



**Rochford District
Council**

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| REPORT TITLE: | To Consider The Future Of The (Earn As You Learn / Operator Support Scheme) Taxi Driver Apprentice Scheme |
| REPORT OF: | Eugene Minogue (interim) Director - Communities and Health |

REPORT SUMMARY

The Committee is requested to consider the future of the Earn As You Learn / Operator Support scheme following the second trial period.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1 -** To approve the proposed to continue with a Taxi Driver Apprentice scheme;
or
- R2 -** To stop the Earn As You Learn / Operators Support Scheme.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 On 18th January 2022, the Licensing team presented a report to the members of the Licensing and Appeals Committee to introduce an Earn as You Learn scheme to encourage new licensed taxi drivers into the trade following the shortage of drivers in the district following the pandemic.
- 1.2 The scheme was subject to a review by the members of the Licensing and Appeals Committee on 9th March 2023. The committee determined to allow the scheme to continue for a further 9 months with a review after this time.

2.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 In November 2021 members of the Rochford District Council Licensing Team identified that the District had seen a reduction in licensed drivers over the 2 years during the Covid pandemic. This was identified not only locally, but also nationally.
- 2.2 As businesses and the public returned to normal it was identified that the trade was not going to meet the demands based on the number of drivers available within the District.
- 2.3 The introduction of the 'Earn as you Learn' scheme was made to provide a platform training scheme to encourage new drivers.

Licensing and Appeals Committee held on 18 January 2022

- 2.4 On 18 January 2022 the Licensing Team presented a report to the Members of the Licensing and Appeals Committee to propose the introduction of an 'Earn as you Learn' scheme.
- 2.5 The key aspects of the report highlighted:-
- There is a national shortage of drivers since the pandemic
 - The existing drivers had changed their work patterns; this had impacted on the availability on a Friday and Saturday night
 - The trade felt that the current requirements in place to obtain a Hackney Carriage Driver's badge took too long and could be up to 6 months
- 2.6 The 'Earn as You Learn' scheme sought to address these concerns by introducing the following requirements.

The 'Earn as You Learn' drivers:-

- Will be issued with a badge once they had completed all the appropriate aspects except the Knowledge Test
- Will be issued with a Private Hire Driver's badge for 9 months
- Must pass the Knowledge Test within 9 months; failure to pass the test would result in the driver's badge lapsing
- Would not be allowed to re-apply within 12 months from the conclusion of the expiry of the badge.

- 2.7 Members agreed the scheme would run for 12 months and a service review should be conducted at the end of the trial period to determine whether to continue with the scheme.

Licensing and Appeals Committee held on 09 March 2023

- 2.8 On 9th March 2023 the Licensing and Appeals Committee received a report outlining the effectiveness of the scheme.

The members agreed to continue the scheme for a further 9 months subject to the following amendments to the scheme:

- That 'EAYL' drivers should attend Knowledge School once a week and that attendance at Knowledge School should be compulsory. If a driver's attendance falls below 70% then they should be removed from the scheme.
- That 'EAYL' pick ups or drop off should be within the Rochford District.
- That each of the 4 main operators are allocated 10 'Earn as You Learn' spaces under an Operator Development Scheme. Once a driver has passed their Knowledge Test or completed the 9-month period, the slot is made available to the operator to hire another applicant.
- That the 'EAYL' scheme be reviewed in 9 months

Earn as You Learn and Operators Support scheme driver statistics.

- 2.9 The purpose of the scheme was to increase the number of licensed taxi drivers to meet demand.
- 2.10 The following chart outlines the current position in comparison with previous years.

| Year (April each year) | Number of Hackney Carriage (Taxi) Drivers | Number of Private Hire Drivers | Total Number of Drivers |
|---------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2018 | 278 | 112 | 390 |
| 2019 | 277 | 114 | 391 |
| 2020 | 275 | 145 | 420 |
| 2021 | 231 | 103 | 334 |
| 2022 | 207 | 136 | 343 |
| 2023 | 187 | 156 | 343 |
| 2024 | 209 | 139 | 348 |

2.11 The chart below shows the number of drivers that have been through the scheme and the success rate of the scheme:

| Scheme | Number of applicants | Number of drivers completed process | Number of drivers still completing the process | Number of drivers that failed to meet the requirement |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--|---|---|
| EAYL Scheme (2022-2023) | 68 | 31 (45.6%) | 0 | 37 (54.4%) |
| OSS Scheme (2023-2024) | 55 | 11 (20%) | 33 (60%) | 11 (20%) |

2.12 As outlined in the document above, potentially, we could see another 33 licensed taxi drivers should they complete this process.

Recognition of the Scheme

2.13 In February 2024, the Private Hire and Taxi Magazine wrote an article about the Earn as You Learn scheme.

2.14 The newspaper was made aware of the scheme by one of the female drivers that had progressed through the scheme.

2.15 The Licensing Team have been asked to present and speak at the Private Hire and Taxi Magazine National Conference in May 2024.

'EARN AS YOU LEARN' SCHEME

ROCHFORD COUNCIL LEADS THE WAY IN SUPPORTING ITS HACKNEY TRADE

INTRODUCTION

In November 2021 members of Rochford District Council Licensing Team identified that their district (like other areas of the UK) had seen a worrying reduction in licensed drivers over the two years during the Covid pandemic.

As business and the general public returned to normal it was clear, based on the number of drivers available, that the taxi trade was not going to be able to meet local demand.

Therefore, in November 2021 the Licensing Team met with the four main taxi operators who made various suggestions including a pilot training scheme to encourage new drivers to join the industry.

'EARN AS YOU LEARN' SCHEME

The aim was to increase the number of licensed drivers whilst maintaining the high standards required to obtain a licence.

And so, on 18 January 2022 the Licensing Team presented a report to the members of the Licensing and Appeals Committee proposing the introduction of an 'Earn as you Learn' scheme.

The key aspects of the report highlighted:

- There is a national shortage of drivers since the pandemic
- The existing drivers had changed their work patterns, this had impacted on availability on a Friday and Saturday night
- The trade felt that the current requirements in place to obtain a hackney carriage driver's badge, which could be up to six months was too long

The 'Earn as you Learn' scheme sought to address these concerns by introducing the following requirements:

- Will be issued with a badge once they had completed all appropriate aspects, except the Knowledge Test
- Will be issued with a private hire driver's badge for nine months
- Must pass the Knowledge Test within three months, failure to pass the test would result in the driver's badge lapsing
- Would not be allowed to re-apply within 12 months from the conclusion of the expiry of the badge

The Operators:

- Would work a mentor system and the drivers could only work for one of the four main operators
- Must ensure they are assigned to work solely within the Rochford District and not subcontracted to operate outside the district
- The 'Earn as you Learn' badge will place a requirement on the operators to work with the licence holders to encourage them to obtain their full badge. Any concerns relating to the driver must be reported to the Licensing Team immediately
- Will ensure that 'Earn as you Learn' drivers will only drive PHVs and only work on pre-arranged bookings
- Will help the driver by means of financial support and assistance from their Knowledge Test schools

STATISTICS SINCE THE INTRODUCTION OF THE 'EARN AS YOU LEARN' SCHEME

The following table outlines the number of applicants, 'Earn as you Learn' drivers and those issued with hackney carriage driver badges that were part of the scheme between 18 January 2022 and 18 January 2023.

| Year | Dual HC & PH drivers | EAYL (scheme) drivers | PHV Only drivers | Total |
|---------|----------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-------|
| 01/2025 | 258 | 0 | 94 | 352 |
| 01/2022 | 207 | 0 | 136 | 343 |
| 01/2023 | 189 | 40 | 114 | 343 |

FEEDBACK SINCE INTRODUCTION OF THE SCHEME

A feedback survey was sent to all the applicants and drivers involved in the 'Earn as you Learn' scheme. The key findings of the survey showed:

- 71.4% of those who responded were working as EAYL drivers at the time of completing the survey
- 35.7% of the responders have held the EAYL badge for 3-4 months
- 46.2% attended a knowledge school once a week or more
- 30.8% stated they have never been to a knowledge school

CASE STUDIES OF APPLICANTS WHO HAVE COMPLETED THE PROCESS

Rochford Licensing Team issued an 'Earn as you Learn' badge to a new applicant in an average of 45 days from the applicant's submission date and the issue date of the driver's badge, this was significantly quicker than previous application processes.

Glenn Hammond applied to become an 'Earn as you Learn' driver in March 2022. Prior to applying for a badge, Glenn worked as a caretaker in a local school. Glenn worked with Bestax's dedicated Knowledge School and was issued his 'Earn as you Learn' badge on 10 May 2022.

On 28 July 2022, Glenn took his Knowledge Test and successfully passed. Glenn was issued with his full Dual Hackney Carriage and Private Hire driver's licence on 28 July 2022.

The total course length for Glenn was five months and six days. Due to the scheme Glenn was able to work and earn for his family and serve the travelling public for an extra two months and 18 days.

Glenn said: "I decided to become licensed driver for a number of reasons: to earn a better wage for my family and to have a long, successful career. Having a good talk with trainers Mark and Andre, they made it clear that if you work hard, you will get the rewards."

"If the course wasn't on the 'Earn as you Learn' scheme I wouldn't have started. However, being organised extremely well and is affordable. Being a taxi driver is completely different to working the usual 9-5, you can become more flexible for your family and still make the time up at any point that day or/for week. It's also worked very well for me financially."

REVIEWING

Glenn continued: "Personally, I think the scheme should continue as the taxi trade is an excellent trade to get into if you're willing to put in the hours. It's also affordable to anyone willing to put in the effort."

taxi drivers meet new & I love it and

As part of the review, the Licensing Team asked the taxi operators for their views on the scheme. The following table shows the number of bookings completed by EAYL / OSS drivers in Rochford.

| Operator | No. of EAYL drivers | No. of bookings by EAYL drivers in Rochford | Percentage |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---|------------|
| Bestax | 124 | 87 | 19.3% |
| Andrews | 940 | 56 | 11.54% |
| Rayleigh Co-operative | 249 | 6 | 43.6% |

A representative of the council's perspective on the success of the scheme without being stranded on the road was highlighted.

"It is our strong belief that the 'Earn as you Learn' scheme, I was able to sharpen my knowledge of my district. This most definitely helped me in passing my hackney carriage test."

"I love being a taxi driver. Not only do I have the independence of being self-employed, but with the no upfront costs of the 'Earn as you Learn' scheme I'm still able to save for a mortgage which at my age could have been unobtainable."

"I'm proud of what I have accomplished not only in learning a trade, but I have become more responsible, my time management has improved and I've become independent for the first time."

"I would really love to be able to inspire any young person interested, especially women, in becoming a taxi driver."

Mark Adkins, from Bestax, said: "The 'Earn as you Learn' scheme was a success for our firm as we were all struggling to recruit new drivers and I've become independent for the first time."

Two of the four operators have taken full advantage of the scheme with both using their knowledge schools to introduce new drivers into the trade, in February 2024 PHTM and PHTM February 2024.

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2.16 The scheme as been recognised as best practice to work with the trade and members to find solutions and have implemented a successful driver recruitment scheme which is now being used by other councils.

Information provided by the operators

2.17 Similar to the previous years report, the operators were asked to provide information in relation to the numbers of bookings completed by the EAYL / OSS drivers.

2.18 The chart below shows the number of bookings completed between 1st July and 1st January 2024

| Operator | Bestax | Andrews | Rayleigh Co-operative |
|--|--------|---------|-----------------------|
| Number of Bookings in Rochford Area | 87 124 | 56940 | 6 249 |
| Number of bookings completed by EAYL / OSS drivers | 16 855 | 6884 | 2 722 |
| Percentage | 19.3% | 11.54% | 43.6% |

2.19 The following chart shows the percentages in relation to pickup locations:

| Postcode | Area | Bestax | Andrews | Rayleigh Co-operative |
|----------|-----------------------|--------|---------|-----------------------|
| SS0 | Westcliff & Chalkwell | 260 | 176 | 29 |

| | | | | |
|--------------|--------------------------------|---------------|-------------|--------------|
| SS1 | Westcliff | 156 | 75 | 22 |
| SS2 | Prittlewell & Southchurch | 295 | 425 | 72 |
| SS3 | Shoeburyness | 147 | 119 | 2 |
| SS4 | Rochford, Canewdon & Paglesham | 192 | 5103 | 110 |
| SS5 | Hockley & Hullbridge | 1 798 | 385 | 475 |
| SS6 | Rayleigh | 11 933 | 245 | 1 655 |
| SS7 | Hadleigh | 317 | 95 | 138 |
| SS9 | Eastwood | 1 042 | 185 | 132 |
| SS11 | Wickford | 379 | 8 | 34 |
| SS13 | Pitsea | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| Outside area | | 336 | 68 | 49 |

Feedback from drivers using the Scheme.

- 2.20 The Licensing Team have received extremely positive feedback from the drivers that have participated in the scheme.
- 2.21 One operator has created 2 short videos explaining how the scheme has impacted on the business and what difference it has made to the drivers.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ofSOpWSVCFQ>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snC579SsrjBA>

3.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 3.1 It has been acknowledged by the trade that the scheme has now achieved its original intended purpose, despite the number of drivers still lower than 2019, the number and frequency of passengers has reduced following covid.
- 3.2 Since the pandemic people have continued to work from home limiting the commuters into the city and the night-time economy has seen a change with the cost of living.

4.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 4.1 The Licensing and Appeals Committee need to be mindful that the scheme has achieved its intended purpose, however the scheme has identified that it is difficult to create a career in this profession without support.

4.2 On average, the licensing team see approximately 20 drivers leave the trade each year.

4.3 To encourage new drivers to replace those that decide to stop, it will be challenging without some type of apprentice scheme in place.

5.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

5.1 No consultation has been conducted in relation to the review of the scheme.

6.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 There will be no financial implications to the Council if the scheme continues or concludes. The finances associated with Hackney Carriage and Private hire is ringfenced as governed by legislation

7.0 LEGAL/GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There is no legal obligations to continue or stop the scheme.

8.0 EQUALITY & HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None Identified

9.0 ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There is no environmental or climate implications if the scheme was to continue or stop.

10.0 ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

10.1 No economic impact has been identified.

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APPENDICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

| Council Meeting | Date |
|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Licensing and Appeals Committee | 18/01/2022 |
| Licensing and Appeals Committee | 09/03/2023 |