

## Driver Improvement Scheme :

### Preliminary Matters :

- A. Given the central role that driving plays in the duties undertaken by Licensed Drivers it is vitally important that existing Licensed Drivers are safe drivers with good driving records.
- B. The introduction of the Council's Driver Improvement Scheme is a new development, which was introduced in January, 2023. Where appropriate, instead of a Licensed Driver being required to appear before the Licensing and Regulatory Committee, they will have the opportunity to undertake a driver improvement course.
- C. By offering a Licensed Driver the opportunity to undertake a driver improvement course it is hoped that, :-
  - (i) The general standard of driving on the part of Licensed Drivers will improve, thereby promoting safe driving and improved driving standards; and
  - (ii) The frequency of poor driving complaints received by the Licensing Section will fall, as will the number of driving offences committed.
- D. As appropriate, if the Licensed Driver refuses to undertake a driver improvement course as part of the Driver Improvement Scheme, then their case will be referred to the Licensing and Regulatory Committee for determination.
- E. Where appropriate, the provisions of the Driver Improvement Scheme have been incorporated within the Convictions Policy and Assessment of Previous Convictions, ("the Convictions Policy"), which are set out in **Appendix 2** of the Statement of Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Policy.
- F. For the avoidance of any doubt, the provisions set out in this Driver Improvement Scheme have application as from and including 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2023.

### Criteria for Referral to the Driver Improvement Scheme :

The following criteria will be applied by the Council's Principal Licensing Officer regarding referrals to the Driver Improvement Scheme, :-

#### Criteria 1 :

- 1. Existing Licensed Drivers who accrue **more than six penalty points and up to nine penalty points** for Minor Driving Offences within a three-year period will be **requested** by the Principal Licensing Officer to undertake a driver improvement course. The Licensed Driver will be required to meet the cost of attending the course. If the Licensed Driver **refuses** to attend the course their case will be referred to the Licensing and Regulatory Committee by the

Principal Licensing Officer for determination, with the Licensing and Regulatory Committee being asked to give consideration to the possible suspension, revocation, or refusal to renew their Licence, as appropriate. For the avoidance of any doubt, the Committee could, if deemed appropriate, impose a period of suspension and direct that a Licensed Driver who has refused to undertake a driver improvement course to undertake such a course at their own expense, with their suspension ending on the date that they successfully complete the course, as opposed to them serving the full period of suspension as originally imposed by the Committee;

### **Criteria 2 :**

2. Existing Licensed Drivers who accrue **six penalty points and up to nine penalty points** for Minor Driving Offences within a three-year period may have their case referred to the Licensing and Regulatory Committee for determination instead of being requested to undertake a driver improvement course if the Principal Licensing Officer believes there are **aggravating factors** to justify this, with the Committee being asked to give consideration to the possible suspension, revocation, or refusal to renew their Licence, as appropriate. Depending on the circumstances of the case, they should have their Licence suspended for a maximum period of six months, or revoked. The Principal Licensing Officer will record the reasons why they believe aggravating factors apply. For the avoidance of any doubt, the Committee could, if deemed appropriate, impose a period of suspension and direct that a Licensed Driver who falls under this provision to undertake a driver improvement course at their own expense, with their suspension ending on the date that they successfully complete the course, as opposed to them serving the full period of suspension as originally imposed by the Committee;

### **Criteria 3 :**

3. Where Criteria 1, or Criteria 2 do not apply **and** complaints have been received by the Licensing Section regarding an existing Licensed Driver's alleged poor driving standards the Principal Licensing Officer **may** request the Licensed Driver to undertake a driver improvement course. The Licensed Driver will be required to meet the cost of attending the course. For the avoidance of any doubt, the Principal Licensing Officer will not unreasonably request a Licensed Driver to undertake a driver improvement course. The Principal Licensing Officer will record the reasons why they believe a driver improvement course should be undertaken. If the Licensed Driver **refuses** to attend the course their case may be referred to the Licensing and Regulatory Committee by the Principal Licensing Officer for determination, with the Licensing and Regulatory Committee being asked to give consideration to the possible suspension, revocation, or refusal to renew their Licence, as appropriate. For the avoidance of any doubt, the Committee could, if deemed appropriate, impose a period of suspension and direct that a Licensed Driver who has refused to undertake a driver improvement course to undertake such a course at their own expense, with their suspension ending on the date that they successfully complete the course, as opposed to them serving the full period of suspension as originally imposed by the Committee; and

#### **Criteria 4 :**

4. An existing Licensed Driver may, at their own request, undertake a driver improvement course on a voluntary basis, with them meeting the cost of attending the course. If the course is to be undertaken then they are required to notify the Licensing Section of this. This is to be done using the following e-mail address : [licensing@sunderland.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@sunderland.gov.uk)

As to Criteria 2, the following “aggravating factors” will be taken into account on a case-by-case basis by the Principal Licensing Officer in deciding whether, or not a Licensed Driver is requested to undertake a driver improvement course, with their case instead being referred to the Licensing and Regulatory Committee for determination, although the list is non-exhaustive, :-

- a) Whether the Driver has previously appeared before the former Regulatory Committee and / or the current Licensing and Regulatory Committee;
- b) Whether, or not the Driver notified the Council about their respective offences in accordance with the self-reporting requirements;
- c) The Driver’s demeanour, attitude and level of co-operation when discussing the speed limits offences in issue with Officers from the Licensing Section;
- d) Whether the Driver has previously undertaken a driver improvement course; and
- e) Any other considerations that may arise from the case in issue.

#### **Information About the Driver Improvement Course :**

The following information is provided about the driver improvement course, :-

1. The course will be administered and delivered by an independent, third-party organisation that is engaged by the Council;
2. The assessment will be carried out by a Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency, (DVSA), Fleet Approved Assessor;
3. It will take the form of an assessment. Drivers will need to demonstrate a level of driving skill and ability associated with that of an experienced professional driver. A sound knowledge of the Highway Code will need to be demonstrated to the Assessor;
4. The standard needed to pass the assessment will be higher than that of a learner driver taking the standard driving test;
5. The assessment will consider issues specifically related to undertaking the professional driving duties expected of a Licensed Driver driving a Hackney Carriage Vehicle, or a Private Hire Vehicle;
6. The main focus of the assessment is on road safety, the safe conveyance of passengers and the safety of the general public;
7. The assessment will last for approximately 45 minutes and will include driving on a wide range of roads, (including dual carriageways and possibly motorways), and a variety of road traffic conditions;
8. Prior to undertaking the assessment, it is recommended that Drivers take a driving lesson, at their own cost, with an approved Advanced Driving Instructor;

9. The Assessor will ask the Driver to carry out two reversing manoeuvres, as chosen by the Assessor, from the following : a turn in the road; a left, or right reverse from major to minor road; reversing into a car parking space, (bay parking); and reversing into a space at the side of the road, (parallel parking). Manoeuvres must be performed safely, under control and in accordance with the Highway Code;
10. The Assessor will ask the Driver to perform two, or three stops of their vehicle. When being done the following should be undertaken : Driver to pull up at a reasonable distance from the kerb where it is safe, legal and convenient; apply the handbrake; select neutral gear; and ensure there are no obstructions, such as a streetlight, that would stop a passenger from opening the door, or would be such that the chosen location is inappropriate for a passenger using a wheelchair, or a passenger being assisted by an Assistance Dog;
11. The Assessor will ask the Driver to perform an “independent drive” which will last for about 10 minutes. The Driver will be asked to drive without being given directions. They will be asked to follow a series of street directions, traffic signs, or a combination of both. The aim of the independent drive is to test whether the Driver is able to make their own decisions whilst driving and how safely they navigate the route without prompts. When undertaking this part of the test : the Driver can ask the Assessor for a reminder of the directions; the key point is to avoid driving faults; if there are poor, or obscured traffic signs, the Assessor will give directions until the next visible traffic sign; a detailed knowledge of the test route is not necessary; and a sat-nav cannot be used;
12. The Assessor will observe the Driver and will mark them against a pre-determined assessment criteria. The Driver will be marked as if taking a normal practical driving test;
13. If a Driver commits more than nine minor driving faults they will fail the assessment. They will also fail the assessment if they record one, or more dangerous, or serious faults. A Driver will also fail the assessment if they commit offences such as driving in a bus lane contrary to a restriction, they contravene a traffic light, overtake contrary to the road marks and other similar actions;
14. **Minor Driving Fault** : a non-dangerous fault, such as hesitating at a junction, or not signalling, or signalling too late;
15. **Dangerous Fault** : an incident that caused actual danger whilst driving;
16. **Serious Fault** : a potentially dangerous incident has occurred, or where a regular minor driving fault shows a serious, or potentially dangerous weakness in the Driver’s driving;
17. The Assessor will only mark the Driver based on what they have seen and have observed during the assessment;
18. A Driver who demonstrates a safe smooth drive without any dangerous, or serious faults, or less than nine minor driving faults will pass the assessment;
19. At the end of the assessment that Assessor will give the Driver the result of their assessment. They will be given a copy of their assessment sheet;
20. A Driver who has passed the assessment will receive a certificate;
21. A Driver who fails the assessment will be provided with a copy of their assessment sheet. They will be expected to undertake a retest, normally within a period of one month of the date of their assessment; and

22. In the event of a Driver failing the assessment for a second time, this would bring into question whether they are a “*fit and proper person*” to hold a Licence to drive a Licensed Vehicle. In such circumstances, their case will be referred to the Licensing and Regulatory Committee, with the Committee being asked to give consideration to the possible suspension, revocation, or refusal to renew their Licence, as appropriate.

## **How to Book a Driver Improvement Course and Payment :**

### **The Booking Process :**

1. All bookings should be made online using the following link :  
<https://www.bluelamptrust.org.uk/bookingform/>
2. For enquiries, Drivers can contact the Assessment Booking Office on 0333 700 0157, which is open Monday to Friday 9:30am to 3pm. Once a date and time for an assessment has been agreed between the Driver and the Assessor, the Driver may cancel, or change the appointment date by contacting the assessing company, Blue Lamp Trust on 0333 700 0157 up to five clear working days prior to the test without incurring costs.
3. The five clear working day cancellation period does not include weekends, bank holidays, the day of an assessment, or the day you give Blue Lamp Trust notice. For example, if a test is booked for a Thursday a Driver will need to advise the Assessor by the previous Wednesday.
4. Changes made within five clear working days will not qualify for a refund and re-booking will attract the full fee which will need to be paid by the Driver.
5. Short Notice Booking – If a Driver agrees an assessment date with the Assessor that is within five clear working days or less, changes cannot be made and refunds will not be given

### **Preparing for an Assessment :**

1. Drivers may have several years of driving experience. However, Drivers may pick-up bad habits over time. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that the Driver takes a driving lesson with an approved driving instructor (ADI), before taking the assessment.
2. It is to be noted that the Assessor does not offer on-road training in preparation for an assessment as this would be considered a conflict of interest.
3. For the avoidance of doubt, the assessing company and the Assessor are not connected with the Council. All communication regarding the assessment, booking, or cancelling an appointment must be made directly with the assessing company using the details provided above.