton Hackney Association
Mr Stephen Pollitt	Senior Tester, Wellington Yard
Mr Ian Satterthwaite	Gordons (Bolton) Ltd
Mr James Schofield	Wilson and Co.
Mr Bill Williams	Bolton Taxi Drivers Association

4. THE CHARGES/COSTS OF TAXI TESTING

- 4.1 In looking at the charges/costs of taxi testing the Panel was conscious of the need to put this in the context of overall charges for taxi licensing. The Panel received information about the cost of various elements of the taxi licensing regime and comparative information with other local authorities. The Panel also investigated the implications of outsourcing taxi testing to private sector garages on costs and accessing tests.
- 4.2 The original service broadly demonstrated a small surplus position (i.e. one testing bay). Although this position varied depending on operational circumstances, the unevenness of the service demand and actual number of tests.
- 4.3 The improved service proposed to the Executive Member in December 2005, which increases resources by two qualified technicians to ensure Bay 2 is always available, without any increase in the testing fee would show a deficit of around £33,000, hence the proposal to increase costs.
- 4.4 The current service (without implementing the proposals made to the Executive Member), which reflects that Environmental Services have recruited two qualified technicians (although one has since left) without an increase in fees shows a deficit of around £14,000.

- 4.5 The fees charged in Bolton for the licensing of both hackney carriages and private hire vehicles are attached at appendix 1. Appendix 2 shows the fees charged as a 'timeline' from the first expression of interest to the completion of the licensing process.
- 4.6 In summary, the cost in fees to a new driver and vehicle on first application is £361 for the year. For existing driver applicants, the yearly cost in fees is £218.
- 4.7 Appendix 3 includes comparisons between Bolton costs and those of other AGMA Authorities. In summary comparisons show that direct comparison between authorities for the six monthly testing of vehicles is complicated. This is because authorities use different methods for their charges and group them together in different ways. However, with these constraints in mind, yearly renewal costs for both hackney and private hire vehicles show Bolton in the mid-range even with an increase in fees. The Panel also compared costs with three authorities that use private sector garages. For existing drivers the yearly cost in fees is: Chorley – up to £430; Preston – up to £285 and for Liverpool - £180. For new drivers the figures are: Chorley – up to £496; Preston up to £325 and Liverpool £219. These figures again show Bolton in the mid-range of prices.
- 4.8 The Panel explored the practicalities and implications of outsourcing some or all of the taxi testing. Although this was not simply a charging/cost issue the Panel's consideration of the possibility of outsourcing is all included in this section of the report.
- 4.9 The costings element of this part of the review was considered in private. The analysis provided showed that it was unlikely that any private sector garage would be able to undertake all the work, the analysis also indicated that the costs of a one-off test at a private sector garage were likely to be higher than those currently charged by Environmental Services (when including cost of monitoring performance of contractors by the Licensing Unit).
- 4.10 The Panel looked at the practice of other local authorities in terms of outsourcing. A benchmarking exercise comparing taxi-licensing costs across AGMA authorities was undertaken. As part of that exercise other AGMA authorities were asked to identify whether testing was carried out 'in-house' or outsourced.
- 4.11 This exercise demonstrated that no AGMA authority simply out-sources its taxi licensing to a private sector garage or garages. Salford City Council had researched the possibility of having vehicles tested in the private sector. However, most large garages/dealers in the Salford area stated that they did not have the capacity to test the number of vehicles that needed licensing. Also the garage dealers were unwilling to increase staff and equipment to enable them to carry out the number of tests/retests required.

- 4.12 Stockport MBC outsources its testing to a national, large scale provider of transport to local authorities. This is part of a much wider transport arrangement that Stockport has with Translinc, rather than simply outsourcing taxi-testing.
- 4.13 Trafford has recently taken the decision to sell its in-house garage and outsource their testing. Again this will be part of a council-wide deal to outsource all of their transport provision to a fleet transport provider.
- 4.14 In order to test the viability of using private sector garages to improve aspects of the taxi testing service the Panel received information about the operation of taxi testing by Preston City Council, Chorley Borough Council and Liverpool City Council. These three authorities used private sector garages to carry out some or all of their taxi testing.

Preston City Council:

- Began using private sector garages to carry out tests on hackney carriage and private hire vehicles in November 2002.
- There are currently six testing stations authorised by the Council to conduct the tests (including the Council's testing station) to deal with a fleet of 187 hackney carriages and around 400 private hire vehicles;
- Each testing station sets its own fees. Fees are all around £50 and testing stations set their own charging policies for re-tests;
- Tests are booked directly with the testing station and the fee is paid directly to the testing station;
- In addition the Council charges a license fee of about £80 per six months;
- The Council reported concern about the performance of a 'couple' of the testing stations and indicated that they had written to them to remind them of the importance of ensuring compliance with the Council specification.

Chorley Borough Council

- Chorley BC have appointed four private sector testing stations to deal with a fleet of 30 hackney carriages and 134 private hire vehicles;
- Each testing station sets its own fee and accepts its own bookings. Fees are in the range £25-£40 for a first test and the same for a re-test;
- Presentation is checked separately by the enforcement officer.

Liverpool City Council

- Have been using a mixture of private and public sector testing stations for about three years;
- Around 17 testing stations are used to deal with a fleet of around 5,000 hackney carriages and 3,000 private hire vehicles;

- Test fees range between £40 and £55 with a variety of arrangements for re-tests - free, free if the garage does the work, through to £15 to £45 re-test fees;
- Tests are booked with the garage;
- Vehicles are tested every twelve months until they reach a certain age and then every six months;
- The Licensing Unit operate a significant 'mystery shopper' type exercise to monitor performance of the testing stations.

4.15 In considering outsourcing the Panel considered the following as key issues in determining its recommendations:

Impact of service – will outsourcing improve the taxi testing service;

Capacity – could private sector garages deal with the volume of tests in addition to their current workload. It is not simply a question of number of tests, but also dealing with the peaks in demand;

Impartiality – It is essential to ensure there were no conflicts of interest for any garages/dealers who might undertake tests;

Consistency – If using multiple testing centres a mechanism would need to be found to ensure consistency;

Tendering – the mechanism that could be used to select suppliers

Monitoring – a mechanism to monitor the performance of the contractor against the contract specification would need to be developed and introduced.

4.16 During the witness sessions the following contributions were made to the deliberations around costs and charges:

- An overall assessment of fees and charges for taxi testing provided a better comparison than looking at individual charges;
- It was felt by a representative of the taxi trade that the trade was not getting value for money from either the testing station at Wellington Yard or the Licensing Unit at Minerva House;
- A trade representative suggested that although cost was not the central issue the costs involved in taxi testing were too high in Bolton;
- The three garages indicated that all testers undertaking taxi tests did not discount the MOT test charge, which was £44.50;

5. THE STANDARDS APPLIED IN TESTING

5.1 The vehicle testing facility at Wellington Street is governed by the Motor Vehicles (Tests) Regulations 1981, made under the Road Traffic Act (1988). The Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) are the enforcing agency for the Act. VOSA undertakes twice yearly audit and compliance checks on the operation of the testing facility and, if necessary, undertakes enforcement action to maintain standards. The last visit was in November 2005 and there were no problems with either the physical test or the test station documentation.

- 5.2 Taxis are subject to inspection and testing by the Council under the provisions of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.
- 5.3 In addition to the standard MOT test, the Council has powers to attach such conditions as it considers necessary to meet standards in the Act. The additional conditions the Council applies relate to bodywork standards, electrical and mechanical standards and other items such as taxi meter, fare cards, council plates, interior stickers etc.
- 5.4 The Council adopted minimum standards for bodyworks in 2002/2003. These standards were agreed with the trade through the Taxi Consultative Panel and approved by the Licensing and Environmental Regulations Committee. The main MOT requirements, the items to be tested in addition to the MOT test and Council's bodywork standards etc for both hackney carriage and private hire vehicles are set out in appendix 4.
- 5.5 There is an appeals procedure in place to deal with proprietors who may be aggrieved by the decision of a vehicle tester. In a typical year the number of appeals made and considered is about 25, out of about 1,500 tests per year. Although the number of appeals is low, the Licensing Unit does receive and handle numerous informal complaints about the standards which are applied at the testing station, particularly concerning bodywork. However, no figures are kept for this.
- 5.6 The Panel was informed that the Licensing Unit is currently reviewing vehicle test standards and where it is felt that any standards should exceed MOT standards it is proposed to invite an external expert (probably STATUS at Manchester Metropolitan University) to act as a moderator to ensure that the proposals are both reasonable and can be justified.
- 5.7 Appendix 5 shows the available figures for vehicle test failures during 2004 and up to October 2005. In summary, the total number of vehicle tests carried out in 2004 was 2763 of which 1906 (69%) were first passes. A total of 857 retests were undertaken. The figures for 2005 (up to October) show that a total of 2367 vehicle tests were carried out of which 1710 (72%) were first passes.
- 5.8 The Panel was informed of the 'yellow ticket' system which is an informal arrangement to deal with vehicles which failed for relatively minor faults, and which could be re-checked by visual inspection rather than undergo a full re-test providing the faults are rectified within 24 hours. Figures for the period April to July 2005 showed that most failures were due to mechanical and bodywork faults.
- 5.9 During the witness sessions the following contributions were made to the deliberations around testing standards:

- There was unanimity amongst trade representative that bodywork standards were overly demanding, there was particular concern about the number of private hire vehicles failing on body work standards, there was also dissatisfaction with apparent inconsistency;
- Should taxi testing be outsourced it would still have to be undertaken using equipment registered and approved by VOSA;
- All testers undertaking taxi tests would need to be fully familiar with taxi testing standards agreed by the Council.
- In addition to a normal MOT test, fire extinguishers, upholstery and bodywork were examined
- The mechanical aspects of the current testing booklet were over 10 years old and only minor issues (including the bodywork standards) had been amended since then. A fully updated document clearly laying out the standards for testing, rather than the current list of items to be tested is needed;

6. THE OPENING HOURS/WAITING TIMES AT THE TESTING STATION

- 6.1 The Panel heard that all AGMA authorities experience peaks and troughs in the availability of testing slots depending on the time of year, and so waiting times vary. In general Bolton is in line with the rest of AGMA authorities in turning round appointments within one to five working days.
- 6.2 The Panel heard evidence that the current average length of test is about 45 minutes, though with a new emissions test and additional paperwork this was likely to increase in the near future.
- 6.3 The investigation of possible private sector garages has shown that the tests were likely to take longer than the current 45 minutes.
- 6.4 During the witness sessions the following contributions were made to the deliberations around testing standards:
- There was a consensus amongst representatives of the taxi trade that facilities and customer services at private garages were superior to those at Wellington Yard;
 - It was suggested that waiting times at Minerva House had shown little discernable improvement;
 - If taxi testing was undertaken by private sector garages then weekday evening testing would be possible (Wellington Yard did not offer this facility).
 - All three private sector garages were accustomed to dealing with peaks and troughs in work and that there would be capacity to deal with taxi testing;
 - Taxi tests took 45 minutes and consisted of the standard MOT test together with additional standards laid down for hackney carriages and

private hire vehicles. VOSA recommended 48 minutes for a test, but this recommended figure was likely to increase in the near future.

- The recently introduced emissions test and additional paperwork meant longer lasting tests;
- It was suggested that the facilities at Wellington Yard for those waiting whilst vehicles are tested are poor in comparison to private sector garages.

7.0 CONCLUSION

(i) The Charges/Costs of Taxi Testing

- 7.1 In assessing the reasonableness of charges and costs of taxi testing it is important to be aware of the overall costs of licensing for taxi drivers and proprietors. In undertaking this review the Panel quickly learnt that the licensing regime for taxis was a complicated issue and elements should not be seen in isolation.
- 7.2 Taxi testing was generally undertaken by Environmental Services at a small financial surplus. Demand from the trade to improve access to tests would result in significant extra costs by opening Bay 2, this would lead to an increase in charges as Environmental Services cannot operate this service at a loss.
- 7.3 The fees charged in Bolton were not unreasonable in comparison with other Greater Manchester Authorities and Chorley, Liverpool and Preston, three authorities that use private sector garages.
- 7.4 It appears on initial investigation that outsourcing to private sector garages would not result in a reduction in costs for taxi testing. However, outsourcing was likely to improve access to tests which is a significant area of concern for the taxi trade. Access would be improved as there would be more providers, different opening hours and locations. Also, waiting facilities were likely to be improved. The Panel noted the support of the taxi trade for outsourcing as a means of improving the service they receive and alleviating delays.
- 7.5 No other AGMA authority simply outsources its taxi testing, though some other north west authorities have successfully done so. It would appear that in practical terms outsourcing is a possibility, though there are a number of issues that would need to be addressed before going down this line. The Panel is of the view that although on balance it supports the principle of outsourcing the following need to be assessed in more detail before actually outsourcing taxi testing:

Capacity – could private sector garages deal with the volume of tests in addition to their current workload. It is not simply a question of number of

tests, but also dealing with the peaks in demand. Discussions with potential providers indicate that a number of different providers would be required;

Impartiality – It is essential to ensure there were no conflicts of interest for any garages/dealers who might undertake tests;

Consistency – If using multiple testing centres a mechanism would need to be found to ensure consistency;

Tendering – the mechanism that could be used to select suppliers

Monitoring – a mechanism to monitor the performance of the contractor against the contract specification would need to be developed and introduced.

(ii) The standards applied in testing

- 7.6 The Panel spent a considerable amount of time looking at the standards that were applied in tests as this appeared to be the major issue for the taxi trade. In addition to receiving details of the standards that are applied the Panel twice viewed the testing bay and observed tests being undertaken.
- 7.7 The Panel feels that mechanical and upholstery standards are reasonable but that bodywork standards appear to be too rigid and are in need of redefinition.
- 7.8 The Panel's conclusion on the issue of standards is that the bodywork standards that are applied are too harsh. The Panel acknowledges the background to why the bodywork standards are currently strict but feels that it is now time to revisit them. Although the Panel believe that the standards are now too harsh it wishes to emphasise that public safety remains paramount in any issue of taxi licensing and any review of the actual standards will need to have that as a guiding principle.
- 7.9 The Panel believes that any review of the standards would need to involve the taxi trade, vehicle testers (both Council and private sector), elected members and the bodywork repair trade. Consequently, the Panel recommends that a thorough review of standards should be undertaken via the Taxi Consultative Panel with a view to submitting recommendations to the Licensing and Environmental Regulations Committee.
- 7.10 The Panel noted the intention of the Licensing Unit to involve external experts in determining the reasonableness of standards in addition to MOT standards and endorses this approach.

(iii) The opening hours/waiting times

- 7.11 The Panel noted the likely increases in the time required to undertake tests and this, coupled with delays in getting appointments during peak times, led the Panel to conclude that a variety of testing stations, including private sector garages, will improve the service provided.

- 7.12 The Panel also believes that testing new vehicles every six months was often unnecessary and yearly test could be adequate for vehicles of less than three years old, though it was paramount that safety was not compromised. Although the Panel acknowledges that twice yearly testing of taxis appeared to be standard practice elsewhere, it concludes that any review of testing standards and possible outsourcing should also include an assessment of whether newer vehicles need to be tested every six months.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 The Executive Member for Environmental Services and the Licensing and Environmental Regulations Committee are recommended to:

(i) Agree to the principle of multiple providers of taxi testing (including the Council testing facility and a number of private sector garages) to alleviate potential increases in waiting times brought about by changes to rules around tests;

(ii) Instruct officers to undertake a thorough investigation of the issues set out in 7.5 above prior to any outsourcing;

(iii) Agree to a thorough review of the bodywork standards applied under the current taxi testing regime with a view to striking a more appropriate balance between safety and appearance. This review to include the Taxi Consultative Panel, vehicle testers (both Council and private sector) and the bodywork repair trade;

(iv) Undertake an assessment of the value of undertaking six monthly tests on vehicles of less than three years

(v) That the Executive Member for Environmental Services and the Licensing and Environmental Regulations Committee be asked to prepare a report setting out their response to the recommendations contained in this report. That these responses be presented to the Adults Services Scrutiny Committee within three months.

8.2 That all those who contributed to the review at witness sessions be thanked for their valued contribution.

APPENDIX 1**Bolton Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licence Fees from 1st April 2005**

1. Hackney Carriage		£
• Vehicle licence	per 6 months	91.00
• Vehicle transfer	*	40.00
• Driver licence	1 st application	117.00
• Driver licence	* renewal per annum	36.00
2. Private Hire		
• Vehicle licence	per 6 months	91.00
• Vehicle transfer	*	40.00
• Vehicle renewal and Transfer fee		110.00
• Driver licence	1 st application	117.00
• Driver licence	* renewal per annum	36.00
3. Other fees		
• Vehicle change fee		49.00
• Vehicle re-test fee	*	49.00
• Driver re-test fee	*	47.00
• Plate charge (1 st grant; vehicle charge; replacement)		28.00
• Replacement badge		5.00
• Replacement door stickers		3.00
• Duplicate licence		5.00
• Historical information		5.00
• Insurance Certificate Production		5.00
• Admin charge (on withdrawal Of application before issue of Licence) per hour		31.00
• Information to solicitors, insurance Companies per hour (1 st hour)		42.00
• Each additional hour		31.00
• Checks with Criminal Records Bureau		34.00

* Fees cannot be refunded if application is withdrawn. In all other cases fees are not refundable once a licence has been issued.

APPENDIX 2**Expected costs of licensing to applicants and timescales****1 (a) New driver and vehicle (first application)**

	£
Vehicle licence fee (includes a test and administration)	91 (6 month)
Criminal Records Bureau *	34
Driver licence (includes knowledge test)	117
Plate fee (for life of the vehicle)	28
Total	270 (6 months)
Total	361 (12 months)

In addition, new drivers will need medical clearance. The cost of a medical certificate varies (£60 to £120).

(b) Timescales:

Criminal Records Bureau check	2 – 6 weeks
Vehicle test	up to 5 days
Driver test	up to 2 weeks
* * Processing of application and issuing of licences – while applicant waits	30 mins

2. (a) Existing Driver and vehicle

	£
Vehicle licence fee (includes a test and administration costs)	91 (6 months)
Driver licence renewal	36
Total	127 (6 months)
Total	218 (12 months)

(b) Timescales

Vehicle test	up to 5 days
Processing of application and issuing of licence	30 mins

Taxi Licensing - AGMA Comparisons**Introduction**

Direct comparisons between local authorities with regard to their charges for six monthly testing on taxis are complicated. This is because authorities use different methods and systems for their charges. There are a wide variety of different charges which taxi drivers must pay. The following are an example of some of the main charges amongst the AGMA authorities:

1. Private hire driver licence
2. Private hire driver renewal licence (paid annually)
3. Hackney driver licence
4. Hackney driver renewal licence (paid annually)
5. Private hire vehicle licence (six monthly vehicle test)
6. Private hire transfer fee
7. Hackney vehicle licence (six monthly vehicle test)
8. Hackney vehicle transfer fee
9. CRB check
10. Plate Charge
11. Additional fees for taxi's over a certain age or over a certain number of seats

Authorities group these charges together in different ways. For example, if we consider just two authorities and two of the charges:

Private Hire Driver Renewal Licence and Private Hire Vehicle Licence (six monthly vehicle test)

Bolton charges £91 for a private hire vehicle licence i.e. the 6 monthly vehicle test and on top of that charges £36 annually for the renewal of the driver licence. This gives a combined yearly renewal cost of £218.

Manchester charges a flat rate of £207 per year for private hire vehicles, this includes the private hire driver renewal licence and two six monthly tests. If one of these two tests is missed by a driver then they are charged an additional £45 to take another test which is what Manchester charge for a garage test alone.

We can choose to present this information in one of the following ways:

1. Bolton charges £91 for a six monthly test and Manchester charges £45; or
2. Bolton charges £218 for yearly renewal and Manchester charges £207.

The detailed costs and figures for each of the AGMA authorities are contained in Appendix 1.

Broad Conclusions

Costs

Due to the difficulties already outlined there are problems in drawing too many hard and fast conclusions from the comparisons of costs. However, broadly speaking, if we look at the yearly renewal costs for taxi drivers i.e. just at the costs incurred for the 2 six monthly tests and their driver licence renewal then we can draw some conclusions (bearing in mind that are a raft of other charges which drivers have to pay – however these are not included here for ease of comparison).

If, based on this criteria, we compare Bolton with four other AGMA members (those members whose charging structures allow for easy yearly renewal cost comparison with Bolton):

Authority	Yearly Renewal Costs for Private Hire	Yearly Renewal Costs For Hackney
Manchester	£207	£377
Rochdale	£249	£249
Bolton	£218	£218
Wigan	£202	£222
Salford	£180	£180

Bolton is in the mid range of costs based on these comparisons. An additional charge of £8 per six monthly test would add an additional £16 to the yearly cost of renewal and would not displace Bolton from the middle of this group.

However, due to the way Bolton organises its charges i.e. by charging separately for driver and vehicle renewals, there is the possibility that negative headline comparisons could be made. This is because some authorities' fee for the six monthly test is much lower than Bolton's. But, as detailed above, this would be a disingenuous comparison to make because other authorities charging structure are different and, in turn, their charges for driver licence renewals are likely to be higher than Bolton's.

It can though be said to be true, that taken in isolation, Bolton's stand alone charge for a six month vehicle test is high when compared to neighbouring authorities.

In-House or Outsourced?

Of the ten AGMA authorities, nine currently do their testing in-house. Three areas of interest around out-sourcing arose, as follows:

- Stockport outsources its testing to Translinc who are a national, large-scale provider of transport to local authorities. This is part of a much wider transport deal which Stockport has with Translinc who are Stockport's fleet transport provider;
- Trafford have also recently taken the decision to sell their in-house garage and out-source their testing. However, again this will be part of a council-wide deal to out-source all of their transport provision to a fleet transport provider; and
- Salford researched the possibility of having vehicles tested in the private sector. However, most large garages/dealers in the Salford area stated that they did not have the capacity to test the number of vehicles that needed licensing. Also, the garages/dealers were unwilling to increase staff and equipment to enable them to carry out the number of tests/re-tests and defect removal tests required.

No AGMA authority out-sources its taxi licensing to an independent garage or garages. They only outsource as part of a larger deal with a large, fleet transport provider. Salford's experience might also point to a lack of enthusiasm in the private sector for a single provider handling the quantity of tests required. Any private sector provider who agreed to handle the entirety of the tests would more than likely have to acquire more staff, equipment and possibly even new premises. If the tests were to be split over many private sector garages this would present the Council with logistical difficulties as regards monitoring and compliance. Perhaps, this is one of the reasons why no AGMA authority has chosen to do their testing in this way.

Waiting times

All AGMA authorities experience peaks and troughs in availability of testing slots depending on the time of year and how close the appointments are towards the end of the month. As a result, all AGMA authorities waiting times vary. Consequently, the waiting times given in appendix 1 are a rough approximation given by licensing staff at those various authorities.

Bury is unusual within AGMA in that they seek to turn initial appointments round within 48 hours. Leaving Bury aside, Bolton is in line with the rest of the AGMA authorities in turning round appointments within one to five working days. Interestingly, Stockport who outsource their provision also has an average waiting time of one week. Also, there are three AGMA authorities where it is not unusual for tests to take more than five working days to arrange.

We can therefore conclude that waiting times at Bolton are no worse than they are at neighbouring authorities and in some instances better. Also, at Stockport, where provision is out-sourced, the waiting times are very similar to Bolton where provision is in-house. It will be interesting to see whether the imminent out-sourcing at Trafford has any affect on their waiting times. Tests at Trafford currently take, on average, one week to arrange.

<u>Authority</u>	<u>Costs – Private Hire</u>	<u>Costs – Hackney Carriage</u>	<u>Costs for Missed Test</u>	<u>In-house or Outsourced</u>	<u>Waiting times</u>
Manchester	£207 for 2 tests and driver annual licence	£377 for 2 tests and driver annual licence	£45	In-house	1-2 working days but waiting times do vary
Stockport	£34	£34	£34	Outsourced to a company called Translinc	Waiting times are on average 1 week
Tameside	£30*	£30	£30	In-house	Do not know as of yet.*
Wigan	£202 for 2 tests and driver annual licence – looking at increasing it soon	£222 for 2 tests and driver annual licence – looking at increasing it soon	£35	In-house	Within 5 working days
Bury	£32	£32	£32	In-house	Within 48 Hour deadline
Bolton	£91 (£218 yearly costs i.e. for 2 tests and driver licence renewal)	£91 (£218 yearly costs i.e. for 2 tests and driver licence renewal)	£49	In-house	1-5 working days, (normally closer to one working day than five)
Rochdale	£249 for 2 tests, annual driver licence & plate	£249 for 2 tests, annual driver licence & plate	£26	In-house	Varies, 1-10 working days
Trafford	£57.40	£57.40	£20.50	Currently In-house	4-7 days
Salford	£180 for 2 tests and driver annual licence	£180 for 2 tests and driver annual licence	£25	In-house	On average 5 -7 days
Oldham	£45	£45	No – but looking into it	In-house	Varies, 5-7 working days.

* Tameside are currently reviewing the 6 month tests as they presently issue only one set of plates for a full 12 months and rely on the driver/vehicle owner to attend

6 months later for a pre-allotted appointment time. As a result, they are spending more and more time chasing drivers up. Consequently, they have recently decided to issue only 6 month licences and plates. They do not know as of yet whether the fee will increase as a result or what affect this will have on waiting times.

2.1 Driver licencing

Private Hire & Hackney Carriage Driver Licence fees

Authority	PHD First Application	PHD Renewal	Hackney Driver First Application	Hackney Driver Renewal	CRB fee
Bolton	£117	£36	£117	£36	£34
Bury	£71.50	£49.50	£71.50	£49.50	£41.50
Manchester	£115	£85	£115	£85	£34
Oldham	£64	£64	£64	£64	£34
Rochdale	£75	£51	£75	£51	£34
Salford	£240	£120	£240	£120	£34
Stockport	£83	£60	£83	£50	incl
Tameside	£168	£80	£168	£80	incl
Trafford	£105	£66	£105	£66	£34
Wigan	£72	£33	£72	£33	£34
Blackburn	£55	£14	£55	£14	£40
Chorley	£57	£41	£57	£41	£34
Liverpool	£65	£26	£65	£26	£34
Preston	£85	£55	£85	£55	£34

First Application

Most expensive - Salford £240 + CRB (PH & Hackney)

Cheapest – Blackburn with Darwen £55 + CRB (PH & Hackney)

Bolton £117 + CRB

Renewal

Most expensive – Salford £240 + CRB (PH & Hackney)

Cheapest – Blackburn with Darwen £14 +CRB (PH & Hackney)

Bolton £36 + CRB

Vehicle licences

Authority	Vehicle Test	Vehicle Re-test	Notes
Bolton	£91	£49	6 month licence
Bury	£205.50 – up to 6 years old	£30	12 month licence up to 6 years

	£237.50 – over 6 years old		Additional tests for older vehicles at 4 or 6 months
Manchester	£207 P/Hire £377 H/carriage	£45	12 month licence Re-test at 6 months
Oldham	£242 P/hire £292 H/carriage	Re-test £28	12 month licence Re-test at 6 months - £45
Rochdale	£249		12 month licence
Salford	£180	£40	12 month licence
Stockport	£227 P/hire £207 H/carriage	£37	12 month licence including plates Re-test at 6 months
Tameside	£180.50 under 3 years old £210.50 over 3 years old	£43	12 month licence under 3 years old 6 month test for vehicles over 3 years old
Trafford	£194 P/hire £234 H/carriage	£57.40	12 month includes re-test at 6 months
Wigan	£114 P/H 6 month £202 P/H 12 m £124 H/C 6 Month £222 H/C 12 m	£20	
Blackburn	£64 P/H 4 month £90 P/H 6 month £164 P/H 12m £79 H/C 4 month £106 H/C 6 month £197 H/C 12m	£53 Full test	Includes plate fee Reductions for LPG conversions
Chorley	£70 P/H 4 month £103 P/H 6 month £185 P/H 12m £138 H/C 4 month £200 H/C 6 month £380 H/C 12m	£25 - £40 set by garage	Re-test at six months
Liverpool	£120	Set by garages	12 month licence
Preston	£85 P/H £97.50 H/C	£45 - £58 set by garages	Six months £75 & £92.50 for renewals

Hackney Carriage Licence (12 month)

Most expensive – Chorley c£430 for twelve months (including two tests @ £25)

Cheapest – Liverpool £120 (no six month re-test)

Bolton - £182

Private Hire Vehicle Licence (12 month)

Most expensive – Oldham £287 (including £45 for re-test at six months)

Cheapest – Liverpool £120 (no six month re-test)

Bolton - £182

APPENDIX 4

Testing of Taxis & Private Hire Vehicles

General

Before a vehicle will be licensed as a private hire vehicle, the Council must be satisfied that it is:

suitable in type, size and design for use as a private hire vehicle,
that it is not of such design or appearance that might lead it to be confused with a hackney carriage and
that it is in suitable mechanical condition, safe and comfortable.

The Council also has powers to attach such conditions as it considers necessary to a private hire vehicle licence.

The following types of vehicle can be licensed as a private hire vehicle:

Saloon cars:

Manufactured for the European market to M1
Four passenger doors
Right hand drive
Hard top
Capacity for four adult passengers

People carriers:

Manufactured for the European market to M1
Right hand drive
Capacity for up to eight passengers (plus the driver)

Minibuses:

'Downsized' M2 vehicles – where the only modification from the manufacturers specification is the removal of one or more of the rearmost rows of seats and the maximum capacity is eight passengers.

Imported vehicles – require an SVA irrespective of age.

Converted vehicles – require an SVA.

The Council licences 'London Cabs' and specially converted vehicles which have low volume type approval, as hackney carriages.

Modifications

All vehicles must comply with the manufacturers' original specification and with the requirements of the Road Vehicles (Construction & Use) Regulations 1986 (as amended or replaced) and other relevant road traffic laws.

Main MOT requirements

Lighting

MOT requirements apply and:

All lights must meet the manufacturers' original specification and the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989 (as amended or replaced).

No additional lights are permitted.

No additional reflectors are permitted.

No headlight masks or converters are permitted.

Appropriate checks to be carried out on imported vehicles to ensure that they are compliant.

Steering

MOT requirements apply and:

Vehicles to be presented without a steering wheel cover.

Brakes

MOT requirements apply.

Tyres

MOT requirements apply and:

The wheel / tyre combination should be of a type recommended for use by the manufacturer of the vehicle. The proprietor should provide written proof from the manufacturer (not an agent) that a particular combination is permitted, where there is any doubt.

Non standard wheel / tyre combinations will not be permitted.

Space saver spare wheel /tyre combinations are acceptable where specified as standard equipment by the manufacturer.

Hackney carriages must be fitted with 'taxi' rated tyres of the correct size and profile.

Seatbelts

MoT requirements apply.

ITEMS TO BE TESTED IN ADDITION TO THE M.O.T. TEST FOR CLASS IV VEHICLES

Bodywork

Bodywork standards over and above MoT standards are set by the Council and are included at Appendix 1. Vehicles must meet both sets of requirements.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS) ACT 1976 Section 48

FOR BOTH PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES & HACKNEY CARRIAGES

NOTE: The testing or inspection of any item listed below shall be carried out without the dismantling of any equipment on the vehicle unless stated.

The item number refers to the item code used on the test sheet.

101. ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT

- | | | |
|--------------|-------|---|
| 102. Wiring | | <u>Inspect fuses and exposed wiring for undue corrosion & chaffing</u>
Ensure that correct load fuses are being used. Ensure that visible wiring is not so corroded or chaffed that in the opinion of the tester a short circuit is likely to occur. Any additional wiring should be fitted neatly fitted using appropriate auto electrical terminals and be properly fused. |
| 103. Battery | | <u>Inspect for security, corrosion & leaks</u>
Ensure that the battery mountings are not so corroded that the battery may break loose. Ensure that the battery is anchored securely. Ensure that the casing of the |

battery is sound and is not likely to allow electrolyte to escape.
That battery terminals should be clean and secure on battery.

- | | | | |
|------|---------------------------|-------|--|
| 104. | Starter Motor | | <u>Test for security</u>
Ensure that the starter motor is mounted securely. |
| 105. | Panel & Interior Lights | | <u>Test for satisfactory operation</u>
Ensure that the speedometer is correctly illuminated. Ensure that interior and courtesy lights, where fitted, are operative. |
| 110. | <u>ENGINE COMPARTMENT</u> | | |
| 111 | Mountings | | <u>Test for security</u>
Ensure engine mountings are secure. Ensure they are not so corroded, split or perished as to be likely to fail. |
| 112. | Fluid Leaks | | <u>Inspect for excessive leaks</u>
Ensure that fluid does not leak from any component or at any seal or gasket during the test. |
| 114. | <u>COOLING SYSTEM</u> | | |
| 115. | Hoses (Interior) | | <u>Inspect for leaks where visible</u>
Ensure that any hoses inside the driver or passenger compartment do not leak. |
| 116. | Heater(s) & Demister | | <u>Test for satisfactory operation</u>
Heaters are to be tested to ensure that the system is capable of being adjusted from cold to hot, any fan assistance works and demisters function. |
| 118. | <u>TRANSMISSION</u> | | |
| 119. | Drive Shaft
rwd. | | <u>Test for undue play</u>
Ensure universal joints are serviceable and mountings are secure. |
| 120. | Gearbox Mountings | | <u>Test for security</u>
Ensure they are secure and not so corroded split or perished as to be likely to fail. |

122. CLUTCH (manual transmission)

123. Operation Test for satisfactory operation
 Ensure clutch does not 'judder', 'grab' or 'slip' outside normal limits and that there is no adverse noise or rattle from gearbox housing.

124. Linkage Inspect for undue wear
 Ensure linkages are not likely to fail.

125. Hydraulics Inspect for undue corrosion & leaks
 Ensure that system is not leaking and that pipes and fittings are not so corroded as to be likely to fail.

127. FUEL SYSTEM

128. Fuel Tank & Pipes Inspect for security, corrosion & leaks
 Ensure that all parts of the fuel system are securely mounted, the system does not leak and that it is not so corroded as to be likely to fail.

130. INSTRUMENTATION

131. Speedometer Test that it is working
 Ensure that the speedometer is working and displays miles per hour. All panel lights & 'tell tale's' must work e.g. battery, oil warning, air bag abs etc.

132. Odometer Test that it is working
 Ensure that the odometer is working in a normal manner and is calibrated in miles (not kilometres only)

144. BODYWORK (Interior)

145. Grab Handles Test for security
 Ensure grab handles, where fitted are secure.

146. Seats & Upholstery Inspect for general condition
Ensure that all seats, upholstery, trim and carpets are clean. Ensure there are no sharp edges which would be likely to cause injury or damage. Ensure seat coverings are sound and that the interior springs are sound.
Seats should be securely fixed to the vehicle body. Seat covers should be of the correct size and should not become displaced by persons entering /exiting the vehicle.
147. Floor Condition Inspect for soundness
Ensure floor is sound and that it is covered by adequate carpets or mats. Ensure floor covering is not so badly worn as would be likely to cause a trip hazard to passengers or affect driver's ability to properly control the vehicle.
148. Window Openings Test for satisfactory operation
Ensure all windows open & close by the use of winders or otherwise where fitted.
149. Fire Extinguisher Fitted correctly and filled
Ensure extinguisher conforms to British Standard and is of a type approved from time to time by an authorised officer of the Council. Ensure it is firmly mounted to the bodywork in the front of the vehicle within easy reach of the driver.
152. TAXIMETER (Taxis. Hire Cars where fitted)
153. Set Correctly & Road Test Ensure it conforms to Council regulations
Ensure it can be illuminated for hours of darkness. Ensure it is firmly secured. Ensure it is set to correct rates. Test over measured distance to ensure accuracy.
155. RENEWALS ONLY
156. Fare Card In position
Ensure card is displayed in such a position as to be easily seen by all passengers.
157. Council Plate Fitted correctly

In accordance with the policy of the Council.

158. Interior stickers

Displayed

In accordance with the policy of the Council.

Additional

Fixing of radio

Display screens

Tinted windows

HACKNEY CARRIAGE & PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLE LICENCE CONDITIONS

BODYWORK STANDARDS ETC.

General

The Council requires Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles which are licensed by it for the use of fare paying passengers to maintain a high standard of presentation.

Paintwork

The Council recognises that vehicle paintwork can deteriorate with time and that paintwork is easily damaged yet costly and difficult to repair. The conditions relating to the standard of the paint finish reflect this.

Uniform colour

Paintwork should be uniform in colour over the whole of the vehicle. Where repairs have been carried out best practice bodyshop techniques should be followed to ensure that the best colour match possible is obtained using recognised automotive re-finishing products.

Gloss finish

Paintwork should have a gloss finish over the whole of the vehicle. Where the paintwork has begun to fade due to age and the effects of ultra violet degradation over large areas of the vehicle and where it cannot be returned to an acceptable level of gloss by the use of 'cutting' compounds re-finishing may be required, particularly where a none uniform appearance results.

Poor workmanship

Repairs should be carried out to a high standard. Defects which result from poor preparation or poor application of the paint finish are likely to result in the vehicle **not** reaching the required standard. Such defects include runs, 'orange peel', 'fish eyes', dust in the paint, orbital sander marks, poor paint coverage, overspray etc.

'Cosmetic' damage

The Council recognises that vehicles suffer minor 'cosmetic' damage during day to day use and that this type of damage can be the most difficult and the most costly to repair. The conditions reflect that this type of defect is inevitable on Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles and permit areas of 'cosmetic' damage as detailed below subject to there being **no more than three** such defects on any panel and **no more than ten** such defects on the vehicle.

Compliance with the requirements can be achieved by repairing only some of the defects where this is to the advantage of the proprietor.

Scratches

Single scratches or groups of scratches which fit completely inside the test template will not cause the vehicle to fail the test unless the paint film has been broken and rusting is evident.

(A scratch is where the paint film is damaged, but there is no deformation of the bodywork).

Small dents

Small dents which fit completely inside the test template will not cause the vehicle to fail the test unless the paint film has been broken and rusting is evident.

(A dent is where the bodywork has been deformed as a result of an impact or other contact and may or may not include damage to the paint film).

Rust spots

A single rust spot or a group of rust spots which fit completely inside the template will not cause the vehicle to fail the test unless the metal is corroded and unable to withstand 'thumb' pressure without crumbling or permanent

distortion. Perforation of the panel due to corrosion from the underside of the panel will result in failure of the test.

(A rust spot is a defect caused by oxidation of the metal due to a failure of the paint film to protect it but without obvious damage).

Flaking etc

Areas of flaking paint or lacquer which fit inside the test template will not cause the vehicle to fail the test.

(Flaking is where an area of the paint or lacquer film loses its adhesion to the substrate due to poor preparation, contamination, water ingress etc).

Stone chips

Stone chips will not cause the vehicle to fail the test unless the paint film has been broken and rusting is evident.

(A stone chip is a defect to the paint film caused by the impact of small stones 'thrown up' by other traffic etc).

A 'panel' is the roof, front wing, rear wing, front door (including 'A' pillar), rear door (including 'B' pillar), bonnet (including the area below the windscreen), boot or tailgate, sill, front panel (including bumper), rear panel (including bumper).

Replacement Panels

Vehicles which have been damaged and had replacement panels fitted are acceptable as Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles provided that the repairs have been carried out to a high standard.

Fitting

Replacement panels should be fitted to the vehicle manufacturers specification using approved fittings.

Alignment

Replacement panels should be correctly aligned. They should be level with all adjacent panels and the gaps between panels should be uniform and similar to those between original panels.

Trim

Vehicle trim serves a number of purposes and can make a significant contribution to the overall appearance of the vehicle. Bearing this in mind, the Council accepts that some items of trim are delicate and damage easily, whilst others are designed to prevent panel damage and may themselves become damaged whilst performing that function.

Fixing

All trim should be present, correctly aligned and fixed in accordance with the manufacturers specification.

Damage

'Scuffing' etc of 'protective' trim will not cause the vehicle to fail the test.

Minor damage of 'cosmetic' trim will not cause the vehicle to fail the test.

Major accident damage etc

Vehicles which have been involved in serious accidents may be used as Hackney Carriages or Private Hire Vehicles provided that they have been professionally repaired.

Vehicles with registration documents which carry a 'V23' marker must undergo specialist testing (or prove to the satisfaction of the Assistant Director (Environmental Services) that such testing has been carried out)

Vehicles which carry a 'Q' registration prefix (or any successor procedure) must undergo specialist testing (or prove to the satisfaction of the Assistant Director (Environmental Services) that such testing has been carried out) and may be required to provide additional proof of ownership.

Assessment

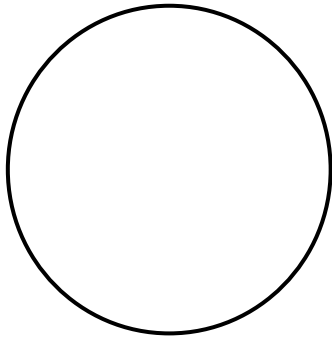
Where a vehicle tester detects evidence that a vehicle has been involved in an accident which may have caused damage to the structural integrity of the vehicle or may have caused safety critical components to become misaligned, the proprietor must prove to the satisfaction of the Assistant Director of Environmental Services that repairs were effected to an acceptable standard or the vehicle must be submitted, at the proprietors expense, for specialist examination at an approved centre before a licence will be granted or renewed.

BODYWORK DAMAGE TEMPLATE

HACKNEY CARRIAGES & PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES

SCRATCHES ONLY

200mm x 50mm
(nominal)

**DENTS****RUST SPOTS****FLAKING PAINT**

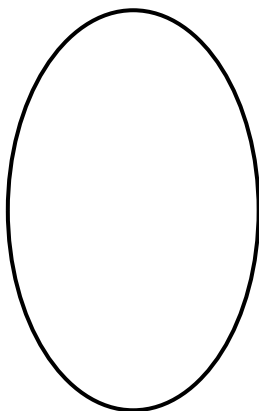
40mm circle

(nominal)

OR

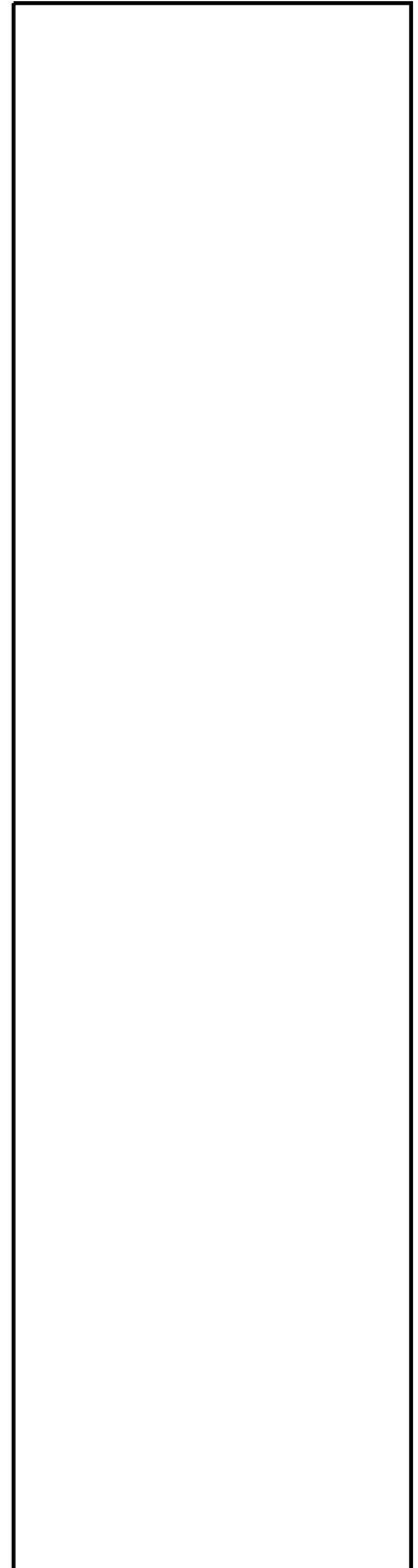
50mm x 30mm ellipse

(nominal)



Damage must fit *completely* within the lines of the appropriate template in order to be acceptable. The template can be aligned to be most advantageous to the Proprietor. **cost £1**

Additional or replacement templates £1



Appendix B

New Condition of Licence – Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles

APPEALS - BODYWORK ETC.

Where a proprietor is aggrieved by the decision of a vehicle tester concerning the standard of bodywork etc, the vehicle will be re-examined by the Assistant Head of Division – Vehicle Fleet Management and the Group Manager – Licensing (or their nominated representatives) to determine whether or not the requirements of the Council have been met.

Where the decision of the tester is upheld and the vehicle is found to fail to satisfy the requirements of the Council, a licence will be refused. Written details of the defects noted will be provided to the vehicle proprietor.

Where the decision of the tester is not upheld, the vehicle will be deemed to satisfy the requirements of the Council relating to the condition of bodywork etc. and can be licensed by the Council as a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle provided that all other requirements are met.

The Appeals test can be witnessed by any other person who, in the opinion of the Group Manager – Licensing, has a reasonable interest in the test provided that they do not interfere with or obstruct the test or behave in an unreasonable manner.

Where a proprietor remains aggrieved by the decision of the Council after having followed this appeals procedure, a right of appeal to the Magistrates Court can be exercised by virtue of the provisions of section 48(7) of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

The following section appeared in report LER/31/01 at Paragraph 5

5. APPEALS

- 5.1. Given that clear definition is provided it is proposed that any dispute concerning the application or interpretation of the conditions would be considered by the Assistant Head of Division, Vehicle Fleet Management and the Group Manager – Licensing (or their nominated representatives).
- 5.2. If the proprietor is still aggrieved by the decision of the Council it is proposed that they should exercise their right of appeal to the Magistrates Court by virtue of Sections 55 & 77 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

- 5.3. The current right to have the vehicle tested by a neighbouring local authority would be withdrawn for disputes relating to the condition of bodywork.

APPENDIX 5**Vehicle Testing – Statistics 2004 / 05****Year 2004**

Month	No. First tests carried out (passes)	No. Re-tests carried out (passes)	Total test carried out
January	132	55	187
February	148	56	204
March	186	95	281
April	163	63	226
May	157	65	222
June	134	71	205
July	132	62	194
August	171	73	244
September	186	98	284
October	170	73	243
November	183	73	256
December	144	73	217
TOTAL	1906	857	2763

Year 2005

Month	No. First tests carried out (passes)	No. Re-tests carried out (passes)	Total test carried out
January	133	52	185
February	141	60	201
March	192	61	253
April	214	83	297
May	181	76	257
June	166	81	247
July	133	43	176
August	155	56	211
September	200	72	272
October	195	73	268
TOTAL	1710	657	2367

	First test passes	Re-test passes	Total tests carried out
Monthly average	164	69	233
Yearly average (projected)	1968	828	2796