



Community Services

Date: 06/08/2008
Open Report

Report of: Sarah Sprung / Ken Harrison

Recommendations from the Driving Standards Agency Review Panel

1. Summary

- 1.1 This briefing paper details the recommendations of the Driving Standards Agency Review Panel, following its scrutiny of the Driving Standards Agency's (DSA's) decision to close the Kidderminster Test Centre

2. Introduction/ Background Information

- 2.1 The Review Panel was established by the Community Services Scrutiny Committee on 19th June 2008.

- 2.2 The Review Panel Consisted of the following Members:

Councillor J Phillips (Chairman)
Councillor J Baker
Councillor M Price
Councillor J Thomas
Councillor G Yarranton

- 2.3 The terms of reference for the review were:

- i) To ascertain the way in which the Driving Standards Agency came to the decision to progress Multi Purpose Test Centres and the areas in which they should be located.
- ii) To identify potential sites within the Wyre Forest District that would be suitable for the development of a Multi Purpose Test Centre.
- iii) To gauge public opinion of the proposed closure of the Castle Road Test Centre and seek public support for a test centre remaining in the District.

3. Key Issues

The Current Situation

- 3.1 The DSA announced, in May 2008, its plans to close the Castle Road Test Centre in Kidderminster.
- 3.2 The DSA confirmed that, in coming to its decision to close the Castle Road Test Centre, it had examined the options of, improving the existing

accommodation, relocating to alternative premises within the Town or co-locating with operations at neighbouring centres within the applicable travel distance criterion.

- 3.3 Nationally the DSA are looking to create 66 Multi Purpose Test Centres (MPTC's) to support significant population or a key strategic location. They are being introduced to facilitate new tests introduced by the European Union for motorcyclists and in the West Midlands include proposals for South Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Shrewsbury and Burton on Trent.
- 3.4 Under current proposals, the nearest Multi Purpose Test Centres for residents of the District to access would be Wolverhampton (16.2 Miles) or Birmingham, Garrets Green (31.2 Miles).
- 3.5 Appendix 1 details the DSA's programme for relocation of test centres during the next 12 months, this was in response to a question raised at the House of Commons in June 2008.

Current Usage of Test Centres / Demographic Information

- 3.6 The table below details the usage of a selection of test centres within the region during 2007/08:

Location	Usage
Wolverhampton	12204
Birmingham (Washwood Heath)	10916
Birmingham (Kingstanding)	10603
Birmingham (Kings Heath)	9808
Birmingham (South Yardley)	8349
Lower Gornal	8228
Birmingham (Shirley)	6839
Worcester	6760
Birmingham (Sutton Coldfield)	6704
*Kidderminster	6514
Stoke on Trent	6301
Cannock	5946
Redditch	4656
Shrewsbury (MPTC)	3849
Stafford	3747
Rugby	3412
Ludlow	1259

*Test Centres identified for closure

- 3.7 The DSA's criterion for distances candidates are required to travel to practical test centres was agreed in 1998, the criterion are set out in the table below:

Population Density (persons per sq Kilometre)	Miles to Travel
1,250 >	7
100> but <1,250	20
<100	30

- 3.8 The District of Wyre Forest has, according to the 2001 Census, a population density of 498 persons per sq kilometre.
- 3.9 The principal urban areas of the District i.e. Kidderminster, Stourport and Bewdley combined cover an area of 46.9 sq km and a population of 84,073. This results in a population density of 1,792 persons per sq kilometre.
- 3.10 This would elevate Kidderminster and its primary urban catchment population to the first band of the criterion, meaning that residents of the area should have access to a test centre within 7 miles.
- 3.11 Members noted that the DSA, in 2005, relocated the Cannock, North Street Test Centre, to an alternative location within the area. The Usage for this centre during 2007/08 was 5946. The population density for the Cannock area is 1167.93, which, according to the DSA criterion for distances candidates are required to travel to test centres, would mean that residents of the area should have access to a test centre within 20 miles.
- 3.12 It was also noted that the Wolverhampton Test Centre was approximately 11.7 miles from the Cannock Test Centre.
- 3.13 The Review Panel also noted that the Borough of Preston in Lancashire has a population of c.130,000 but a large rural hinterland that brings the administrative population density down to 928 people per km².
- 3.14 Members discussed the similarities between Kidderminster and Redditch and noted that Redditch has 1858 less users than Kidderminster and, in addition, the population of the Kidderminster, Stourport and Bewdley are significantly greater than the entire population of the Redditch Borough.
- 3.15 The Panel received information on the availability of sites in the district, for use both as Multi Purpose Test Centres and standard car testing centres. Members noted that a preliminary list of 16 sites had been identified, as detailed in appendix 2.
- 3.16 A driving instructor and two learner drivers attended a meeting of the review panel to provide feedback, on behalf of other instructors and learner drivers, on the DSA's proposals.

3.17 Members noted that a total of 296 people had voted in an online poll on the Council's web site and that of this figure 94.3% felt that the district should retain a test facility.

3.18 As the DSA were not able to attend a meeting of the review panel, they agreed to respond to written questions in order to provide clarification on a number of points. Appendix 3 sets out the responses received by the review panel.

4. Financial Implications

4.1 There are no financial implications for Wyre Forest District Council.

5. Conclusion

5.1 In conducting the review, the panel identified several inconsistencies in the DSA's approach to the location of driving test centres and the implementation of its travel criteria.

5.2 As Kidderminster had been identified as one of just 25 Strategic Centres in the West Midlands Region, recognised by the Regional Assembly and the Government Office for the West Midlands in the Regional Spatial Strategy, Members felt that both the town and the district should benefit from this status.

6. Options for the Committee

6.1 To consider putting the following recommendations forward to Cabinet:

- 1. The Driving Standards Agency be requested to reconsider its decision to remove a test centre facility from the district.**
- 2. Subject to the Driving Standards Agency's willingness to reinstate a facility in the District, the Council assist the Driving Standards Agency in identifying potential sites for consideration.**
- 3. The Local Member of Parliament be requested to put a Parliamentary question forward regarding the Driving Standards Agency's distance setting criteria.**

7. Background Papers

7.1 The minutes of the Driving Standards Agency Review Panel held on:
14th July 2008
28th July 2008

7.2 The briefing paper considered by the Community Services Scrutiny Committee on 2nd July 2008.

8. Consultees

- 8.1 Driving Instructors operating in the District
- 8.2 Local Learner Drivers

9. Appendices

- 9.1 Appendix 1 - DSA's Programme for Relocation
- 9.2 Appendix 2 – Site Locations
- 9.3 Appendix 3 – DSA Response to questions

Officer Contact Details:

Sarah Sprung
Democratic Services
Tel: 01562 732736
Email: sarah.sprung@wyreforestdc.gov.uk

Ken Harrison
Regeneration & Economic Prosperity Manager
Tel: 01562 732557
Email: ken.harrison@wyreforestdc.gov.uk

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